Online Legacy Preservation for Humanities Researchers

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The problem

As researchers retire or pass away, the online record of their work and their research careers begins to fragment and fade away: research homepages are often briefly maintained by their previous institution(s), but then fade into offline archives; published papers are scattered through print and digital archives worldwide; CVs and biographic descriptions that formerly provided a coherent timeline and 'story' for a career simply disappear; research data and databases associated with projects and publications are orphaned in repositories; links between the researcher and collaborators remain implicit in the research literature or hidden in acknowledgments sections for dissertations and theses; and records of public research conversations are lost to mailing list, blog, etc. archives.

Example: distributed, temporary, unconnected, online representations for one researcher

Objective

Our aim is to make explicit and persistent these implicit, impermanent connections in the formal and informal research records.

Case studies

We begin with case studies of four New Zealand Humanities researchers, nearing or at the ends of their active careers.

What materials currently exist that they believe are essential to detail the results of their research, and that convey the 'story' of their work?

- Publications: "formal" as well as institutional and grey literature (also significant in NZ's recent past)
- Datasets: archiving, metadata, access rights, privacy issues…
- Format: paper, digital format (physical storage)
- CVs, research statements, bios
- Curated collections of "their" subject literature

For these materials, we then explore:

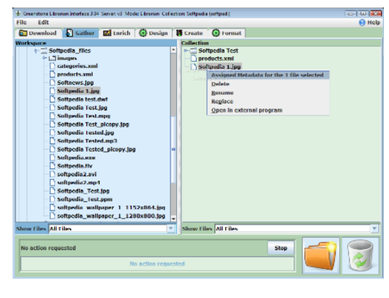
- Their availability: websites (publisher, institutional, personal, …), institutional, personal collections, …
- Their (likely) persistence over time
- Further interviews with peers, to elicit their opinions of which materials they believe to be essential for capturing the case study research

This work carried out in parallel with a similar study of Engineering/Computer Science researchers, both NZ-based and international.

Prototyping

Insights from the case studies will guide the creation prototypes for our sample of researchers to explore the requirements and constraints of accessing full-text content (publications and data) within the current copyright environment. Building prototypes will highlight the issues from the multiple perspectives of information seekers, academic publishers, researcher-centric websites (e.g. ORCID, Academia.edu) and the researchers' institutions.

greenstone digital library software



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