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CONFRONTING AN ETHICAL MATTER IN COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES: A SHIFT TO LESSER ACCESS PROTOCOLS REGARDING DIGITIZED THESES AS A CASE STUDY

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Abstract:

Ethical issues abound within the archival science landscape, accessibility matters not the least among them. These issues are further compounded by the evolving nature of records themselves, morphing from analog to digital forms or their being born-digital records. In this paper, the author will recall and reflect upon her experience of confronting an ethical quandary very early in her tenure at her present employer, a publicly-funded university. The ethical quandary in question was one related to theses written and delivered as graduation requirements across graduate programs in the university; upon deposit, they were deemed part of the College Archives. The theses' accessibility was dramatically reduced after legacy and current theses were digitized (and later, born-digital) and due to a major pivot regarding their storage infrastructure and retrieval protocols. This extreme shift towards access reduction is one that the writer believes to be unethical in a publicly-funded institutional archives domain given the more access rather than less paradigm within the profession and which digitization typically promises.

Key words:

ETDs (electronic theses and dissertations); accessibility; institutional repositories; college archives; ethics

Izvleček:

Soočenje z etičnimi načeli v fakultetnih in univerzitetnih arhivih: študija primera premika k slabšemu dostopu do digitiziranih zaključnih del

V arhivski znanosti se pogosto porajajo etična vprašanja, tudi glede dostopnosti. To potencira tudi razvijajoča se narava samih dokumentov, ki se spreminjajo iz analognih v digitalne ali pa so digitalni že v izvorniku. V prispevku bo avtorica razmišljala o lastnih izkušnjah pri soočanju z etičnimi dvomi, ki so se pojavili že zgodaj v času njene zaposlitve pri sedanjem delodajalcu, javno financirani univerzi. Omenjeni etični dvomi so bili povezani z diplomskimi nalogami na univerzi, ki so postale del fakultetnega arhiva. Dostop do nalog je bil namreč drastično omejen, potem ko so bile digitalizirane (in kasneje, ko so že nastajale v digitalni obliki), a tudi zaradi spremembe načina hrambe ter protokolov dostopa. Tak ekstremen premik k zmanjšanju dostopnosti je, glede na paradigmo širokega dostopa, ki ga digitizacija obljublja, po mnenju avtorice v javno financiranem arhivu neetičen.

Ključne besede:

digitalna dela in dizertacije, dostop, institucionalna hramba, fakultetni arhivi, etika

1. Introduction

Preserving the past and making it accessible via documentary forms does not mean history should ever stand perfectly still. Interpreting history -- with all of its people, places, and events -- is an ever-moving and shape-changing effort. Navigating this terrain naturally invites researchers to wade into the archival records waters; however, access to such treasures can be a tricky endeavor. This ultimately begs the question: to whom do archivists grant access to archival records? This is the ethical quandary addressed in this paper. Ethical issues abound within the archival science landscape, accessibility matters not the least among them. These issues are further compounded by the evolving nature of records themselves, morphing from analog to digital forms or their being born-digital records. This writer will recall and reflect upon her experience of confronting an ethical quandary very early in her tenure at her present employer, a publicly-funded university. The ethical quandary in question was one related to theses written and deposited as graduation requirements across graduate programs in the College. Like many peer institutions, upon deposit, theses were and are deemed part of the College Archives. However, in 2014, the FIT Library sought a new, more advanced way to collect, preserve, and make accessible hundreds of legacy theses (and those yet to be written). As a result of the process, the theses' accessibility was not only dramatically reduced *after* the legacy works were digitized but also access became fee-imposed for external researchers. This extreme shift towards access *reduction* is one that the writer believes to be unethical in an archives domain given the *more access rather than less* paradigm within the profession and which the process of digitization typically promises.

2. Methods

The writer interviewed relevant professionals within the College Library (parent department of the College Archives) where she works to explore alternative approaches to the restrictive one aforementioned and to ascertain ways to mitigate the imposed firewall between external researchers and relevant content. She also offered a review of the relevant literature regarding ethical matters as they relate to making electronic and/or digital theses accessible.

