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IVRLA[1] RESEARCH REPORT: POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION PROJECT

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1. CONTEXT

The IVRLA Postgraduate Education Project was born from the need to connect this valuable digital resource more closely with its target audience of students, researchers, and teachers. As the IVRLA approached the completion of its five-year life-cycle, it was seen as a particularly appropriate time to introduce the academic community, both inside and outside UCD, to a completed, fully-developed project, in itself an unusual circumstance within the field of digital humanities, which often defines itself by its open-ended nature (Kirschenbaum paragraph 2). The first objective of the Postgraduate Education Project is to emphasise the potential of the IVRLA's collections for primary research. In addition, the project aims to provide its audience with the critical instruments needed to participate in the pressing debate on the role of digital resources in academic teaching, research, and publishing.

2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

The project, which was conducted from July to December 2009, involved designing and developing IVRLA-related seminar materials for specific target groups. Three target groups within UCD were identified for the purposes of this project. These three target groups are representative of academic institutions elsewhere and the materials developed for these groups will therefore be applicable to users throughout Ireland and internationally.

The first target group comprises doctoral researchers from the UCD Graduate Research and Education Programme (GREP) in Gender, Culture and Identity, a structured doctoral programme run by the School of English, Drama and Film. These students take part

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[1] The UCD Irish Virtual Research Library and Archive (IVRLA) is a major digitisation project which was undertaken by University College Dublin from 2005 to 2009. Material selected from UCD's extensive resources of archival and rare material was digitised and catalogued before being made available from a single virtual location (http://ivrla.ucd.ie). This digitised material covers a wide range of humanities and social science disciplines and is arranged in curated collections which can be browsed, searched, bookmarked, or downloaded. In addition to the digitisation of existing UCD collections, the IVRLA conducted a series of demonstrator projects. The remit of these projects was to develop additional digital research resources and to present these in the form of an exhibition collection. Some of these projects incorporated existing IVRLA material but many generated new content which was inspired by the potential of digital resources. Consequently, the IVRLA and its demonstrator projects show how digital repositories can provide access to diverse archival research materials as well as challenging the ways in which we consider digital content and generate research in a digital environment. The IVRLA is a component of the UCD Humanities Institute of Ireland and is funded under the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLI) Cycle 3, administered by the Higher Education Authority.

in a dedicated module on Digital Humanities during their first year and are encouraged to include a digital component as a part of their dissertation. The second target group comprises graduate students enrolled in taught degrees in the UCD School of English, Drama and Film and the UCD School of History and Archives. The third group comprises staff members of these schools who are engaged in teaching undergraduate students. These two target groups include participants that display varying degrees of familiarity with both the IVRLA and digital resources in general.

The seminars aimed at each of these target groups comprise firstly a number of presentations introducing the IVRLA's extensive collections and illustrating their potential to furnish topics for dissertations and courses, especially in the areas of Irish history, literature, sociology, and linguistics. Participants take part in exercises to test the IVRLA's search interface and examine the different types of material held within the collections. They subsequently build their own collections of IVRLA objects via a dedicated project blog, where their findings are then debated and analysed with the instructor and the other participants. These practical exercises have the aim of raising critical awareness and evaluation capabilities, especially in the areas of the reliability, sustainability, and usability of digital resources.

It is undeniable that digital resources play an increasing role in today's learning environment. Yet, especially where students are concerned, there is a risk of their remaining uncritical "black boxes," accepted at face value without reflection on their development and creation. Contemporary students are often pictured as "digital natives" (Prensky 1), but this very familiarity with the surface of the digital world may in turn hide a limited awareness of the inner functioning of digital resources, and little ability to evaluate and choose the most reliable and appropriate digital sources for their research (Stoerger). On their part, academics may still display a certain amount of mistrust towards the reliability of digital resources (Flanders 14), with their preference being for services that offer online access to academic journals first published in material format (*Researchers' Use of Academic Libraries and Their Services* 39). This paper openly cites digital versions of articles when this was the format in which they were consulted, and includes references to several digital-only resources produced by established and emerging academics in the field of digital humanities.

