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The Value of Archives

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The Value of Archives

Written by Sarah Ellsworth, MLS - October 2020

This report was created to quantify and qualify the value of historic archives managed by the Parkview Library within the Institutional Repository (IR) and/or our internal platform Sharepoint.

Background:

Parkview Hospital has a long history and with an accumulation of documents and photographs. These historic materials (digital and physical) reside between three Parkview departments: Marketing, Media Services, and the Resource Library.

The Parkview Resource Library receives two or three requests for archival materials annually. While this is obviously a small frequency, the request is coming from our largest stakeholders in the organization. Plus the process of quickly retrieving these historic materials is difficult- several Parkview departments reaching out to each other to track down photographs.

During our most recent project of tracking down photographs of past Parkview board members, a discussion between departments suggested that the Parkview Resource Library manage and house all the historic materials. These materials could be housed internally on our Intranet SharePoint or housed publicly on our Research Repository.

The proposal is to establish a useful and curated method for easy access/retrieval for these historic materials. Additionally, this proposal will be weighed with potential benefits and known drawbacks.

Determining Impact and Benefit:

After reviewing several publications, listed in references, it is known that determining impact is most useful when impact is *defined*. Typical methods of impact measure are difficult to apply to archives.

For example, common measures are *economic impact* and *social impact*. These can be applied to archives as a general project to undertake.

The **economic impact** of an archive is not great when you consider the amount of time that is needed to compile, organize, and digitize historic materials. Time is paid hours of librarians over the course of months, perhaps years. While it is true that time will be saved in the future from the efficacy of a well-managed repository, it pales in comparison to the time taken to create this database. Additionally, there is no direct income derived from usage of an archive.

The **social impact** of an archive is stronger if the historic materials are moved to the Research Repository, which is a public platform. Social impact is a complex definition, sometimes valued as inclusion, recognition, awareness and connection to the community.

“Establishing a digital archive of historical artifacts is one way that libraries can add value to their institutions. This type of preservation can also bring together communities, increase the visibility of the library, and help library staff learn new skills.” (*The Digitization of Historical Artifacts in a Hospital Library*)

Currently, the Parkview librarians have been adding archives to the Research Repository, separate from this mentioned archive projects. The Parkview Research Repository is a place where research and scholarly output will be preserved and shared with the public. The goals of our Institutional Repository (IR) are:

- Increase visibility of, and access to, Parkview Health researchers by disseminating publication information.
- Showcase individual researchers, clinical specialties, and Parkview as part of the system's publishing initiative.
- Identify and maintain an enduring, digital record of Parkview research in the format of publications, presentations, and posters.
- Increase awareness and provide support of Parkview Health programs.

During training in March 2020, Parkview Librarians learned that adding an archive section to their IR increases traffic, and this has proven to be true. The chosen archival content (a collection of 1960's Park Views Newsletter) is a top download, locally and globally. The public loves historical documents and photographs for personal use and education.

The Research Repository is already aligned for what we need as a platform for this specific archives project.

We can extrapolate that adding more archival content to our IR will increase social impact, by bringing awareness to Parkview's history and current growth and research.

While economic and social impact are common, they are limited in their ability to quantify the value of archives.

Defining Impact as Difference and for Whom

Impact as difference

There is a case for the most useful definition of impact is that the impact of a service involves an effect of the service on the user. It is easiest to think of this in terms of the difference made.

Simply put: Does having an archive make a difference?

Arguments can be made for positive cultural, historical, and work-related differences.

Impact on whom?

The impact may be a difference made to an individual user, or to a group, and eventually to society.

Impact within an organization should also be considered because the original discussion of an archive came from a current need from Parkview staff. This current need also translates into future needs, as we have determined through service patterns.

We have users now plus we also need to consider future users (sometimes referred to non-users in literature). Thus, looking into the future, there is a value, rather than an impact, of a service. That value can be the contingent value for non-users, the value of having that service available even if there is no immediate intention of using that service personally. This is quite common and reasonable for an archive.

Simply put: There is value in that an archive merely exists.

Having access to a well-managed and curated archive creates a value of awareness to our institution, as a value of service within our institution, and a service value for individuals/groups in the community now and also in the future.

With all of these measures of value, how can we determine if this archive project is successful?

The early development of archive provision was closely associated with the needs of an academic historical constituency. Concepts of social and economic impact are cleanly applied to an archive. Typically an archive is not faced with the need to justify itself in these terms, and widely accepted as a 'good thing' and not subject to indepth scrutiny. We understand that there is value in having an archive for our institution and for the public.

The Purpose of the Archive is to:

1. Solve the problem of tracking down historic materials by storing them in one easily accessible location.
2. Create awareness and usage in our institution and the community, now and in the future.

My Suggestions:

1. Determining a simple goal of usability and selective curation for the archive's purpose of use.
2. Defining success by usage. This is trackable through our current repository.

Barriers and Concerns:

Time

As mentioned above in economic impact, compiling, organizing, and digitizing historic documents and photographs takes a large amount of time. A selection process and overall timeline would have to be determined in order to achieve the goal of an archive. This is paid professional time of two librarians who also perform a number of other expert services that demonstrate higher economic and social value. Thankfully we already have a platform set up to house these materials, but the labor involved with this project is still immense.

Storage of Original Materials

While the project involves digitizing all the materials we chose to upload to a public platform, it does not determine where and how the 1,000s original documents will be stored.

Marketing

To ensure that the work done is noticed by administrators, other hospital staff, and the public- any digitization project must be marketed. Decisions will need to be made on marketing to our archives to the institution and the public, while also respecting our Research Repository. Usage equals success of an archive.

In summary

The value of an archive, while it is difficult to quantify value and impact, is widely accepted as a good endeavor.

We can determine some economic, social value, as well as differential impact for a variety of users. It is understood that this would be a large time-consuming project. The decision to go forward with this project will be determined by stakeholders weighing time, value, and impact.

References

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