Collaborating with Library Staff: Opportunities for Technical Communicators

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What Are Institutional Digital Repositories?

Historically, academic research libraries have used the printed publication for depositing and archiving research and scholarly works.

Over the last 10-15 years, these libraries have moved to storing, distributing, and preserving more and more of their collections electronically, including scholarly research produced by university faculty and students.

An institutional digital repository expands the readership and availability of scholarly research, maximizes use of instructional materials, and facilitates self-archiving. Access is immediate, free, and unrestricted in most cases via the university library's Web site.

Diverse students and faculty use institutional digital repositories have a variety of desires, needs, and experience with Web-based resources.

Many of the major academic research libraries provide access only to electronic versions of publications via the Web to make them more readily available, save space, and eliminate unwieldy, inefficient, and costly storage of physical items.

The move to institutional digital repositories provides opportunities for technical communication practitioners and researchers alike.

Practitioner Opportunities

- Developing information campaigns
- Developing training modules
- Designing & developing Web site
- Writing copy for Web sites
- Preparing procedural manuals and guidelines

Researcher Opportunities

- Conducting focus groups
- Surveying faculty, staff, and students
- Evaluating information campaigns
- Providing research-based guidelines for developing Web sites
- Providing heuristic review—i.e., research based expert reviews—of existing Web sites.
- Conducting usability testing of prototype Web sites & Software

An Example:

Electronic Theses & Dissertations

Colorado State University is in the process of moving from paper submission of theses and dissertations to electronic submission of theses and dissertations.

We conducted four focus groups of doctoral students and faculty (n = 22). Our objectives were to (1) assess prior experience with electronic submissions, (2) determine familiarity with conversion software, (3) gauge awareness of the move to ETDs, (4) identify potential barriers.

Reactions

- Favored ETD submissions
- Had experience with Acrobat conversion software, prior submission of electronic documents for publication
- Wanted ability to submit a variety of formats
- Wanted a simple, straightforward submission process
- Interested in extensive user support

Potential Issues

- Prior publication
- Subsequent submission to journals
- Copyright issues
- Proprietary information
- Plagiarism
- Electronic longevity
- Need for new Graduate School policies and procedures

Colorado State University

Knowledge to Go Places