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Review of Electronic Records in the Manuscript Repository

Kiffany Francis
Cleveland State University

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ELECTRONIC RECORDS IN THE MANUSCRIPT REPOSITORY

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ELECTRONIC RECORDS IN THE MANUSCRIPT REPOSITORY. Elizabeth H. Dow. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009, xvii, 189 pp., ISBN 978-0-8108-6708-6, paperback, \$45.00.

Digital materials are inherently fragile and providing long-term care for these materials in the collecting repository presents many challenges, especially for archivists and manuscript curators working in small collecting repositories. In *Electronic Records in the Manuscript Repository*, Elizabeth Dow describes the fragility of digital materials best, “it only takes one broken strand in the web of hardware, software, data, and user knowledge needed to retain digital materials for them to be lost forever.” The author presents and organizes introductory information for professional archivists and manuscript curators about accepting and managing electronic records in an easy-to-read manner. She defines a good digital document as one that has integrity (i.e., it is complete and unaltered) and the qualities of being authentic, reliable, and usable. Dow provides both the theoretical background and some practical steps for archivists and collection curators to start doing something rather than nothing.

The book is organized with more general concepts in the beginning and then ends with more specific and practical examples to encourage implementation on behalf of the small repository. The first four chapters provide an overview of different concepts that provide a foundation for understanding the issues with preserving digital materials for the long term. Parts of these chapters read like a list of definitions, though the information is useful and serves as an excellent reference for later chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of archival concepts, which is helpful for those who approach the book from a library background instead of one that is strictly archival. The second chapter provides a comparison between analog and digital materials and explains some of the challenges in archiving digital materials.

Chapter 3 provides a great deal of technical definitions for understanding hardware, software, types of digital materials, and types of repositories (DAMS, ERMS, DLS, IR, etc.). In

this chapter, Dow gently introduces the Open Archives Information System (OAIS) reference model, which has become an ISO standard. The OAIS model is a conceptual model which explains at a high level what functions a digital repository should be able to perform: ingest, archival storage, access, data management, administration, and planning for long-term retention. She intentionally avoids including the OAIS diagram, which can be confusing to interpret, and instead explains the model in an easy-to-understand way.

The book provides information on the different methods that may be used to keep digital materials viable for long-term retention. Archivists can either consider converting digital materials to analog (i.e., printing or microfilming) or can choose to manage the digital materials using methods such as refreshing, reformatting, migration, normalization, and emulation. The author also provides some notes on handling different types of media such as magnetic tape, optical technology, digital images, email, and web pages. Techniques, methods, technologies for managing digital materials, as well as the knowledge about the materials themselves are ever evolving, but the author gives a summary about what is known and mentions additional resources for further information.

The last half of the book focuses on what the archivist or manuscript curator can do to start a digital repository. The book provides an overview of the resources that are necessary in planning for a trustworthy digital repository (TDR) and suggests some open source tools that could be used in symphony to create such a repository. Dow also lists some of the positive steps that archivists may take towards creating a TDR that can assure longer term preservation and access to digital materials. Archivists can change the mission statement of their collecting repository so that it includes the long term retention and access of digital materials. It is also important to assess the scope of your retention activities, who will carry out information

technology activities and metadata creation, what your data recovery plan will be, what information architecture you can employ to achieve your institution's mandate or mission, and how you will pay for all of it. The book also gives practical advice on how to work with donors who may be creating digital collections that will be of value to your repository.

There is no absolute solution for electronic records management though significant progress and gains in knowledge have been made by institutions that were willing to create their own TDRs. Dow makes reference to these in every chapter. One of the most valuable elements of the book is that Dow includes extensive notes and references throughout the text. She also includes additional appendices: Works Cited, Essential Tools, Beginner Bibliography, Continuing Education Opportunities and Workshops, and Other Useful Works. *Electronic Records in the Manuscript Repository* is highly recommended for those who want an extremely accessible introduction to managing and preserving digital materials and would serve as a great reference to the topic.

*Kiffany Francis
Metadata Librarian
Michael Schwartz Library
Cleveland State University
Cleveland, Ohio*