2.1 Colleague Interviews

Such a monumental pivot would require many stakeholders' involvement. For the purposes of this particular case, this writer turned to three College Library colleagues to gauge their concern with matters of access ethics and ETDs. Her colleagues included:

- Associate Professor/Library Director, Greta Earnest
- Assistant Professor/Head of Acquisitions and Metadata Services, Leslie Preston
- Assistant Professor/Digital Initiatives Librarian, Joseph Anderson

Not long after arriving at FIT, Assoc. Prof. Earnest dreamed of adapting, adopting, or otherwise creating a vehicle to showcase FIT scholarly output. Her vision was sharpened with exposure to the online resource, “MIT World,”¹ in that it demonstrated what was possible in the realm of sharing widely the content generated by or under the auspices of the home institution. Ultimately, FIT Library colleagues developed an analogous product in 2016 entitled, “Archive on Demand.”²

Asst. Prof. Preston reports directly to Director Earnest and manages the Library’s materials collection budget; as such, she would help to bring fantastical aspirations into realistic forms.

Early in his tenure at FIT, Asst. Prof. Anderson, who reports directly to Asst. Prof. Preston, began investigating readily-employable institutional repository (IR) options. An IR is a “digital repository used to manage and disseminate content” (SAA, 2022a) on behalf of an entity and its constituent community.³

“Originally envisioned as a means of disseminating digital scholarly work, IRs have grown to include other digital repository functions and their contents to include born-digital records and digitized content from archives and libraries. IRs are especially in use in higher education.” (SAA, 2022b)

IR products such as DSpace (i.e. DuraSpace) were already being used by many of the State University of New York’s 64 campuses, of which FIT is a campus. There were many starts and stops along the way; however, eventually FIT opted to partner with ProQuest⁴ as the FIT Library already had a strong relationship with this vendor for other database products and functions.

However, this writer was more than a little confused and curious about the thought processes behind the pivot from full access to severely limited or even fee-based access to FIT theses. As such, she faced a clear ethical challenge as the College Archivist.

In order to untangle this curiosity, she posed the following questions to each colleague above-mentioned:

1. Was the intersection of ethics and access ever a consideration regarding electronic theses storage and retrieval options including but not limited to ProQuest?
2. How would you define the concept of “ethical access” as it relates to archival material like theses?
3. Did this concept play into your decision to pivot away from the ProQuest solution to an IR?

Earnest replied as follows:

I would say there was an intersection of two ethics, that of our library and that of the student. As a graduate degree granting institution, its library has an imperative to both capture and give access to our graduate students’ work. Although for Bachelors programs it is not necessarily customary to retain student work, for graduate programs it is expected. I see it as our

¹ For more on MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) World content, visit https://videlectures.net/mit_world/.

² For more on Archive on Demand content, visit <https://archiveondemand.fitnyc.edu/about>.

³ All definitions, unless noted otherwise, are from either the Merriam-Webster Dictionary or the SAA Dictionary of Archival Terminology.

⁴ ProQuest is a fee-based product that offers content to outside researchers for additional costs.

ethical imperative and responsibility to capture, preserve, and make available the work. Graduate students may well want to continue on for their PhD, or publish/present, or both. Our students should have the final say on the outcome access to their work. Our job is to explain the advantages and disadvantages of making their work available, give them the tools to understand copyright decisions, and make the final decision. Ideally if access is not made available immediately, after a period of time students will grant access to their work. Libraries and archives are cognizant of the dichotomy between respecting privacy and providing access to information. This dichotomy is present in much of our work. A simple instance can be found in the heart of our traditional transactional enterprise - we provide books to patrons but we do not provide the information regarding which books our patrons check out. However there are so many ethical questions, would we provide access to a book published posthumously if the author expressed that their book should not be published...In the instance of theses, at least at FIT, we are still a young institution as far as our graduate programs are concerned. And so, fortunately, most of our thesis authors are still alive. Although the question of alive or deceased may not always be a presiding factor with which to make a decision, I think if a thesis author is alive we should do our best to find them and give them the choice of access. This, to me, is ethical. However part of the answer is procedural, in the future our institution to commit to informing students of their choices, at the time their finishing project is completed. The same concepts at play in ProQuest (as described in item #1) pertain to the Institutional Repository. The advantage of the Institutional Repository, in addition to ease of access, is that we are able to provide a more demographic and uniform mechanism to all our graduate students (and undergraduate students for that matter). Currently, if students use mixed digital media in their work, we cannot capture it appropriately. The Institutional Repository gives us the opportunity to offer students who do capstone projects (usually video as well as presentation software slides), Illustration (image and written works), Fashion (video and slide), etc. the opportunity to have their work equally in the IR. Currently, with Proquest, there is a bias where written theses are captured, only representing a few, not all of FIT's graduate programs (Earnest, 2022).

