

Digital Curation, 2nd edition. By Gillian Oliver and Ross Harvey. London: Facet Publishing, 2016. 256 pp. Index. Softcover. \$85.00.

Digital curation was defined in 2008 as “the management and preservation of digital material to ensure accessibility over the long-term.”¹ In terms of digital time, that was eons ago, but typing “curation” still invokes a wavy red underline, signaling that it is not recognized by word processing software as a real word. Nonetheless, digital curation is an important field that archivists are already involved in, and this volume provides an excellent guide to the field and best practices within it.

This volume is the second edition; the first edition, written by Ross Harvey and titled *Digital Curation: A How-to-do-it Manual*, was published in 2010. Currently an adjunct professor of Information Management in the School of Business IT and Logistics at RMIT University in Melbourne, Harvey has held academic positions at universities in Australia, Singapore, New Zealand, and the United States, and has published widely in various areas. His research and teaching interests have largely focused on the stewardship of digital materials in libraries and archives. Gillian Oliver took the lead on updating the content for the second edition. Oliver, whose professional background encompasses information management in the United Kingdom, Germany, and New Zealand, recently joined the Faculty of Information Technology at Monash University in Melbourne as an associate professor and director of the Centre of Organisational and Social Informatics. Together, Oliver and Harvey bring broad international expertise to this topic.

It is not surprising that a second edition should appear in just six years. Considering the rapid pace of technological change and the extensive activity in this area by researchers and practitioners, a second edition was necessary to document emerging best practices. The second edition retains the original’s organization into three parts: part 1, “Digital Curation: Scope and Incentives”; part 2, “Key Requirements for Digital Curation”; and part 3, “The Digital Curation Lifecycle in Action.” This approach is grounded in the DCC (Digital Curation Centre at the University of Edinburgh) Curation Lifecycle Model, although the authors discuss other conceptual models and the relationships between them (pp. 31–43).

Archivists will find much that is familiar in this book; particularly in part 3, which includes chapter titles such as “Deciding What Data to Keep,” “Preserving Data,” “Storing Data,” and “Using and Reusing Data.” However, some archivists may be put off by the centrality of “data” (defined as “any information in binary digital form”) that lies at the heart of the Curation Lifecycle Model (pp. 32, 45). For that reason, readers who seek more information about digital curation should start with part 1 to understand the breadth of the field and the challenges facing all information professions as they deal not just with traditional records, but also with “big data” and the need to serve what the authors call “cyberscholarship” (pp. 19–24), which refers to “the ways in which networked computing, data, and scholars work together” (p. 19). Of particular interest is chapter 4 (“Defining Data”), which considers “what exactly is it that we want to curate?” (p. 45). The authors’ discussion of the meaning of data clearly establishes the place of archivy within digital curation, even though archival institutions will continue

to preserve analog materials, and not all institutions will have to deal with vast amounts of research data.

The four chapters in part 2 are devoted to the four full life-cycle actions of the DCC model: “Curate and Preserve,” “Description and Representation Information,” “Preservation Planning,” and “Community Watch and Participation.” This part further establishes the importance of archives within digital curation, while at the same time broadening our understanding of our role. For example, archivists have long been concerned about digital preservation (and have contributed significantly to solving the problem), but digital curation is much broader (pp. 55–56). Furthermore, we may not think of ourselves as data creators, but when one considers the many digitization projects underway, it is clear that archivists are creators of data. Given the extensive descriptive information that archivists provide, we are also creators of metadata; however, the authors distinguish between descriptive information (pp. 67–70) and representation information, (the information needed to make a bitstream retrievable in a meaningful digital object), which includes more than just file format identification information (pp. 68, 76–78). Of paramount importance is the need to share knowledge. Archivists are often defensive of their professional territory, but no doubt should exist about the importance of collaboration with allied disciplines and professions if we are to avoid a “digital dark age.”

Part 3 discusses the DCC life cycle’s sequential and occasional actions required to curate data as they move through the life cycle. Oliver and Harvey set out the reasons for these actions and the specific activities associated with each. As noted, archivists will be generally conversant with much of the content, since the chapters broadly correspond to our professional mission to acquire, preserve, and make available records of enduring value. At the same time, archivists will benefit from different perspectives on their role in this rapidly changing field.

This volume has two great strengths: its comprehensiveness and its ease of use. In addressing the range of activities associated with the life cycle of data curation, the authors cover an enormous amount of information in a clear manner. Where appropriate, information is presented in tables; for example, the analytic summary of the main digital preservation methods (pp. 162–65) and the overview of descriptive information and its functions (p. 70). The content is also well documented, with a list of references to background studies, websites, and articles provided at the end of each chapter. I was further struck by the user-friendliness of this volume, whether one is a dedicated reader, a skimmer, or in search of specific information. For those planning to start at the beginning, the introduction to each of the three parts includes an overview of each chapter, and the first page of each chapter includes a checklist of topics, making it easy to decide what can be skimmed and what must be studied. For the reader with a particular question, there is also a detailed index. In this field, one can quickly drown in a vat of alphabet soup (e.g., OAI, METS, MODS, DIP, WAV, etc.), so the extensive list of abbreviations is also very helpful. The volume’s only drawback is the speed with which new developments in this burgeoning field may overtake the information. Thus, practitioners cannot rely on this book alone, but must also keep up to date through active engagement with professional literature and conferences.

For the archival generalists in small shops facing their first accession of born-digital records, this is an excellent introduction to what is required. Experienced digital archivists will also welcome how this updated reference source sets out current and emerging practices in this field. For educators preparing students for a career in this emerging profession and for students considering this career, this volume sets out the skills needed and the potential for a challenging and satisfying career (pp. 24–29). Regardless of the reader’s motivation, Oliver and Harvey have provided an essential resource for anyone interested in digital curation. And we can hope that, by the time the third edition appears, “curation” will be a recognized word, no longer singled out by spellcheck.

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NOTE

1. Daisy Abbott, “What Is Digital Curation?,” DCC Briefing Papers: Introduction to Curation, Edinburgh: Digital Curation Centre, April 2, 2008, <http://www.dcc.ac.uk/resources/briefing-papers/introduction-curation/what-digital-curation>.