Assessment of Self-Archiving in Institutional Repositories: Depositorship and Full-Text Availability

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Assessment of Self-Archiving in Institutional Repositories: Depositorship and Full-Text Availability

Jingfeng Xia and Li Sun

Abstract: This research evaluates the success of open access self-archiving in several well-known institutional repositories. Two assessment factors have been applied to examine the current practice of self-archiving: depositorship and the availability of full text. This research discovers that the rate of author self-archiving is low and that the majority of documents have been deposited by a librarian or administrative staff. Similarly, the rate of full-text availability is relatively low, except for Australian repositories. By identifying different practices of self-archiving, repository managers can create new strategies for the operation of their repositories and the development of archiving policies.

Introduction

Self-archiving is “a broad term often applied to the electronic posting, without publisher mediation, of author supplied research.”\(^1\) The process “involves a simple web interface where the depositor copy/pastes in the ‘metadata’ (date, author-name, title, journal-name, etc.) and then attaches the full-text document.”\(^2\) The definition of “self” has been vague in current discussions. While some definitions include non-authors as contributors,\(^3\) most others refer to authors only.\(^4\) In this article “self” is used in its stricter definition to denote authors themselves depositing their research results.

Much has been written about the importance of self-archiving for the development of institutional repositories (IRs); however, less has been explored for assessing the achievement of self-archiving, at least quantitative explorations beyond individual repositories.\(^5,6\) The lack of such assessment is primarily due to the short history of IRs, most of which are less than five years old and still in their experimental stages. Self-archiving has been viewed as a revolutionary practice for accumulating content for digital repositories and never doubted in its applicability to IRs.

Assessment is a necessary way of providing data for realigning the practice of self-archiving in the operation of IRs, thereby re-negotiating the infrastructure of repositories. An appropriate evaluation of the progress of a digital repository within the institution can demonstrate usage, justify investment, and support the case for further development.\(^7\) Beyond an institution, a repository evaluation can identify community trends and support regional, national, and international collaborations.

Self-archiving was born with subject-based repositories (SRs) in the early 1990s. In the past fifteen years, self-archiving has proven to be the fundamental concept of collecting content documents. Authors themselves deposited their research outcome in the forms of pre-prints (before peer-review, e.g., arXiv) and post-prints (after peer-review, e.g., PubMed Central) into
This concept was inherited by IRs from their first presence less than ten years ago, assuming that the success of self-archiving in SRs would guarantee the same success in IRs. More than a decade later, IRs have proliferated around the world, and this growth makes possible the assessment of self-archiving in institutional repositories.

This research attempts to perform a quantitative analysis on self-archiving. It examines the depositorship of content documents in some selected IRs, aiming to identify patterns of author archiving vs. non-author archiving. Such identification will draw a better picture of self-archiving practices and help understand the real situation of IR management. This research also checks the availability of full text in these IRs because researchers are more interested in reading full text than citations only. The rate of full-text availability in an IR’s content is a great indicator of the success of the IR. We hope these measures will help repository managers develop new strategies to promote the participation of faculty in the innovation of scholarly communication.

Challenges in Self-Archiving

Institutional repositories have experienced a tremendous development. Within a short period of time, according to Tompson et al., the number of functional IRs has reached more than 250. Another survey found 305 IRs in twelve countries by June 2005, not including the United States, which was one of the top performers in advancing IRs. The Register of Open Access Repositories recorded 637 IRs in March 2006. In addition, many other institutions are planning to build their repositories, thereby making the total number of IRs potentially bigger. With the proliferation of IRs, some articles talking about individual IRs also included the examination of self-archiving practice in the repositories as part of their research. Many assessments focused on the achievements and challenges of open access self-archiving. Most investigations concentrated on identifying the attitudes of authors toward carrying out self-archiving. Such examinations, however, usually appeared to be brief and unsystematic.

One of the early assessment projects was supported by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) in the U.K., resulting in two reports on self-archiving. In particular, the second report is an author study that released statistics on issues pertaining to self-archiving in selected IRs. It described an investigation of 1,296 respondents about authors’ self-archiving behavior and outcomes. As a cross-disciplinary and cross-country study, this report revealed some important discoveries.