Preston replied as follows:

As Librarians, I think we all grapple with the ethics of access and the intersection of authors as copyright owners of the material. We also have an ethical mission to promote access and share information as widely as possible with our community. Information wants to be free! I believe ethical access is open access as long as there has been some communication to the authors regarding this policy. In some cases this can be "due diligence" on the part of the library to contact authors (whether successful or not), request for "opt out" or embargo period, or explicit in writing i.e. institutional repository agreement. Graduate Studies continues to use the Proquest management tool and the theses continue to be collected and managed there. Current students check off the "university agreement" when they submit their theses through Proquest admin portal which states a copy will be deposited into the open access IR. I think in the case with the theses we digitized prior to 2015, we addressed the ethics by "due diligence" - that is, we reached out using email addresses supplied by the department as well

as through our own sleuthing. The email explained that we would also deposit their work into an open access Institutional Repository by a certain date. Only a few students requested an opt-out. I think most students want their work to be shared as freely and widely as possible (Preston, 2022a).

Preston's perspective is especially relevant and interesting given her role of overseeing the Library's budget. Every year over the last six (6) years, the Library's budget has decreased on average 2% while prices for materials have increased between 3-6%. Preston reflected on an FIT Library Collections-Inflation vs. Actual Budget analysis as a compelling contrast. The FIT Library's 2022 material budgets should be over 1,090,000 USD versus its existing 2022 baseline budget of 363,000 USD (based on the periodicals price index and standard library materials inflation rates at 6% compounded increase each year) (Preston, 2022b).

Preston noted, "How are libraries such as FIT's supposed to fulfill their missions, or simply survive, if budgets are at best flat and worse, in net decline?" (Preston, 2022c). It certainly places budget decision-makers in a conflicted position as they try to balance increasing access within an ethical framework, which is the same frame that involves providing more resources to more people and with smaller budgets. While that topic is not pointedly within the scope of this article, it is a topic worthy of further investigation and discussion.

Anderson replied as follows:

Generally as a librarian and especially a digital librarian, I'm always on the lookout for ways to increase access to materials to the widest possible audience while respecting the wishes of the creators of the materials. I think in the case of our theses, it was a very natural thing to do because there is already a long [tradition] in academia and scholarship for the thesis or dissertation to act as both a test for the matriculating student as well as a contribution to their field of study. So making these materials more widely available aligns with the goals of the thesis itself because it can contribute to their field more widely if more people have access. As for the ethics [matter] I generally think making materials less exclusive when possible is always more ethical than making things more exclusive (Anderson, 2022).

2.2 Literature Review

First to develop and then to support this writer's position, she investigated the scholarly, scientific literature for examples of similar challenges and journeys as those of her own institution's and perhaps an access model she could support and eventually employ.

Zach and Peri point out that IRs grew rapidly within North American colleges and universities as early as the 1990s; however, they were primarily focused on published materials traditionally managed by library methods, rather than focused on unpublished content or archival records controlled by university and college archives (2010, p. 106).

Over time, the momentum has certainly increased toward easing accessibility to archives generally and theses specifically. Beaven declared that "University libraries and archives must preserve their collective research" (2004, p. 47). In 2004, he predicted that "many researchers, universities, and libraries [will] view ETDs [electronic theses and dissertations] not only as a wave of the future but a tsunami" (2004, p. 46). He continues to state that "ETDs are needed for the advancement of knowledge" (2004, p. 46) and

that using electronic versions of theses and dissertations should increase accessibility. Beaven quotes Moxley, who said, "Ultimately...a university's digital library of theses and dissertations reflects that institution's heart and soul" (2004, p. 46). Moxley continues to say that "Anything less than widespread adoption of mandatory ETD requirements is academic myopia" (2004, p. 46).⁵ But why establish such a mandate without the intent to share the content widely, certainly beyond one's own institutional community?

