

Digital Curation Projects Made Easy: A Step-by-Step Guide for Libraries, Archives, and Museums. By Carmen Cowick. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018. 136 pp. Softcover. \$35.00.

At a seemingly exponential rate, cultural heritage organizations of all kinds are acquiring, developing, and providing access to digital collections. These collections include both analog materials like photographs or books that have been digitized, as well as born-digital materials like research data sets, e-books, and digital archival materials. For many libraries, archives, and museums, caring for digital collections is no longer a novel undertaking, but rather has become a regular part of their work. However, this is not the case across the board, as many institutions are just now beginning to grow their digital collections in earnest. Even for institutions with long-established digital collections, the scholarship and practice of digital curation continues to evolve. For these reasons, the role of digital curation is a pressing question for virtually all cultural heritage organizations.

As an introduction to this critically important area of cultural heritage work, Carmen Cowick's *Digital Curation Projects Made Easy* is a succinct yet thoroughly informative guide. While the target audience is information professionals just beginning to delve into managing digital collections, the book could also serve well as a review for information professionals with more digital experience, or as a handy reference work for either staff or student workers in the midst of digital projects. In the opening chapters, Cowick provides a clear discussion of key terms and ideas, a compelling outline of the benefits of digital collections projects, and level-headed advice on prioritizing and managing resources needed for digital collection projects. The second part of the book includes step-by-step project guidelines for building digital collections for various kinds of materials including photographs, newspapers, rare books, art collections, and oral histories.

In the introductory chapters, Cowick defines digitization and digital preservation as part of the broader practice of digital curation, which encompasses the creation or acquisition, description, access, and ongoing care of digital objects. Cowick enumerates the benefits of digitization projects—such as increased availability of collections or new kinds of outreach projects opened up by digital technologies—but clarifies that digitization alone does not constitute a preservation strategy. Rather, digitization is only the beginning stage of digital curation, as the creation of a new object that will require ongoing attention and resources. As Cowick states, “in fact, your digital object will probably need much more care than any physical object in your collection” (p. 3).

Cowick builds on this essential point by providing project guidelines that emphasize making digital curation a sustainable aspect of an institution's work; for example, by articulating clear priorities for digital projects and by formalizing digital preservation and digital collections policies. Framing the more directed guidelines for specific digital curation projects laid out in the following section, these opening chapters are a good primer on what needs to be done to make digital curation integral to an institution's mission. However, a caveat should be made that these opening chapters are only a primer and by no means a comprehensive nor exhaustive guide to getting a sustainable

digital curation program up and running. For the beginner, though, the book is a great starting point, and Cowick provides many references throughout for further reading.

Despite the strength of the book as an introductory text to digital curation, the chapters devoted to step-by-step guides for building and managing digital collections are limited almost exclusively to digitization projects. Digitization is certainly a key component of digital curation, but as Cowick herself makes clear in the opening chapters, digital curation encompasses the acquisition, appraisal, description, and ongoing preservation of both digitized and born-digital materials (p. 8). While the title advertises the book as a guide to digital curation projects in general, the step-by-step project guidelines offered in the book risk oversimplifying “digital curation” to only digitization as such. Given the nuanced introductory discussion of the relationship between digitization, digital preservation, and digital curation, the lack of project guidelines for born-digital materials is especially pronounced.

The book may more accurately be described as a step-by-step guide to digitization projects—but in this regard, Cowick’s project guidelines are enormously beneficial for both beginners and information professionals with more experience working on digital collection projects. Cowick presents sound advice for all stages of digitization projects and digs into details relevant for working with particular kinds of materials. From purchasing scanning equipment to formalizing file naming conventions, Cowick clearly outlines key considerations impacting different decisions and suggests ways forward that institutions of varying sizes and resources can follow. As mentioned above, Cowick pays special attention to the need for an ongoing commitment to digital preservation, and the project guidelines reflect this. Digitizing materials is only the start of digital curation work. Cowick also gives guidance on ensuring the longevity of digital collections, with recommendations for preservation-friendly file formats, digital storage, and access platforms, among other points. Hand-in-hand with long-term preservation, Cowick emphasizes the importance of providing access to digital collections, as increased accessibility is often a primary reason for digitizing materials, and collection usage helps to justify the ongoing commitment of resources to preserving materials. Cowick supplies illustrative examples for how institutions can maximize the use of digital collections, such as creating a blog promoting digitized rare books (p. 84) or a podcast engaging with oral histories (p. 109).

The guidelines tailored to particular kinds of materials are a truly welcome resource and could aid anyone undertaking digitization projects involving photographs, newspapers, rare books, artwork, or oral histories. No two digitization projects are completely alike, and the type of material being digitized can necessitate major differences in terms of equipment, techniques, description, preservation, and access. Cowick details the handling of both analog and digitized objects for these various types of materials, covering myriad particularities throughout the digitization process for each kind of collection. For instance, she describes how best to clean and flatten newspapers in preparation for scanning (p. 64), which is likely a useful tip even for someone with years of experience working with newspaper collections. Along with advice for the long-term preservation of the original analog materials, Cowick’s guidelines create a sense of continuity

between analog and digital collections. Digitization does not initiate a break with existing analog collections, but rather opens these collections up to new potential uses and users.

Overall, the book serves as an informative introduction to digital curation and should ably guide information professionals at institutions with both emergent and established digital collections programs. The real strength of the book is its emphasis on digital curation as an ongoing effort that needs to be integrated into organizational policies, procedures, and workflows—not just one-off projects to make some old photographs available online. The book offers plenty of help to jump-start information professionals new to digital curation; but, by limiting the scope essentially to activities related to digitization projects, Cowick misses an opportunity to deliver a more comprehensive guide to digital curation.

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