RETHINKING DIGITAL INITIATIVES

Challenges and Opportunities in the Changing Technology Landscape

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WHAT ARE LIBRARY DIGITAL INITIATIVES?

Thirty years ago, digital initiatives emerged as a practice associated with *digital libraries*. Although the digital library concept has evolved considerably, digital initiatives are still largely associated with *digitization projects* and *institutional repositories*.

Today, EBooks, scanned texts, and archival surrogates are increasingly found alongside electronic theses, digital assets, and research data. These developments highlight the growing need for academic library participation in a broad range of technologies, covering everything from online education to electronic publishing.

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- Familiarity with computing, as a requirement broadly applied to all academic librarian specialties, dates back to 1984 (if not earlier).

- The term "digital initiatives" appears in 1996, in a report from the *Research Library Group*, an early consortium of libraries, archives, universities, and museums.

- By 2000, the practice began to be distinguished from collection building and associated with "digitization."

- Around this time analyses of library-specific position announcements indicated that the term "digital" was appearing frequently, and applied to a wide range of activities.

- But the focus centered predominantly on the concept of the "digital library," and initial practitioners were often described as "digital librarians."

DIGITAL LIBRARIES

Digital libraries are built using a range of platforms and applications, and house assorted and varied electronic materials including scanned print documents, born-digital images and text files, and digitized special collection items.

Contemporary digital libraries include the Internet Archive, Project Gutenberg, the LoC Word Digital Library, and the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA).

The **Digital Library Federation** began in 1995 as a U.S. national effort to create a distributed digital library structurally and conceptually similar to a traditional library. Over time it evolved into an organization for developing metadata and interoperability standards.

The Digital Librarian title likewise evolved, due in large part to its lack of specificity. As the institutional requirements became increasingly specialized, a series of corresponding new positions appeared, including:
- Digital Initiatives (infrequently Digital Projects) Librarian
- Digital Archivists
- Digital Preservationists
- Digital Curator
- Digital Scholarship Librarian
- Data Management Librarian

CURRENT DIGITAL INITIATIVES PRACTICE

"Digital Initiatives Librarians have excellent communication skills as they will often need to communicate closely with a diverse number of stakeholders. They should have excellent technological skills including a knowledge of Web development and programming, a knowledge of Digital Asset Management Systems and Digital Repository administration, and a good knowledge of metadata standards. They should have a good overall knowledge of the types of digital services provided in libraries as well as a good knowledge of the issues surrounding the provision of digital content."

— *ASIS&T Job Descriptions, September 2019*

UNM https://library.unm.edu/services/disc.php
UW https://www.uwyo.edu/libraries/about/spaces-collections/digital-initiatives/
UFC https://library.ucf.edu/about/departments/technology-solutions-digital-initiatives/digital-initiatives/
FIU Law https://law.fiu.edu/library/digital-initiatives-center/
URI https://web.uri.edu/library/collections/digital-initiatives/
Ohio U https://www.ohio.edu/library/about/giving/digital-initiatives
UC Riverside https://library.ucr.edu/about/directory/digital-initiatives
SIU https://lib.siu.edu/services/digital-initiatives.php
Regis https://libguides.regis.edu/dip
UCLA https://www.library.ucla.edu/staff-departments/digital-initiatives-information-technology-diit
Iowa State https://www.lib.iastate.edu/about-library/organization/departments/digital-scholarship-and-initiatives
Olivet Nazarene https://library.olivet.edu/about/departments/digital_initiatives.php
U Miami https://www.library.miami.edu/departments/digital-initiatives.html
U Idaho https://www.lib.uidaho.edu/digital/about.html
FIT https://www.fitnyc.edu/library/digital/
U Alberta https://www.library.ualberta.ca/digital-initiatives
Utah State https://library.usu.edu/about/staff_directory/digitalinitiatives/index
Loyola Marymount https://library.lmu.edu/digitalinitiatives/
U Arkansas https://libraries.uark.edu/contentdigital/
Dalhousie https://libraries.dal.ca/research/digital-initiatives.html
Princeton Theological Seminary https://library.ptsem.edu/digital-collections-overview
UofL https://library.louisville.edu/archives/di
BYU https://lib.byu.edu/directory/digital-initiatives/
McGill https://www.mcgill.ca/library/contact/departments/digital-initiatives
HKUL https://lib.hku.hk/database/
UCO https://library.uco.edu/diwg
MSU https://lib.msu.edu/digitalinfo/
Bowdoin https://library.bowdoin.edu/about-the-library/digital-initiatives-group.shtml
UCSC https://guides.library.ucsc.edu/digital-initiatives

Digital Services Specialist, University of Florida's Smathers Libraries

Web Applications Librarian at The Catholic University of America

Digital and Preservation Archivist at Clemson University Libraries

Digital Scholarship Librarian, Binghamton University

Digital Scholarship Officer at Bucknell University

Digital Preservation Librarian at Syracuse University Libraries

Digital Initiatives & Scholarly Communication Librarian at Boston College Law

Associate University Librarian for the Division of Digital Strategies at UC Santa Barbara

Digital Repository Librarian/Assistant Professor at Oregon State University Libraries & Press

Digital Scholarship Librarian at University of Tennessee Knoxville

Digital Asset Librarian at Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Stanford

Director of Digitization at Clemson University Libraries

Digital Strategies and Systems Librarian at Winthrop University, Dacus Library

Digital Scholarship Librarian or Digital Scholarship Technologist at Hamilton College

Digital Coordinator and Archival Liaison at Institute for Thomas Paine Studies at Iona College

Digital Services Librarian, TCU

Digital Archivist and Records Manager at Seton Hall

Senior Library Assistant for Digital Initiatives, Tisch Library, Tufts University

South Asia Digital Librarian at The Center for Research Libraries

Digital Preservation Librarian, University of Arizona

Digital Scholarship Librarian at University of Arizona Libraries

Open Scholarship Librarian at New York University - Division of Libraries

Systems & Digital Services Librarian at Wentworth Institute of Technology

Library Specialist-Cataloging & Digital Services -- Union College (Schenectady NY)

Head of Digital Object Metadata Management at UC San Diego Library

Digital Preservation Specialist at Wellesley College

Digital Initiatives & Resources Librarian - Park University, MO

Digital Preservation Librarian at Washington University in St. Louis - University Libraries

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DIGITAL INITIATIVES INSTRUCTION

"Librarians now realize that their systems departments are no longer able to handle all the demands for supporting the many different types of technology available in the library so that library staff are increasingly being required to provide some level of technology support for themselves. The implication is that they have to acquire or develop 'hard' technical skills."

— Isaac Kenechukwu Ohaji, 2010

RETHINKING & REFOCUSING

- Include technologists and technology practitioners, both within and outside of the library, as participants in needs analysis, curriculum development, and position definition.

- Adopt standards for structuring library organizational units (staffing, administration, technology and financial support) along with standards for position titles and educational requirements.

- Develop curricula that include broad but sufficiently detailed exposure to systems, software development, project management, and related disciplines.

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