In Australia, Arthur Sale analyzed the content of IRs of seven universities. By comparing their content size, he attempted to figure out if a policy that required faculty to deposit their research output into an IR could result in higher archiving rates. Of these universities, the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) set a formal requirement for authors to make contributions to its repository. Sale also focused his research on the patterns of self-archiving. He selected three IRs that adopted a mandatory policy in Australia and the U.K. and examined the time lag of articles from their publication in journals to the acquisition in the repositories. He found that the institutionalization of a mandatory policy would have a remarkable impact on the speed of article deposition by authors.
Similar assessment projects are currently being undertaken in the United States. For example, the MIRACLE (Making Institutional Repositories in A Collaborative Learning Environment), sponsored by the IMLS (Institute of Museum and Library Services), was launched to investigate the development of institutional repositories. Its purpose is to discover elements for the success of institutional repositories and effective ways of contributing to and accessing repositories. The outcomes of the project are expected to include “case studies that illustrate key elements contributing to their success; specification of variables that influence success factors; evaluation of institutional repositories based on user studies; instruments and protocols for re-use by other investigators and repository staff.” These assessments found that self-archiving has faced challenges in the daily practice of IRs.

One of the challenges comes from scholars’ attitudes toward and behaviors in performing self-archiving. The other challenge is the actual recruitment of IR content documents. Scholars, however, have not been as enthusiastic about self-archiving their research results into repositories as expected originally. This apathy was initially considered to be the result of unawareness of the existence of an IR to faculty scholars. Researchers and IR managers adopted a variety of strategies to promote repositories, which included personalizing the interface of a repository for each individual depositor, simplifying depositing procedures, incorporating existing Web materials into the content of an IR, and the like. However, researchers soon realized that faculty did not have time or inclination to self-archive their work, even though they knew the existence of an IR. The fact that self-archiving an article requires only several minutes was not enough to convince them to contribute.

One assumption is that scholars did not generally recognize the benefits of repositories to their scholarly work. Usability studies emerged to analyze the impact of IR materials to the research community. Interoperable repository statistics were released to measure the usage of all types of documents within selected repositories and call the attention of scholars to the value of repositories. Yet, it has become clear that even though scholars were supportive of the repository revolution and agreed to give their materials to an IR, they would rather give the IR managers permission to “do the work on their behalf, but could not commit to doing the work themselves.”

With regard to the increase of content size, IR managers have observed a noticeable change over time. During the first months/years of the establishment of many IRs, documents were accumulated rapidly through self-archiving, thereby bringing much optimism to IR advocates and managers. Then, the recruitment of IR content began slowing down. It became a universal phenomenon that “the rate of deposit of new records typically falls off sharply after the initial burst.”

Content size is one of the most important factors for assessing the achievement of self-archiving. Very few IR managers are satisfied with the content of their IRs. In fact, most managers are concerned with their recruiting rates and content capabilities. However, both IR advocates and practitioners are equally optimistic about the future of self-archiving. Yet, the practitioners who are aware of the difficulties in obtaining IR content through self-archiving are also confident about the future. For them, the challenges to increase IR content are only temporary and can be worked out by adopting feasible outreach plans. Many expect
that a policy for mandating scholars to self-deposit their work into a repository can change the current situation in IR content recruitment.33

In general, the literature on IR assessment has focused on personal interviews among faculty members.34 Unquestionably, the attitudes and awareness of faculty scholars about repositories have an impact on the practice of self-archiving. The attitudes and awareness, however, will eventually have to be translated into the actual numbers of IR content. This translation, as discussed above, is not an easy process. Also, insofar as the authors know, no study has identified content documents self-deposited by authors and documents archived by other people on behalf of the authors. This is key to the understanding of self-archiving achievement regardless of what “self-archiving” is defined. Without such assessment, we may end up talking about something other than self-archiving.

Assessment Factors

In an article in the next issue of Serials Review, the authors discuss a set of factors useful for assessing self-archiving in institutional repositories.35 The factors represent different approaches in assessment from those in previous assessment projects. In prior studies, authors’ attitudes, implementation costs, and content usage were the main focuses.36 Factors here concentrate on the evaluation of depositorship and full-text availability. These factors are highlighted below.

Depositorship

Many repositories provide information about the depositor of an article, which may not be the author of the article. A non-author deposition may signify different operational styles of an IR and is a clear indicator of not-by-author self-archiving style. This display of depositor’s name, unfortunately, is not broadly available in all repositories. The EPrints application features the name, although not all known EPrints repositories use the feature. Other software applications, both open and commercial, such as DSpace, Fedora, Greenstone, and Symposia, do not currently have a similar feature.

