

Planning Digital Libraries: Definitions and Decisions

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What is a “digital library?”

A total environment, more than a subset of materials:

- Curated collections
- Organized and interoperable resources
- Specific purpose or audience
- User services
- Business operations
- Sustainability



Choosing Digital Collections

- Subjects covered at the institution
- Academic level of the work:
 - Introductory
 - Comprehensive
 - Advanced research
- Resources available
 - Budget, staff, technology
 - Relationships with partner institutions



Digital Coverage of Subjects

- Coverage of core journals
- Availability of ebooks for current and/or retrospective monographs
- Need for film, music, media, interactive modelling or mapping tools: specialized equipment and expertise
- Peer-reviewed content vs. quick information
- Course material developed locally vs. texts ordered from publishers



Print or Digital or Both?

- Completeness, quality and reliability of the digital version
- Print backfiles and “last copy” agreements
- Digital back-up
- Ability to use digital for lending and reserves
- Institutional importance of the specific topic
- Amount of climate-controlled shelf space
- Delivery mechanisms for rapid access



Acquiring Digital Content

- New materials from commercial publishers
- High-quality resources posted free via the Internet
- Projects digitizing segments of library holdings
- “Mass digitizing” from library collections
- Local content: faculty lecture notes, course readings, dissertations, administrative materials, photographs
- Cooperative agreements and regional networks
- Balancing costs, access, and usage rights



Digital Tools for Academic Users

- Citation and bibliographic software
- File management and indexing
- Text and data mining (searching)
- Geographic information systems (GIS) and statistical analysis
- Image zoom and transformation



Digital Library Services

- Search physical and digital books, journals, databases and digital collections
- Class reserves: texts, images, music, and film
- Digitizing consultation and technical assistance
- Online reference, circulation, delivery, instruction
- Library interaction through social media
- Remote access from home, office or distance
- Institutional repository and data management



Infrastructure for Library Operations

- Networks and devices for staff and users
- Business and personnel operations conducted online
- Integrated library systems managing physical and digital objects
- Technology spaces: information commons, media labs, smart classrooms, video conferencing, visualization walls, wireless
- Software development team
- Systems support for desktop and applications
- Long-term archiving of digital information
- Assessment and metrics



Digital Library Costs

- Acquisition of materials
- Space for staff and technical operations
- Staff salaries and training: technical and programming skills
- Types of user devices to be supported
- User services: reproductions, reformatting, images
- Vendor services: software, maintenance, storage
- Servers, workstations and peripheral hardware



Phasing and Strategic Planning

- Align with academic priorities
- Gradual but regular increases in operational readiness and technological capacity
- Assess institutional infrastructure and services
- Use special opportunities through partnerships, fundraising and grants

