

# JLSC

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## Brief Reviews of Books and Products

Rethinking institutional repositories: Innovations in management, collections, and inclusion

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Hutchinson, A. (2024). Rethinking institutional repositories: Innovations in management, collections, and inclusion [Brief Reviews of Books and Products]. *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication*, 12(1), eP17784. <https://doi.org/10.31274/jpsc.17784>



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## BRIEF REVIEWS OF BOOKS AND PRODUCTS

Cromwell, J. C. (Ed.) (2023). *Rethinking institutional repositories: Innovations in management, collections, and inclusion*. Association of College and Research Libraries. 256 pages. ISBN: 9798892555432. \$70.00. <https://bit.ly/IRs>

A January 2024 Times Higher Education blog entry<sup>1</sup> reinforces the increasingly common belief that although institutional repositories (IR) were originally developed to further goals of the open access (OA) movement, weak content recruitment and an emphasis on OA journal funding have eclipsed much of the role of IRs in this area. This sentiment opens the door for a book like *Rethinking institutional repositories*, which addresses new roles IRs are beginning to assume in order to remain relevant. Written by librarians, archivists, and related staff at U.S. research libraries, the book's 22 chapters are divided into sections on management, new content types, and diversity and inclusion in repository operation. Many IR managers will recognize editor Josh Cromwell as the organizer of the Southern Mississippi Institutional Repository Conference.

While several contributors to the book acknowledge the low participation by faculty in populating IRs, the section on management issues addresses it most directly. (One chapter is titled "I Don't Have the Time or Really Understand What This Is! [...]," a sentiment to which many veteran IR managers can relate.) This initial portion of the book discusses planning, evaluating and improving legacy IRs, among other things. Several chapters address the realities of shrinking resources and the consequent need to establish partnerships and reassess all repository-related operations and policies.

While acknowledging the initial shortfall in encouraging green OA, many IR managers have expanded the scope of their collections. The section on new collection and content types focuses on unpublished or special collections produced within an institution that are distinct from peer-reviewed scholarship created there. These contributions highlight the collection and description of a wide variety of materials such as podcasts, archival and institutional records, undergraduate research, campus-published journals, and various forms of gray literature. One contributor offered the catch-all definition "other shareable open content that has no other logical home." Other chapters go beyond content, discussing partnerships with

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<sup>1</sup> Greig, F. (2024, Jan 18). *It is time for open access to move on from institutional repositories*. Times Higher Education (blog).



outside historical societies and other nonprofits that are the source of these materials. One argument is that this “other” material is at greater preservation risk than mainstream, faculty-produced scholarship since the latter is often externally published and therefore copies are (in theory) available at least one place outside the IR.

Perhaps baked into the original OA intent of repositories was the bias toward journal-based disciplines like the sciences and the (inadvertent) exclusion of more diverse disciplines and their digital outputs. The book’s section on inclusion illustrates a recent shift in focus of repository management from content recruitment to accessibility and inclusion. Some chapters go beyond content diversity and address topics such as techniques for auditing accessibility and remediating problems. Contributors to this section recommend a variety of strategies to foster diversity, including outreach to underrepresented campus groups and workflows and tools for captioning video content, all of which can be copied, modified, or otherwise applied by readers in their own contexts.

This book is useful for those who see a future for their IR, even where diverted from its original goals. Each chapter can stand alone as a case study or survey of innovative repository practices. They are well documented and show that the contributors have done their homework. All staff who work with IRs in varying roles can find something useful affecting repository operations, from nuts-and-bolts processes to governance, collaborations, and other management-level issues. Each contribution bears a Creative Commons license, and the book is available as an OA PDF.

A few chapters mention grants for completing specific collections work, but larger funding questions are left mostly unanswered. Subsequent works on IRs should address the sustainability of some repositories given the ongoing shift in original mission and perpetually uncertain state of library funding. That would include communicating this uncertainty to digital material creators and depositors.

One of the book’s contributors offers the sentiment “[i]nstead of chasing reluctant users [...],” which sums up the “rethink” that IRs need. Where they are expected to continue indefinitely, IRs need such a rethink, and this book provides food for thought. The new collections and services described here should give repository managers ideas to broaden what might have previously been a narrow mission for their IR, and the resulting increase of both contributor-depositors and end users of materials in the IR could prompt library administration to resurrect interest and support for the effort in spite of disappointing prior participation.