Depositorship is one of the cornerstones of self-archiving assessment. Although the definition of self-archiving varies from scholar to scholar, it is always important to know the condition of self-archiving in existing IRs. At least, “self” is still one of the basic tenets of the IR movement, with “archiving, full text, open access, and interoperability” being the others.

Availability of Full Text

The value of open access repositories partly resides on the online availability of full-text articles. Although metadata can provide important citation for research publications, it is full-text documents that attract the attention of researchers. A great number of non-full-text deposits in an IR will inevitably reduce the reliance of scholars on the IR in carrying out their projects. The definition of self-archiving has underlined the importance of depositing both metadata and the actual document into a digital repository.37 In practice, some IRs have varying rates of metadata-only deposits. For such a deposit, many IRs provide a link to an
external site where the corresponding full text is accommodated, thereby relying totally on others for the availability of the full-text document.

**Research Method**

This research applied the two factors mentioned above to the measurement of self-archiving. Nine repositories were selected from a list of known archives that run EPrints as their IR software application.\(^3^8\) Compared to other IR software applications, EPrints was originally designed to be and, as of this writing, is recognized as the Web-based tool that provides a simple interface for end users to self-deposit materials and to retrieve content efficiently. EPrints features a depositor field that requires input during article deposition and displays it with other metadata information.

By October 2006, there were 213 archives running EPrints worldwide,\(^3^9\) including repositories for institutions (mostly universities), subjects (disciplines or inter-disciplines), functions (e.g., theses and dissertations), etc. Among them, only institutional repositories were the focus of this research. Further, specialized academic institutions, such as an institute of science or technology, were excluded in order to make comparisons across institutions, as were repositories designed or operated by certain programs of an institution that would not give a whole picture of self-archiving for multiple disciplines at the university level.

Another selection criterion was the content size of IRs that could range from several items to thousands. We intentionally picked those that contained the most content documents on the list. In general, the longer an IR has been running, the more content it accommodates, and, therefore, the better reputation it has. The selected repositories have good reputations in the development of IRs and in the research communities. Their content size has been large enough to symbolize a success and allow an in-depth analysis, and their history has been long enough to guarantee the evaluation of self-archiving. Multiple countries are represented including Australia, Italy, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (U.K.). Below is a list of the nine IRs:

- Australian National University (EPrints2 Archive),\(^4^0\) Australia
- Lund University (LU: research),\(^4^1\) Sweden
- Queensland University of Technology (ePrints Archive),\(^4^2\) Australia
- University of Glasgow (ePrints Service),\(^4^3\) U.K.
- University of Melbourne (ePrints Repository),\(^4^4\) Australia
- University of Queensland (ePrint Archive),\(^4^5\) Australia
- University of Southampton (ePrints Soton),\(^4^6\) U.K.
- University of Strathclyde,\(^4^7\) U.K.
- University of Trento (UNITH-ePrints),\(^4^8\) Italy

Most of the selected IRs have thousands of deposits. Due to time constraints, the authors only sampled content instead of the entire IR population and accessed the content of each IR by opening its “Browse by Subject” and going into each subject. Documents in each subject were covered for the assessment. If a subject contained fewer than twenty documents, each document was manually checked. Its link to full text on a local server or to external source(s)
was opened for further inspections. We recorded each deposit by checking its self-archiving status and full-text availability. If a subject had more than twenty documents, we checked every third document in the list until the number of checks reached twenty. The total number of documents checked for each IR, except for Southampton and Lund because of their large content size, was more than ten percent of the total content. The sample size for Southampton and Lund was about 200 documents each.

The content documents typically include research articles, conference papers, book chapters, reports, etc., published or unpublished. In some repositories, multimedia materials also exist. In this research, theses and dissertations are not considered to be part of the content because the authors wanted to check different rates of author vs. non-author archiving, and theses and dissertations have obviously been the results of non-author archiving in most repositories. The “advanced search” of EPrints provides a “theses” option which can be unchecked to eliminate both theses and dissertations. The accessing time to these repositories was early October 2006.

