"Knock, Knock:" Are Institutional Repositories a Home for Grey Literature?

Julia Gelfand
University of California, Irvine

Abstract:

Academic and special libraries are eagerly as well as reluctantly joining the bandwagon to participate in institutional repositories. The young and growing collection of the University of California Institutional Repository hosted by the California Digital Library (CDL) contains nearly 5300 documents (see http://repositories.cdlib.org/escholarship/). This paper will analyze the contents of that collection in terms of levels of greyness. Content comes from 9 different campuses composing the University of California's Research Units, Centers, and Departments and includes working papers, research content, journals and peer reviewed series. This author has developed a five-point scale that identifies and describes the range of content to conclude the extent that this example of an institutional repository is grey. Institutional Repositories have different collection and review policies and this will be noted. Capturing this content institutionally adds prestige and visibility to resources that without this institutional affiliation may not have peer review, be available digitally and thus remotely, and have perpetual access. A conclusion will be made whether this model of institutional repository supports a new publishing method for renewed life in grey literature.

This conference will focus on a number of different themes that dissect the intersections grey literature has with other forms and formats of information. I will begin the discussion about how institutional repositories have taken on a new role in higher education and scholarly publishing and what implications this has had and may have for grey literature by using the experience of the University of California eScholarship program. An international conference was just sponsored in November 2004 by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and the Scholarly Publishing Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC & SPARC Europe) on the next wave of institutional repositories (IR).[1] Meetings of library leaders around the world have taken place over the past few years to launch the emergence of institutional repositories and it is the opinion of this author that it is a way of giving legitimacy to grey literature, even if only scant reference to that has been articulated in the literature or in public forums until now. So knock, knock, someone is really home now.

Clifford Lynch writes about this in early 2003 by stating,

> "The development of institutional repositories emerged as a new strategy that allows universities to apply serious, systematic leverage to accelerate changes taking place in scholarship and scholarly communication, both moving beyond their historic relatively passive role of supporting established publishers in modernizing scholarly publishing through the licensing of digital content and also scaling up beyond ad-hoc alliances, partnerships and support arrangements with a few select faculty pioneers exploring more transformative new uses of the digital medium."[2]

This powerful and eloquent statement does all to confirm the definition of grey literature by inference and establish a new home for it. Today, still in its infancy, the institutional repository by all accounts is more than a nursery; it is a palace with vast
Real-estate as it expands its horizons and hospitality to even more forms of information products and reaffirms its essence and stature in the academic community. Grey literature, as tweaked and redefined at the GL 1997 Conference in Luxembourg is defined as "that which is produced on all levels of government, academics, business, and industry in print and electronic formats, but which is not controlled by commercial publishers."[3] For clarity and contrast, the Institutional Repository is best defined by Lynch as "a set of services that a university offers to the members of its community for the management and dissemination of digital materials created by the institutions and its community members."[4]

Grey literature differs from commercial publications in that it is not based solely or even principally on an economic model, but rather on a communication model which we also now describe as scholarly communications. This confirms the issues I and many others have written about concerning why grey literature is difficult in collection development and collection management realms. Until electronic publishing and the web was stable it was difficult to identify, obtain and bibliographically describe.[5] Still, we could benefit from more standards to support even better access.