Theses fit organically within an educational institution's archival records construct. Yakel et al arranged university IR archival content types into four categories: faculty papers, student papers, special collections, and university records. The faculty papers included research data, curricular materials, and other types of personal papers. Special collections material consisted largely of groups of images. Student papers included student work, such as e-portfolios and class assignments; but 90% of the documents in this category are theses and dissertations (2008, p. 337).

There is surely power in numbers. In 2013, Craft discussed the North Carolina Digital Online Collection of Knowledge and Scholarship project, which was established as a collaboration among the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Appalachian State University, East Carolina University, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, and the University of North Carolina Wilmington. The group's goal was "to create an open access repository to showcase the scholarly output of the participating institutions" (2013, p. 357). As of 2013, the database had grown to include more than 8,000 items including works by faculty members and students (2013, p. 357).

A concurrent and aligned ethical matter, which is international in scope, involves the balancing of protecting authors' rights while they themselves realize their responsibilities to the scholarly community. Dawrs observed in 2012 that "Theses and dissertations are clearly of a different class of writing than material produced expressly for publication. Because of this distinction, institutions are taking varied approaches" (2012, p. 351) when it comes to accessibility. "As campuses worldwide continue to adopt their own open-access policies for theses and dissertations, the online numbers can only continue to grow" (2012, p. 352).

Dawrs continued by reminding readers that at the time of his article's publication in 2012... it had been "more than a decade since the Open Society Institute, sponsored a multinational, multidisciplinary gathering in Hungary" (2012, p. 348) to "accelerate progress in the international effort to make research articles in all academic fields freely available on the internet" (2012, p. 348). He continues to clarify that although this event was by no means the first attempt at facilitating free, online access to scholarly information, "the gathering resulted in a pivotal position statement entitled the *Budapest Open Access Initiative* (2012, p. 348)." This statement became a "foundational document for the open-access movement," (2012, p. 348) which is a "worldwide endeavor rooted in the idea that scholarly writing, produced by authors who have no expectation of payment for their work, should not become a commodity" (2012, p. 348).##FNOTE

In 2014, Noonan and Chute were aligning data curation and the concept of ETDs' value and accessibility. In a survey, the authors asked respondents to answer the following question (among others): "Are administrators (i.e. Directors, Deans, Vice Presidents, Provosts, Chancellor, President) at your institution concerned about data curation?" (2014, p. 223). The authors learned that high-level, decision- and policy-making parties were indeed "truly concerned and especially about born-digital...material produced by faculty, staff, and students such as theses and dissertations" (2014, p. 223). The authors also learned that there was a growing movement "to build an OASIS [Open

⁵ *Myopia is a lack of imagination, foresight, or intellectual insight.*

Archival Information System] repository for research data sets (2014, p. 223).” The signal from these findings is that if high-level administrators recognize the scholarly value of thesis and dissertation material, then they might be more likely to fund the operations to preserve them and sustain their accessibility.

Bergin and Roh highlight a most on-point model to that of the FIT Library and College Archives. The University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries established their IR...in 2006, and, ultimately, like FIT, they began their operations by systematically populating its IR with ETDs. At the time of the article’s writing (2016), they had over 4,500 dissertations and theses uploaded; the authors declare that these works are “some of the most highly used content” (2016, p. 127) in its repository. They also had just launched a project to scan 24,000 print, legacy theses and dissertations for the IR. Most pertinent to this writer’s argument, they also ultimately made the decision to stop mandating graduate students to submit papers to ProQuest (2016, p. 127).

Bergin and Roh offered a timeline (that reaches back to 1997) that demonstrated the development of their ETD program and associated decision-making process:

1997: Began accepting electronic submissions of doctoral dissertations through the ProQuest online ETD submission system.

2006: Began a Digital Commons repository, called ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst, to showcase the research and scholarly output of students, faculty, and researchers.

2007: Started collecting electronic submissions of master’s theses for the first time; students submit their theses via an online deposit to ScholarWorks.

2009: UMass Amherst Graduate Council institutes a new policy allowing students to choose open access, campus access, and embargoes for their theses and dissertations.

2010: Library decides to go completely e-only for dissertations and theses; print copies are no longer accepted.