Findings and Discussion

Low Percentage of Author Self-Archiving

Among all EPrints repositories, the University of Southampton’s Soton database has absolutely the largest content. Its approximate 20,000 items are far more than any of its peer repositories (Table 1). The success of the Soton database is primarily because Southampton is the inventor of the EPrints application and the home of an enthusiastic self-archiving advocate—Stevan Harnad. For many years, the university has made tremendous endeavors to encourage self-archiving among its faculty.49

Table 1. Total content number by repository (source: http://www.eprints.org/software/archives/ accessed October 8, 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repository</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Deposits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southampton University</td>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>20,621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lund University</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>6241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland University of Technology</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>3777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Queensland</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>3451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian National University</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow University</td>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>2765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Strathclyde</td>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>1420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Melbourne</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>1331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Trento</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>685</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is worth noting that author self-archiving is not the major way of contribution to the accumulation of the content in Southampton’s Soton repository. The findings reveal that the majority of existing documents are not deposited by authors. In other words, for most documents, the name appeared in the “Deposited By” field of a document is not found in the authors of the document.

Southampton is by no means an isolated case. As a matter of fact, all IRs in our list, except for Lund and Glasgow that do not provide a depositor data, have a low percentage of author self-archiving (Table 2). For most documents in these IRs, the “Deposited By” field has one of the following: (1) a name that is not the author of this document, (2) an abbreviation for a department or school, and (3) something that may indicate this document as imported by an automated program. The third one is relatively rare. The “Deposited By” field has a link to another page where information about this depositor is provided, which in most cases includes the total number of documents deposited by the depositor on the server. Usually, a non-author depositor has many deposits, few of which, if any, are his/her own writings. The information may also indicate that the depositor is a librarian or administrative staff who is assigned as a liaison to the repository with the duty of depositing digital materials on behalf of faculty members or of an academic unit.

Table 2. Rate of author self-archiving by repository

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repository</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Non-author</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lund University</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow University</td>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Strathclyde</td>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Trento</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian National University</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Southampton</td>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Melbourne</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland University of Technology</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Queensland</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Queensland University of Technology (QUT) has implicitly claimed that administrative staff in individual academic units are encouraged to deposit papers on behalf of authors from their unit. The QUT EPrints shows that a librarian at the university library has deposited 445 documents, of which only five articles are written by her. At the University of Queensland (UQ), a librarian has as many as 1,029 deposits, consisting of about one third of the total content in this IR. Among all her deposits, only seventeen articles were authored or co-
authored by this librarian. Similar practices can be easily detected from the IRs of Australian National University (ANU), Melbourne, Strathclyde, and Trento.

The IRs of ANU, Strathclyde, and Trento have adopted an almost exclusively non-author depositing practice (see Table 2). A great percentage of their materials are deposited by others. Although other Australian IRs have a relatively lower rate of non-author depositing, the rate can also be as high as 70 percent.

Among author self-archived documents, only a few authors appear to be active depositors. Taking UQ as an example, an author (Hubert Chanson) deposited a total of 283 documents, and another author (Jerome K. Vanclay) deposited 147 documents, while the total content number was 3,451 by early October 2006. This situation seems to be common in other IRs as well. Due to the relatively small number of content in most IRs, many scholars in these institutions may not have participated in self-archiving, although a few others appear to be enthusiastic.

This finding is reflected in current practices of self-archiving in some IRs. After several years of practice in the operation of IRs in different parts of the world, many strategies have been developed to promote the recruitment of content material. Depositing papers for others is one of the strategies. In addition to the IRs examined here, many other repositories have also worked toward this strategy. For example, a recent article cited the involvement of assistants in depositing papers for the T-Space repository at the University of Toronto.51 The senior author was once an assistant depositing articles for scholars who gave rights to the DLIST repository at the University of Arizona.

A liaison system is an effective way of collaboration between a library and academic units served by the library in higher educational institutions.52 In traditional library service, a librarian is usually assigned to work with particular department(s). “(T)hose where library service appeared to be most valued by the faculty were those for which librarians reported the most frequent interaction with faculty members.”53 The self-archiving process could still be assigned to a librarian to deposit documents for faculty in given department(s), or be assigned to someone specifically working on contributing research work of the faculty members in the department. The latter might be a particularly practical model because the department liaison is more aware of any updates in the research of faculty of his/her unit than a librarian is. Utilizing departmental staff will be more common when a mandate policy for self-archiving is introduced in the operation of an IR.54 Given the changed practices, we may need to reconsider the definition of self-archiving and add non-author deposition into its concept.

**Unavailability of Full Text**

The process of self-archiving an article includes the deposition of metadata, as well as full-text documents. In the IRs examined, full-text documents are not always available. Lack of availability may vary from IR to IR or from subject to subject inside an IR, but it merits analysis.