Despite these and other issues, digital resources provide both students and educators with significant opportunities. Digital resources can be created and altered with relative ease; they can be reproduced an infinite number of times without damage or degradation to either the original or the copies; they can be easily shared and transmitted with user communities

across the globe; they can be studied and visualised by human users through a wide array of tools; they can be grouped to be analysed algorithmically by computers on a scale impossible to the unaided human brain (Cohen et al.; Spiro 14 May 2008). As an increasing amount of digital resources are being created and distributed by both commercial and academic providers, scholars at all levels of experience must learn to contend with the issue of an unprecedented abundance of primary and secondary materials (Rosenzweig paragraph 7). Masked by the ease with which resources can be discovered is the unending scholarly imperative of interrogating and questioning these same sources. Students especially still need to learn how to evaluate the reliability of a source document, whether they encounter it in the physical or in the digital world. Students and teachers also need to distinguish between different kinds of scholarly digital resources in order to locate those most suitable to their needs and expectations. Once this process of discovery and evaluation has been completed, researchers need to comply with the copyright conditions specified by the creators of those digital sources throughout the phases of publication and dissemination. When they in turn take on the role of creators of digital content, researchers need to make informed choices on the metadata and copyright conditions they attach to their resources. The IVRLA provides the UCD learning community with a cogent model for the application of these scholarly imperatives to a complex digital archive.

3. DETAILED OUTPUT

The first project seminar was delivered to doctoral researchers from the UCD Graduate Research and Education Programme (GREP) in Gender, Culture and Identity on 12 November 2009. This practical seminar, which included a tour of the IVRLA project areas, involved detailed discussion of the processes of digitisation, cataloguing, and presentation of digital objects. As this was a small group, formal seminar presentation materials were not developed; however the points discussed formed the basis of seminar materials developed for the other two target groups. Detailed seminar materials have been developed and are available on the IVRLA website for two specific groups: postgraduate students and academic staff. An additional important (and ongoing) resource created by this project is the project blog[2] which contains seminar outlines, sample exercises, and the responses of seminar participants to those exercises. The remainder of this section of the paper outlines the approach taken in the seminars and discusses issues of particular importance.

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[2] This can be found at <http://ivrlapep.wordpress.com>.

An explanation of the nature of the resources offered by the IVRLA is the first element of the seminars offered by the Postgraduate Education Project. When consulting its collections as part of the practical exercises, participants may expect transcriptions of original documents, or encoded editions of books. They learn instead that these resources, the purviews of *digital editions*, are not a part of the IVRLA, which is then presented as an example of an image-based *digital archive*. The IVRLA contains what John Unsworth calls "digital primary resources" (Slide 3), in the form of a "purposeful collection of [digital] surrogates" of physical materials (Price paragraph 22). These physical materials are drawn from a variety of UCD repositories and are heterogeneous in original format, spanning manuscripts, maps, printed books, photographs, artworks, and one database. They are mostly presented in the form of digital images that users can either view online or download to their computer. The IVRLA is also somewhat unusual within the landscape of scholarly digital resources in publishing relatively recent material that is less than one hundred years old in date, though this in turn presents further copyright and ethical challenges. In addition, the IVRLA contains sixteen thematic research collections of digital objects that support research on a specific theme (Palmer 350). These research collections follow a different model, as their content was largely chosen by researchers instead of librarians. As these collections were not yet completed at the time of developing the seminar materials, they do not feature either within the seminars or in this paper's discussion. Emphasis is placed on the fact that the IVRLA's collections reflect both the diversity of holdings within the UCD library and departmental system, and the precision and attention to standards typical of projects devised by librarians (Rosenzweig paragraph 41).

This understanding of at least a schematic typology of digital resources is the necessary prelude for participants to move onto the next step in the research process, that of evaluation. Students especially can benefit from using the IVRLA as a blueprint for measuring the academic reliability of a digital resource. The IVRLA fulfils satisfactorily the criteria proposed by Lisa Spiro (9 May 2008): the digital images it provides are of high quality and legibility; it supplies detailed metadata records for each digital object; it incorporates a clear copyright notice for its entire contents; it contains powerful and easy-to-use mechanisms to allow for resource discovery, referencing, and sharing; it includes extensive documentation on its procedures for the selection, creation, and preservation of its digital collections.

Of the requirements highlighted above, metadata is the one most likely to confuse the humanities researcher. Its common definition of "data about data" appears vague, while more

detailed references to technical standards such as MODS, EAD or Dublin Core potentially discourage those less familiar with digital humanities from grasping this essential concept of digital research. By studying the practical applications of metadata within the IVRLA, the Postgraduate Education Project seminars aim to elucidate the main issues surrounding metadata for students and teachers alike. Of significant usefulness is a contrast between the IVRLA's practices and those of Google Book Search.

