Open Repositories 2013

Community Centered Training Paper Proposal

Title: Training, the (not so) secret key to repository survivability

Abstract:

A favorite slogan of the repository world is “the coolest thing to do with your data will be thought of by someone else.” However, that “someone else” and their cool projects might never exist if others don’t understand what your repository contains or how to access and manipulate your content. Not only is training important to ensuring long-term repository sustainability, it is a vital component of any strategic vision for digital content development.

Training is vital for new and existing repository staff. As digital library programs grow in size and popularity, our ability to adapt to changing staffing needs are bottlenecked by our ability to provide effective and up to date training. This is true regardless of budget climate, whether need exists around growing existing staff into new roles, or around training newly hired staff who may have technology skills but no background in cultural heritage. If we want to maintain and improve quality as we expand, we would do well to think about our training strategy.

The demands placed on archivists, librarians, curators, and technologists can feel pretty stressful: "please master everything that's ever been relevant to your domain", "oh, and can you also keep track of all current developments that might be relevant," and "by the way we have this new project based on a totally new technology - you know computers so we're assigning it to you." Those who develop and sustain repositories are often required to demonstrate knowledge in many domains. We rely on these individuals throughout the community to support and sustain our infrastructures, applications, content, and users, and yet we often neglect their ongoing training. Ongoing training, and the access to a supportive community of people working to solve problems similar to their own that good training leads to, can make a world of difference.

Training is also vital if we want other people to make use of our collections. The hydra approach of "one body, many heads," or, roughly translated, "durable data, lightweight interfaces", has meant a blossoming of library-produced digital library interfaces. However, users of our collections are already asking us for API access, wanting to develop their own applications against our data. That's exactly what we want them to do! And yet, until we have effective training, we won't be able to expand in this way.

Training fortifies repository against the future by transmitting the human part of the knowledge maintenance project at the root of every digital repository. Hydra, understandably, is most widely thought of as a digital repository solution. However, within the community we tend to focus explicitly on Hydra as a community of people and institutions who collaborate on common solutions. We believe that this intentional focus on Hydra as a community has been a successful strategy. So successful, in fact, we realized recently that the limiting factor on the adoption of Hydra by new institutions, and the limiting factor on the rollout of new projects by existing hydra adopters, was our ability to hire and train people to build and run these repositories.

The Hydra Project has decided to again attempt to solve this problem collaboratively. Training projects thus far have included HydraCamp in several flavors and on several continents, workshop pre-conferences at code4lib, DLF, Open Repositories, and other public events, and internal development conferences. Members of the Hydra and Blacklight development communities have started engaging with the free "for women and their friends" RailsBridge Ruby on Rails curriculum, and recently offered a standing room only RailsBridge pre-conference at code4lib 2013. Code4lib 2013 also saw the first Blacklight workshop taught explicitly for people who had just finished a RailsBridge intro workshop. Our strategy is to leverage the existing successful model of RailsBridge training, and to build open curriculum around digital library topics on top of the RailsBridge content and in the RailsBridge style. This has already proven to be a successful strategy. This talk will share some of the benefits the hydra community, and individual institutions that have adopted hydra, have experienced from taking this approach. A learning community moving forward together will transform to meet the challenges of the future.

Drawing on their experiences in corporate, academic, and community-based training, the authors discuss the ways that training can address these issues, lower stress and uncertainty, and forge the long-term connections that sustain our communities and repositories.

Paper Outline:

Training and job quality

Training and content quality

Training and repository sustainability

Training and strategy

Training as risk management

Training as community building

Training as outreach

Presenter Bios:

Mark Bussey has over 25 years experience supporting technology in public, academic, and corporate settings. Mark has been responsible for building and leading highly effective support and development teams at Best Buy, Pearson Education, and other corporations. Mark's collage of training experience includes teaching Freshman English, teaching PC assembly and configuration to retail employees, team building in multiple contexts, leading HydraCamps, and teaching classical guitar. Mark is currently Managing Director of Data Curation Experts and a strong proponent of training as a key component of the Hydra Community growth plan. Mark holds a B.A. In Mathematics and English from Amherst College and a M.A. In Music Education from the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul. MN.

Bess Sadler has worked in digital library software development for over a decade. She is a co-founder of Project Blacklight (http://projectblacklight.org) and Project Hydra (http://projecthydra.org) and she is a frequent speaker at library and technology conferences. Bess is the Manager for Application Development in the Digital Library Systems and Services group at Stanford University Library. She holds an MLIS from the University of Alberta and a BA in Women's Studies and Information Systems from UNC-Chapel Hill.

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