Forging Ahead with Institutional Digital Information Strategies at Duke University and Dartmouth College

In 2008, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded Dartmouth College and Duke University grants to initiate campus-wide digital information plans. Both institutions appointed directors for their programs and are moving forward with designing their strategies and developing initiatives to deploy them.

Approaches

Duke is taking a service-focused, faculty-driven approach. Under the assumption that there already are and will continue to be a wide variety of independently managed systems and workflows for managing digital information, Duke is investigating where services could be developed that could be integrated into existing workflows and provide incentives for more effective practices for managing, preserving, and providing access to the digital outputs of the University. These will include both infrastructure at various levels (for personal, group, published, and institutional data) as well as services to assist with data management within them and with transitions between them.

Dartmouth is taking a policy focused, integrated governance-driven approach. Dartmouth has completed a Strategic Vision document that considers the issues of governance, culture, and technology. As a first step, the Vision Document prioritizes governance and proposes the formation of 2 groups: a high level Strategy Committee and a mid-level Working Group to prioritize and develop policies to develop technical infrastructure and services. These two groups will assess the needs across disciplines and departments, set priorities, and establish policies.

Initiatives

Duke

- Convened a Digital Futures Task Force, composed primarily of faculty, to examine the issues, set priorities, and promote campus-wide action. Other groups are exploring policy issues, service models, and system implementations, and an interest group of local repository managers has been formed to share best practices across administratively separate units.
- The Task Force developed a draft open access policy for faculty publications and is currently seeking feedback from faculty governance bodies about its adoption. Work is getting underway to integrate the processes for collecting and providing access to faculty publications with existing faculty reporting and dissemination workflows, and to develop value added services to provide incentives for broad participation.
- Planning and some pilots are underway to explore service models in the library to support open access publishing, research data management, and digital humanities projects, and to build on existing programs for archiving
administrative records and digital materials accessioned into Special Collections and University Archives.

- Planning has recently begun on a collaborative project with partners at UNC-CH and NCSU and the regional Renaissance Computing Institute (RENCI) to develop local repository infrastructures that can be federated across the three campuses, including common methods for encoding and applying policies for retention, access, and disposal, and common cloud storage architectures. The initial content type the project will focus on will be course material, especially audio/video from lecture capture, but the goal is to have the infrastructure also support research data and other types of digital collections, and to form the backbone of a digital preservation repository.

Dartmouth

- Assessing the needs of Humanities Scholars. Humanities scholars are an important part of a college or university faculty; however, no study has examined their particular information needs, expectations, and concerns in the context of the design of an institutional repository. Building a service based on an articulation of desires and in response to concerns -- instead of one based on various assumptions of need -- should result in a more heavily-used repository and one that is relevant to greater portions of the institution.

- Paperless Admissions. Dartmouth’s undergraduate Admissions Department has transitioned to a completely paperless workflow and notification system utilizing Nolij Web, Documentum, and Banner. Embedded workflow decisions have streamlined the process and enabled to Admissions Department to complete their annual processes with fewer FTEs. Additional savings have been found through the reduction of paper correspondence, printing, and mailings.

- Paperless Administrative Office. The Computer Science department has implemented a document management system to improve workflow and reduce its dependency on paper. The department has used the same system to transitioned to a paperless graduate admissions process.

- ThayerFS. The Thayer School of Engineering has deployed a NetApp system to develop a single storage solution in which each faculty member, staff employee, and student will have personal storage space as well as access to any course or group in which they are members. An initial storage quota is free for each end-user. Additional storage space is available on demand and incurs a one-time fee per Gigabyte. Backups and snapshots are provided so that file recovery can be initiated by the end-user. The system will store curricular, administrative, and research data.

- Research Data Stores. Addressing the needs of researchers with large data stores has become a central issue for research computing at universities. Faculty from all disciplines are building larger, multiple terabyte sized data sets that are often stored locally with inadequate application of best practices and safeguards. Research Computing at Dartmouth has established an NFS based system to store research data for researchers in Biology. Service level agreements have been developed and approved by a faculty oversight committee for research computing.