2013: Began retrospective digitization project for print theses and dissertations.

2014: Revised access options for current ETD submissions. We eliminated the permanent campus-only restriction option and replaced it with a temporary campus-only restriction for one year or five years, after which it becomes open access.

2014: Stopped submitting dissertations to ProQuest through their online ETD submission system. All dissertation submissions are now deposited directly into the IR and submission to ProQuest is optional (2014, p. 127-128).

Reaching even further back in time and to add valuable, supporting context, Daniel Coit Gilman declared in 1898 “that universities...should use all available means of communication to diffuse the knowledge they possess” (Gilman, 2016, p. 72). The United States Congress formally recognized this imperative for the dissemination of knowledge beyond the vehicles of scholarly books and journals through the passage of the Smith-

Lever Act of 1914. While the act called for the “development of practical applications of research knowledge and imparting information...through demonstrations, publications, and otherwise” (2016, p. 72), Gilman projected that, were it drafted and proposed today, the Smith-Lever Act would also recommend the creation of online IRs as one means of sharing knowledge created by these institutions. By sharing knowledge in ways that make it available to the public in perpetuity, and yet respects the rights of its creators, universities will ensure that their communities of scholars are encouraged to contribute to the “common stock of knowledge for years to come” (2016, p. 82).

Kim and Irwin also present a quite relevant and compelling case based at the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV). UNLV did not have an online mechanism to provide universal access to born-digital files such as electronic theses. To remedy this situation, the staff decided to prioritize the selection of community-created content for initial IR inclusion. The UNLV IR preserves and provides access to research output created by both faculty and students. In addition to electronic theses, the IR includes “journal articles, conferences papers and presentations, monographs, posters, electronic...dissertations, data sets, technical reports, and supplementary materials such as audio, video, and images” (2021, p. 365).

All of these benefits considered, McMillan reminds readers that IRs are not a panacea, vis-a-vis ethical access practices. The convergence of ETDs and IRs has in fact raised some concerns over time and across applications. Among the concerns is the appropriateness of requiring that works in the repository be in fact publicly accessible. However, in the end, this should not be a dilemma for most universities in that they include dissemination of knowledge as an integral part of their mission statements. “IRs are one vehicle that enables institutions to fulfill their knowledge dissemination goals by providing public access to the institutions’ ‘knowledge products’ such as ETDs” (2016, p. 107).

In “The Value Proposition in Institutional Repositories,” Blythe and Chachra describe the role of libraries (or more accurately, librarians) as IR managers that “capture, retain, and leverage the value in the knowledge products of institutions and their members” (2005, p. 77). In fact, all higher education institutions have a certain responsibility to their communities (both internal and external) to instate and promote clear accessibility policies and to balance intellectual property rights of “knowledge-product authors with the mission of the institution and the goals of its IR” (McMillan, 2016, pp. 107-108). Readers will find more on mission statements as they apply to ethical accessibility policy and practice in the *DISCUSSION* part of this paper below, beginning on page 11.

By now, it is clear that libraries were (and may very well still be) at the forefront of ETD initiatives even before they (libraries) took the lead in the open access movement. In both cases, libraries did what they do best: they advocated for a universal public good. “While libraries have traditionally focused on meeting readers’ needs, 21st-century libraries are increasingly involved in the entire life cycle of information, including publishing where they are not usually constrained by profit or even cost-recovery motives” (McMillan, 2016, pp. 109).

Again, while IRs do not satisfy all ethically-driven accessibility concerns, nor are they the answer to all access challenges, they certainly do have an impressive reach of purpose beyond their primary mission and the needs of a college archives.

On the theme of universality vis-a-vis IR application(s), Mobley reported that in the spring of 2010, the Lowcountry Digital Library project initiated a migration from proprietary CONTENTdm⁶ to an open source, digital library platform. It was at this time that the College of Charleston library concurrently began considering options for an IR system for the preservation and presentation of contemporary college output such as [electronic] theses and other works not only those created by students but also the work of faculty. In this case, an IR held the promise of providing “a long-term home not only for electronic theses but also [for] the output of the college as a whole” (2016, p. 292).