The attention of the participants is first drawn to the different provenance and scale of the two collections, one produced by the target effort of specialist librarians, the other by a world-spanning commercial project that aims "to digitise all books" and already includes 10 million titles (Brin A31). When possible, participants to the seminars are encouraged to share their difficulties in using Google Book Search for research. Most of these issues stem from the lack of reliable metadata, which leads to frequent misclassifications of books, erroneous publication dates, misspelled titles or incorrect attributions, seriously hampering the usability of Google Book Search in a university context (Nunberg). In addition, Google Book Search does not include mechanisms for defining multi-volume works, first and subsequent editions, and other such pieces of data that are of especial relevance to scholars. By contrast the IVRLA provides correct *descriptive metadata*, identifying titles, authorship, and creation dates. It groups objects through *structural metadata*, linking scans of subsequent pages of the same book, and placing items of other nature, such as letters and photographs, within defined collections of related materials. It shows users the *administrative metadata* they need for manipulating a digital object, in the form of file formats and sizes, and of copyright declarations. The extensive project documentation moreover describes in detail the metadata standards being employed for the long-term preservation of its digital objects, which may be relevant to more advanced users. Analogies with the more familiar context of library catalogues are first employed to overcome the participants' diffidence towards the concept of metadata. Through a direct comparison between the contrasting models of content selection, organisation, and management from the IVRLA and Google Book Search, students and researchers reinforce the critical skills needed for evaluating digital resources.

The IVRLA is also an excellent case study in relation to copyright and its implications for doing research through digital means. Students spend a considerable part of their time online engaged in social networks and other websites that feature content republished from other sources, such as You Tube videos or photographs from sites such as Flickr (Jones et al.). It may prove difficult for them to understand the boundaries of their freedom in relation to other types of online content, such as those created by scholarly projects like the IVRLA. The

Postgraduate Education Project leads participants to examine closely the IVRLA's copyright notice, and to adopt it as a platform to illustrate concisely the main issues surrounding digital copyright. IVRLA users are not charged for accessing its collections, but this open access does not entail the right to freely republish or alter the materials thus acquired. Instead, only research and educational use of the materials is allowed, and explicit permission must be obtained before reproducing any of the content digitised by the IVRLA in other websites or publications. Copyright remains with the UCD repositories that provided original material for the IVRLA, but through the strong underlying metadata, these are easily identifiable for each digital object, allowing interested researchers to contact the relevant copyright holders. Correctness of citation is ensured through the use of the Handle system of unique, persistent, and secure identifiers for all IVRLA content ("Handle System Overview"). For the target group comprising lecturers, further exploration of copyright focuses on the IVRLA's provisions that specifically allow educational use of its materials. Participants discuss their experience with the relevant Irish and international legislation on educational use and "fair use," employing as an example the numerous resources offered by the American Library Association.

The Postgraduate Education Project also draws attention to another aspect of the IVRLA that is relevant to researchers: the planning and management of a large research project. Due to the greater familiarity with digital research implied in this topic, it is included only in the seminar dedicated to the first target group, the GREP doctoral students. In this seminar, the IVRLA staff members explain the complex structure and organisation of a successful digital research project. Through a site visit to the IVRLA, GREP students become acquainted with digitisation techniques, the principles of data administration and storage, the role of cataloguers, and the complex co-ordination that takes place between all staff members on such an intensive project. The expertise collected in the IVRLA thus acts as an incentive and an example for the current and future research of the GREP scholars.

Through these strategies, the Postgraduate Education Project pursues the dissemination of the significant resource the IVRLA has created within the UCD community and further afield. This is achieved by linking the otherwise abstract concepts of metadata, digitisation, open access publication, project management, and copyright legislation with their practical implementations within the IVRLA. The final aim of the project is to increase the engagement of students and staff with the ongoing debate on the future of academic publishing and research, which is more than ever dependent upon a critical awareness of the potential and challenges of digital resources.

4. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This project represents the first phase of education about the IVRLA. There are many ways in which it could be developed. The seminar materials already available could be delivered to different groups of researchers and teaching staff, enabling participant surveys (which could be published on the Postgraduate Education Project's blog) and tailoring of the seminars to specific disciplines. Course materials could be developed for full undergraduate modules on digital research, which could be tailored to the student's area of study (for example literature, history, or folklore) and include sample research assignments and suggestions for appropriate individual or group assignments. Detailed sections dealing with the IVRLA research projects could be added to the existing seminar materials; indeed entire seminars or courses could be developed to consider the area of digital research outputs. The existing seminar materials, and any subsequent developments to them, will allow users to gain a greater understanding of and a closer engagement with the IVRLA digital repository. This research project looks forward to seeing the output of such engagement over the coming years.

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