Knowledge in the Digital Age: The Case of Egypt

AUC Research Conference

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Comments prepared by Carolyn Runyon for the Knowledge in the Digital Age: The Case of Egypt, a session chaired by Sherine El Taraboulsi. Co-presenters include Nagla Rizk and Stephen Urgola.

Introduction

I'm Carolyn Runyon, and I'm the Digital Collections Archivist here at AUC. I work in the Rare Books and Special Collections Library on digital projects, including the

- AUC Web Archive, which archives content published on the Web, including the AUC Web site and Revolution-related social media
- Digital Archive and Research Repository (better known as DAR), AUC's Open Access institutional repository for scholarly research and university records
- the AUCWiki, a collaborative workspace for AUC's scholarly output that supplements DAR and includes the Biographical Dictionary of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, which is a collection of over 70 articles authored by students in Michael Reimer's History 412 course offered last spring
- and the Rare Books and Special Collections Digital Library, which provides online access to the Rare Books Library's rich primary sources, mostly recently the drawings of Egyptian architect Ramses Wissa Wassef.

In order to manage these systems and projects I work with

- student and faculty scholarly communications contributors, who have built a dense archive of theses, research papers, documentaries, oral histories, articles, presentations, and creative works, including visual art and creative writing,
- instructors who build assignments with the intent that they will be published using our scholarly communications tools (DAR and the AUCWiki),
- administrators, like the Vice Provost for Institutional Research, Dr. Harman, and Dean of Graduate Studies, Dr. Sharaawi, who serve as advocates our Open Access repositories among faculty and students working on master's theses
- I also work with my colleagues in the Rare Books and Special Collections Library. Those curators with inimate knowledge of collections who help me select and describe cultural heritage resources,
- and, finally, and perhaps, most importantly, with information technologists in UACT who work tirelessly to develop new and revise existing platforms to house and promote the work of the AUC research community as well as history and culture of Egypt

Whether I'm working with content providers (the students and faculty who provide scholarship) or curators (the personnel who identify cultural heritage resources for digitization), we are all engaged in the work of creating knowledge in digital environments. Digital libraries, like the Web archive, AUCwiki, DAR, and RBSCDL, have the power to improve access, reach new audiences, and enhance knowledge. As AUC tightens the purse strings, we are developing innovative and entrepreneurial models for digitization and scholarly communications projects.

How can we be innovative and entrepreneurial in our digitization and digital preservation efforts?

We use a variety of innovative and entrepreneurial techniques not only to develop digital content, but also to manage the content once it's available on the Web.

- Working with UACT, we develop digital initiatives, such as the Rare Books and Special Collections Digital Library, that support digital curation, which refers to harnessing the power of the community to add value to digital objects, through tasks such as tagging, commenting, and rating. As budgets for professional catalogers and metadata experts dwindle, we must rely on the crowd to provide context and descriptive details for online content.
- We engage in scholarly communications projects, such as DAR and the AUCWiki, that promote free and open access to research. Instead of only providing access to published, peer-reviewed articles in available subscription databases such as JSTOR, we support gray literature formats, such as technical reports, white papers, datasets, and preprints that challenge traditional publishing models.
  As an aside, and a plug, publishing content in Open Access repositories, such as DAR and the AUCWiki, increases the number of people who can access your research, thus yielding more citations of your work. Most publishers allow you publish at least a pre-print of your work in an Open Access repository, and many will let you include the final published PDF of the journal article after a year or 2 have passed.
  Further, publishing in an Open Access repository increases the intellectual capital of the school, which could help us meet the university's goal of becoming a competitive research institution.

So far, my response has been an overview of what we're already doing, but in the future, we hope to develop processes and collaborations that further stress innovation and entrepreneurship in digital librarianship.

- Archives in the States are investigating scan on demand procedures, a form of patron driven acquisitions that would allow special collections libraries and archives like the RBSCL provide resources in an online environment upon request. Instead of systematically digitizing entire collections, researchers make selections about what content is made available in our digital library, thus tailoring resources to specific knowledge production needs.
- I think that there is also an opportunity for us to work cooperatively with other cultural heritage institutions to back up our digital data, to avoid disasters like the fire at the Institute D'Egypte. Digitization alone will not preserve content, we have to be aggressive in identifying strategies that replicate data in variety of locations, not just on AUC's servers.

By working collaboratively with the AUC and global research communities, we are able to provide access to and context for much more content, than we ever could working within traditional publishing and digital library frameworks. A willingness to adopt new methodologies and technologies in addition to an entrepreneurial mind set will yield more discoverable and focused digital content.