3. Results

After measuring her environment and its current thesis access protocols against other, like-purpose institutions that hold similar archival records, this writer discovered tenable and workable alternative approaches to that of her institution, at least one of which she can support within her own environment to restore -- and even surpass -- previous levels of access to the theses. Therefore, in order to balance all participants' rights and responsibilities, adopting the IR model is the most meaningful and plausible solution for instilling an ethical approach to accessing FIT theses.

4. Discussion

For decades, FIT master students' theses were printed, analog products, shelved in the FIT Library's unit of SPARC (the unit this writer administers), and made freely accessible to the FIT community and the outside public for consultation by appointment. After major efforts, over many years, and across many participants, hundreds of legacy theses were digitized and the files were deposited into ProQuest -- a proprietary, fee-based subscription database; all future theses would follow this same path. According to the licensing agreement between the College and the database vendor, only current FIT-affiliated community members were permitted to have access to the content with proper FIT-assigned identification and passwords.

In order to provide broader, closer-to-legacy access protocols, several work-arounds were considered and indeed executed in order to deliver the content within former, standard operating procedures. However, work-arounds presented their own ethical challenges especially as they related to respecting the licensing agreement between the College and ProQuest.

The question is this: Does such a shift in archival records maintenance and practice rise to an unethical status? Definitions of key terms, the aforementioned exploration of relevant scientific literature, and assessing practices against established professional codes should help us answer this question.

4.1 Definitions

Before this writer takes a deep dive into discussing ethics as they relate to archives accessibility, she would like to ground the discussion with some definitions.

A *moral* is concerned with the principles of right and wrong behavior. It is based on or derived from the code of behavior that is considered right or acceptable in a particular setting, environment, and/or society. Morals can serve as internal barometers for human beings as they examine and gauge the nature of good and bad character and conduct.

⁶ To learn more about CONTENTdm, please visit <https://www.oclc.org/en/contentdm.html>.

Morals are also held or manifested as high principles for proper conduct (Merriam-Webster, 2022a).

The collective demonstration of moral behavior is the condition of *morality*; it is a construct of beliefs about what is right behavior and what is wrong behavior (Merriam-Webster, 2022b).

While some moral principles seem to transcend time and culture, such as fairness, generally speaking, morality is not fixed. Morality describes the particular values of a specific group at a specific point in time (University of Texas, 2022a).

With morals defined and contextualized, let us now review the meaning of *ethics*. Ethics pertains “to a set of moral principles,” a “theory or system of moral values,” and is in association with “principles of conduct governing an individual or a group [such as archivists]” (Merriam-Webster, 2022c). As a distinct discipline, [ethics] deals with “what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation” (Merriam-Webster, 2022d).

Some authorities make a clearer “distinction between morals and ethics.” However, many people “use the terms interchangeably when talking about matters of personal beliefs, actions, or principles” (University of Texas, 2022b).

One might declare that ethics are morals made actionable.

4.2 Institutional Mission Statements and Ethics

Simply defined, a *mission statement* is a short but powerful statement of why an organization exists, what its overall goals are, and a declaration of what its clientele or community can expect from it.

Mission statements can serve as an incredibly important navigational tool when considering the existing and future operations of an organization, institution, company, or any formal group. By identifying one’s purpose, one can more clearly define what success means and as such, one can more likely achieve it.

The mission of FIT, as an institution of higher education, is to prepare students for “professional excellence in design and business through rigorous and adaptable academic programs, experiential learning, and innovative partnerships” (FIT, 2022a). As a publically-funded institution, “FIT fosters creativity, career focus, and a global perspective and educates its students to embrace inclusiveness, sustainability, and a sense of community” (FIT, 2022b).

Inclusiveness (via broad access) and sustainability (via preservation) are also at the heart of SPARC’s mission; it is

to foster original research across and beyond the FIT community by acquiring, preserving, and providing universal access to primary research materials including College archival records. Unit materials include physical, digital, and 3-dimensional examples. All acquisitions support one or more curricula offered at FIT; our user community is as diverse as the content on our shelves and all are welcome (FIT, SPARC, 2022).

4.3. Strategic Planning as Ethical Frame

Far more detailed than mission statements are *strategic plans*. Guidance for creating and maintaining an ethical culture and series of practices -- as well as one with a sense of purpose -- can also be firmly established in an institution's strategic planning effort.