Table 3 shows that lack of full text is obvious in IRs in the European institutions except for the University of Trento, based in Italy. The Strathclyde EPrints has the highest rate of non-
full-text content, which is as high as about 91 percent. The rates of non-full-text documents for other European IRs, namely, Lund, Glasgow, and Southampton, are 84 percent, 73 percent, and 67 percent respectively.

Table 3. Rate of full-text availability by repository

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repository</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Full-text</th>
<th>Abstract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Strathclyde</td>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lund University</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow University</td>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Southampton</td>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Trento</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Queensland</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland University of Technology</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Melbourne</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian National University</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All four Australian IRs, on the other hand, show a low rate of non-full-text documents, with a percentage as low as less than 5 percent. This may be related to the existence of a mandate policy by Australian institutions or merely demonstrate different operational styles of these IRs. According to Arthur Sale, QUT is the only university in Australia that requires its faculty to self-archive digital documents in its IR. Other Australian universities have not adopted a similar policy as of this writing.

Current data are not sufficient enough to suggest a geographic influence in the operation of IRs. Theoretically, the policies and practices of an IR are regulated and applied at the institutional level. Similarities of IRs across institutions may be the result of regional or national collaborations, such as a consortium or a higher-level project/organization that sponsors a group of IRs and shares ideas among them. Further investigations are necessary for a better understanding of IR similarities and differences with regard to self-archiving styles.

It is uncertain if some non-full-text deposits are the result of metadata harvesting from external data providers, or if they are added to an IR merely for the purpose of making the IR content look larger. Current information indicates that for Southampton, “the repository entry is sometimes just a metadata stub and the full-text has not been uploaded to the repository…” In the case of the Australian repositories, metadata-only entries are held in separate reporting databases (WARP in Tasmania, Research Master in QUT) and the open access repositories hold 100 percent full text items.”

The non-full-text deposits can be divided into two categories: metadata with an abstract and metadata without an abstract. Some provide an external link to the journal’s Web site on
which an article is published or to another Web page where the full text is available. Links depend on the status of the external source for online accessibility. As a result, many links direct the user to a login-required Web page for full text; some links are broken links where the original URL has been changed or closed; and, some links, though returning full text not featured by the local server, may potentially become dead links. Therefore, the difference between the availability of full text and the presence of metadata is “only a few clicks.”

While the usability of an IR relies on its content size, the value of the content is largely determined by the availability of full-text documents. Researchers are more interested in reading a full article than an abstract. Or, “a combination between abstract and full text documentation would represent a reasonable compromise between user acceptance.” The value of an IR and thus self-archiving will be lowered if the majority of its content are metadata with abstract only, or even worse, metadata without an abstract, and if an external link to the full text version becomes unavailable.

Conclusion

Self-archiving as a revolutionary way of publishing has been a myth for a long time. Advocates have emphasized its advantages and significance in scholarly communication. Although having already found self-archiving difficult to promote and manage, practitioners tend to pinpoint its potentials and take an optimistic view. In most discussions, self-archiving has been considered to be an integrated part of the development and practice of digital repositories, both IRs and SRs.

A closer look at individual deposits, however, divulges a slow, if not negative, performance of self-archiving in the making of IR content documents. Not only are the majority of current IR deposits contributed by non-authors, but many IR deposits are also presented in a non-full-text mode. IR managers have invested tremendous time, money, and energy to campaign for self-archiving by bringing the attention of scholars in their institutions. Their harvests, however, are not at all what they should have deserved proportionally. The understanding of the practice of self-archiving will help re-orient the operation of IRs and make them healthy. Repository as a digital platform of scholarly communication still has its value, although criticism exists. The assessment of input activity is key in determining the use of information systems, thereby adding values to digital repositories.

This very preliminary assessment examined two factors on the status of self-archiving. Only IRs using EPrints and having the largest content size were selected. Also, the assessment relied solely on publicly accessible data. Future analysis can extend to a complete set of assessment factors and include other types of IRs, either EPrints or DSpace and Fedora. Both comparative studies across IRs and in-depth evaluations on individual IRs are necessary. Thorough evaluations on the most successful IRs will produce valuable information in understanding the importance of self-archiving. Further assessments can be carried out by combining quantitative evaluations on IR deposits with qualitative interviews among scholars and IR professionals.

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