Federating Repositories of Accessible Materials for Education

October 30, 2019
IMLS Planning, Mellon Implementation

The Mellon proposal funded for 2019-2021 is based on a 2015-16 planning grant funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, on which I was co-PI with Laura Wood, in which we hypothesized that a shared, inter-institutional repository would be an effective way to assist institutions of higher education in providing accessible instructional materials to students with disabilities.

The end product of that work is a white paper surveying the landscape of accessibility in higher education, and the absence of libraries in that landscape. “Libraries Take AIM!” can be found at https://bit.ly/2Nm6yHU
Sharing Accessible Text

The current two-year Mellon-funded pilot project will have seven universities working with four repositories to share print materials made accessible for students with documented disabilities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repository</th>
<th>University</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bookshare</td>
<td>George Mason University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Texas A&amp;M University</td>
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<tr>
<td>HathiTrust</td>
<td>University of Illinois</td>
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<td>Internet Archive</td>
<td>University of Northern Arizona</td>
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<td></td>
<td>University of Virginia</td>
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<td>University of Wisconsin-Madison</td>
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<td>Vanderbilt University</td>
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Federating Repositories

UVA’s EMMA (Educational Materials Made Accessible) will be the hub through which DSO staff retrieve, and Library staff re-deposit, machine-readable texts from the Internet Archive, HathiTrust, and Bookshare. EMMA will also be the repository for materials that do not originate with one of the other three repositories.

EMMA is being built on a white-label instance of the Bookshare Platform as a Service, which is now being extended to enable DSO staff to authenticate and search across the other three repositories from within EMMA. In beta now, and should be functional by the Spring semester.
DSOs will search the repositories on behalf of students with documented disabilities (no direct access by students at this point). If an already remediated version of the text they need can be found, they will download and use that. If they improve the text for the same purposes, their version will replace the earlier one. If no remediated text already exists, they will search for machine-readable text and remediate that.
DSOs, Libraries, and Presses

When they’re done, librarians on their campus will take the resulting file, add metadata describing the nature of the remediation, and upload it to the appropriate repository. University presses at four of the participating universities will also contribute their texts to Bookshare.
Copyright Misconceptions

The planning grant found that misconceptions about copyright law are a major factor inhibiting staff in disability service offices from sharing remediated learning materials. Therefore, a white paper on "The Law and Accessible Texts: Reconciling Civil Rights and Copyrights" was the first outcome of the FRAME grant. It was published earlier this year by the Association of Research Libraries and authored by Brandon Butler, Prue Adler, and Krista Cox. You can find it at https://bit.ly/2JrrrQO
Butler et al. find that US Copyright law combines with US Disability and Civil Rights law to provide:

- Protection for creating and remediating digital repository under fair use
- Protection for distributing text to qualified disabilities under both 121 and fair use

And further that there is:

- No purchase required
- No need to destroy copies
- No validity to the scary warnings some publishers issue.
EMMA’s Future

It is my hope that EMMA will become a membership-supported service open to all institutions of higher education in the United States (and, we hope, in countries that are signatories to the Marrakesh Treaty).

Membership will be priced to break even in total, and to have levels that are affordable in community colleges, smaller four-year colleges and universities, etc. The cost of membership should be more than offset by the reduction in the risk of being sued by accessibility activists, and by the reduction in duplicative effort on the part of DSO staff.
Thanks : Questions?