The language of FIT's *Strategic Plan* hints at an ideal framework across College unit business activity and one in which access to College Archives can be inferred. In all, there are three main goals of the plan within which there are thirteen distinct strategies.

In Goal Two of the plan, FIT aspires to "be an innovation center for creative industries worldwide" (FIT, 2022c). One of the strategies within Goal Two, Strategy B, dictates that FIT should "create an organizational and information infrastructure that promotes innovation and experimentation" (FIT, 2022d). Each strategy has several action points that should lead to implementation success. One such point in Strategy B is to "develop an FIT...scholar database, modeled on the SUNY database, to serve as a resource for researchers and artists within and outside of FIT and to raise external awareness of FIT faculty activity and achievements" (FIT, 2022e). While the SUNY database is proprietary (DSpace), it is completely open to universal public access and use (FIT, 2022f).

Also within Goal Two is Strategy C; this strategy challenges FIT to "increase the visibility and recognition of the research and creative activities of fit faculty, students, and partners" (FIT, 2022g). The relevant action point within this strategy, and in support of the writer's argument, calls for FIT to "launch the FIT Global Creative Content Portal, in collaboration with [FIT's] Gladys Marcus Library, as an access point for internal and external communities interested in research and creative work at FIT" (FIT, 2022h). Today, FIT and its Library are on the verge of partially realizing this aspiration with its own IR.

Therefore, on both the macro and micro levels of consideration, FIT as an institution dictates via various mechanisms that the Library generally and SPARC specifically must reinstate unfettered access to its College Archives, including the master students' theses, in order to comply with the aforementioned elements of the College's strategic plan and to fulfill its stated mission.

4.3 Codes of Ethics to Guide the Way Further

Reaching beyond and still in concert with the construct of the College's mission and strategic plan, archivists are guided by the profession's code of ethics on both the national and international levels.

On the national level, this writer referred to the *Code of Ethics* of the Society of American Archivists, especially **emphasizing in bold text** those points related to archives accessibility matters.

1. *Professional Relationships: In their professional relationships with donors, records creators, users, communities, and colleagues, **archivists should be** as respectful, honest, **transparent, empathetic, and equitable** as possible.*
2. *Judgment: Archivists should be **transparent** about their role in the selection, retention, and creation of the historical record by carefully documenting all **collections-related policy decisions**, including*

preservation treatments, descriptive work, processing activities, and access guidelines.

3. *Authenticity: **Archivists should not willfully alter, manipulate, or destroy data or records to conceal facts or distort evidence.***
4. *Security and Protection: **Archivists protect all materials for which they are responsible [to ensure continued, long-term access].***
5. *Access and Use: Archivists actively promote **open and equitable access** to records in their care as much as possible. **They strive to minimize restrictions and maximize ease of access. They facilitate the continuing accessibility of archival materials in all formats. Archivists formulate and disseminate access policies that encourage ethical and responsible use.** They work with creators, donors, organizations, and communities to ensure that **any restrictions applied are appropriate, well-documented, and equitably enforced.** When repositories require **restrictions** to protect confidential and proprietary information, such restrictions should be **applied consistently. Archivists should seek to balance the principles of stewardship, access, and respect.***
6. *Privacy: **Archivists should maintain transparency when placing [access] restrictions, documenting why and for how long they will be enacted.***
7. *Trust: Archivists should demonstrate professional integrity and avoid potential conflicts of interest. They **seek to balance the rights, interests, needs, and suggestions of all people and groups affected by archival decisions** (SAA, 2022c).*

Now, to pull the lens back further, this writer turned to the International Council on Archives' *Code of Ethics*, again, **emphasizing in bold text** those points about or adjacent to matters of accessibility.

*Archivists should **protect the integrity** of archival material and thus guarantee that it continues to be reliable evidence of the past.*

*Archivists should **appraise, select and maintain** archival material in its historical, legal and administrative context, thus retaining the principle of provenance, **preserving** and making evident the original relationships of documents.*

Archivists should ensure the continuing accessibility and intelligibility of archival materials.

Archivists should promote the widest possible access to archival material and provide an impartial service to all users.

Archivists should respect both access and privacy, and act within the boundaries of relevant legislation.

Archivists should use the special trust given to them in the general interest and avoid using their position to unfairly benefit themselves or others.

***Archivists should promote the preservation and use of the world's documentary heritage, through working co-operatively with the members of their own and other professions** (ICA, 1996).*

Like all professions and professionals, archival science and archivists have plenty of struggles, be they ethical in nature or otherwise. A solid means of mitigating ethical challenges is a well-established foundation of practice in which integrity and authenticity reach beyond the records themselves but also define in part the practitioners and practices that construct the profession at large.

5. Conclusion

This writer measured her environment and its current access protocols against other like-purpose repositories that hold similar archival records. As such, she discovered tenable alternative approaches, at least one of which she can conceptually support within her own work environment to restore previous greater, more equitable, and more ethical levels of access to the digitized theses.

The ultimate solution to her ethical quandary was that of her colleagues' establishing an institutional repository for the College thereby nullifying the need to engage the fee-based, proprietary database for theses' retrieval.

The road to accessibility to college and university archives can be extremely difficult at times, certainly circuitous sometimes, and can even result in practices deemed unethical, or nearly so, sometimes as measured by established institutional, national, and international standards and paradigms.

It is incumbent upon college and university archivists, and their archives-adjacent colleagues, to create a culture of product, procedure, and practice that engages as many constituent beneficiaries as possible.

Indeed, it is this writer's position that the measure of an archivist's success is gauged by the extent of that which s/he makes discoverable, possibly understandable, and/or even perhaps knowable. However, an archivist's mission does not end there. S/he is indeed ethically charged to go another step further: to share discoveries — and that which is understood and known — as resources allow and as widely as possible. This is the ultimate goal of archival science: to establish and secure our collective memory and that of its evolutionary path ultimately to a shared collective wisdom.

The archives community at large, both archivists and patrons, would be served well if archivists took direction from our physician colleagues and the field of bioethics, that directive being: *primum non nocere* or "first, do no harm." However, equally or more importantly vis-a-vis ethical access to archival records, would be, *novissime, non nocebit* or "last, do no harm."

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POVZETEK

SOOČENJE Z ETIČNIMI NAČELI V FAKULTETNIH IN UNIVERZITETNIH ARHIVIH: ŠTUDIJA PRIMERA PREMIKA K SLABŠEMU DOSTOPU DO DIGITALIZIRANIH ZAKLJUČNIH DEL

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V arhivski znanosti se pogosto porajajo etična vprašanja, tudi glede dostopnosti. To potencira tudi razvijajoča se narava samih dokumentov, ki se spreminjajo iz analognih v digitalne ali pa so digitalni že v izvorniku. V prispevku bo avtorica razmišljala o lastnih izkušnjah pri soočanju z etičnimi dvomi, ki so se pojavili že zgodaj v času njene zaposlitve pri sedanjem delodajalcu, javno financirani univerzi. Omenjeni etični dvomi so bili povezani z diplomskimi nalogami na univerzi, ki so postale del fakultetnega arhiva. Dostop do nalog je bil namreč drastično omejen, potem ko so bile digitalizirane (in kasneje, ko so že nastajale v digitalni obliki), a tudi zaradi spremembe načina hrambe ter protokolov dostopa. Tak ekstremen premik k zmanjšanju dostopnosti je, glede na paradigmo širokega dostopa, ki ga digitalizacija obljublja, po mnenju avtorice v javno financiranem arhivu neetičen.

Avtorica je opravila intervjuje s kolegi v fakultetni knjižnici, katere del je tudi fakultetni arhiv, da bi na tej podlagi raziskala alternativne pristope oziroma določila načine, kako zunanjim raziskovalcem olajšati dostop do vsebin. V prispevku podaja tudi pregled relevantne literature glede etičnih načel, ki se nanašajo na upravljanje z elektronskimi in izvorno digitalnimi zaključnimi deli študentov.

Raziskala je okolje, v katerem je zaposlena, in trenutno veljavne protokole glede dostopa. Le-te je primerjala s protokoli v drugih ustanovah, ki hranijo podobno arhivsko gradivo. Odkrila je nekaj uporabnih alternativnih pristopov, od teh vsaj enega, ki bi ustrezal njenemu okolju in ponovno vzpostavil (ali celo presegel) nekdanji nivo dostopa do zaključnih del.