Art and advocacy: designing dialogues

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Hover Boys, 2004
Courtesy of the artist Annie Whiles
Goldsmiths Research Online
http://eprints.gold.ac.uk/4681
Background

Founded in 1891, Goldsmiths has been part of the University of London for over 100 years, and is ranked 9th in the UK for world-leading 4* research (Research Assessment Exercise 2008). It is a member of the 1994 Group, which brings together a select number of research-focused universities. The University’s unique academic approach comes from the interaction of 15 academic departments, together with a number of smaller centres and units. Goldsmiths currently has 5,805 undergraduates, 3,422 postgraduates, 400 academics, and nearly 500 visiting and associate tutors.

Research at Goldsmiths is characterised by interdisciplinarity, creativity and experimentation. The development and application of new methods to established fields is evident in programmes such as visual anthropology, digital sociology and practice-based research in art, design and visual cultures. The Art Department is one of Goldsmiths’ flagship departments, having produced 6 Turner Prize winners and counting internationally acclaimed artists such as Alison Craighead and Janice Kerbel as well as renowned art writers like Adrian Rifkin and Maria Fusco among its academic staff. Apart from conventional text-based research output, the Art Department produces exhibitions, performances and screenings as well as digital media, fine art printmaking, photography, casting, metal, woodwork, stitch and fabric, print and dye and constructed textiles.

Advocacy for the University’s institutional repository has encompassed two approaches: the “material” approach which comprised the production and circulation of written material and presentations; and the “discursive” approach which involved establishing a dialogue with members of the Art Department, both collectively and individually. Rather than following a preconceived strategy, advocacy retained a high degree of flexibility to accommodate for unexpected or site-specific requirements and circumstances. This case study therefore presents details of this material (the brochure and the presentations) and the discursive approach (the clinics, follow-ups and continuing support) in a wider context of engagement with the Art Department. It also includes statistics to evaluate the relative success of this advocacy. In conclusion, this case study outlines some of the issues that have been raised and provides a number of lessons learnt for the wider community.

Expectations

Goldsmiths’ institutional repository, Goldsmiths Research Online (GRO), was launched in October 2009. It uses the EPrints system and, managed by Goldsmiths Library, is run by two members of staff: a repository manager who, as Deputy Librarian, is responsible for overall management of research resources, and a repository coordinator (part-time). After the launch, the repository team embarked on a series of presentations to introduce academic and support staff to Open Access and the role of institutional repositories. Departments with text-based research output such as Psychology were quick to deposit in Goldsmiths Research Online but arts-based research was slow to appear.

Given the importance of the Art and Design Departments and the amount of non-text based research outputs, the repository team decided to pay particular attention to the demands posed by creative outputs. These demands were both technical (for example, what metadata should go with an item such as a video installation) and conceptual as arts-based researchers found it more difficult to relate to Open Access, research outputs and self-archiving. The repository team therefore undertook a
usability study with the Design Department in order to pinpoint and redress particular problems. On the back of this study, which led to an increased deposit rate amongst staff of the Design Department, the repository team approached the Art Department with a view to similarly increasing understanding and deposit rates. The period before the advocacy programme, from the repository launch to March 2010, saw only 26 deposits made by the Art Department. During the 6 months after the advocacy programme, from April 2010 to September 2010, the repository received 273 deposits from the Art Department, a more than 1,000% increase in deposit activity. These new deposits were also more diverse in their nature, including exhibitions, videos, performances and printed ephemera.

1. The brochure

The first step saw the production of a brochure. This was to introduce the institutional repository, Goldsmiths Research Online, as well as attendant issues such as Open Access, author’s rights and Open Access journals. Given that Goldsmiths supports an extremely diverse range of research and research outputs, the brochure had to reflect these matters with a view to the creative and arts-based research. This was done by using examples from arts-based research that had already been deposited in the repository to illustrate the issues and the operations of the repository. All illustrations in the brochure were taken from Goldsmiths Research Online and each caption contained the repository URL.
journals (Art & Research, Culture Machine, Cultural Analysis, Kunsttexte and Invisible Culture) dealt with creative research.

The brochure was distributed at meetings and to key members of staff such as heads of research to raise initial awareness of Goldsmith Research Online’s existence. It provided staff with an introduction to the repository and to key issues such as copyright. It also formed the basis for all further engagements.

2. Presentations

After circulating the brochure, the repository team began a series of presentations to different groups and bodies across Goldsmiths. As Goldsmiths Research Online will be used to facilitate the Research Excellence Framework (REF), the Research Office supported its promotion. Through the Research Office, the repository team gained access to meetings such as departmental research boards and heads of research meetings. Whereas the Research Office would stress the importance of the repository in relation to the REF, particularly in relation to “impact”, and highlight its functionality as a research management and research audit tool, the repository team would emphasise Open Access, archiving, exposure and publicity. This combination of stick and carrot ensured that Goldsmiths Research Online was not exclusively perceived as (yet another) artefact of the audit culture while being associated with enough institutional incentive to encourage deposit. Of course, different audiences require different approaches and presenting to heads of research entailed more attention on furthering impact. In contrast, presentations to individual departments were tailor-made to speak to the discipline’s research culture and ethos.

After the initial round of presentations to higher-level groups, the repository team continued contact with attendees individually. This helped establish individual people as “champions” as well as make contact with individual departments’ gatekeepers.

The Art Department presentation

After the heads of research meeting, the Art Department’s Director of Research Studies (DRS) asked the repository team to arrange two presentations for the Art Department that would also integrate training aspects. Two 1.5-hour sessions were scheduled which included a PowerPoint presentation, a live demonstration and a workshop. This would allow people to deposit items under supervision and ask any questions as they arose during the process. The following introduction to the repository was written specifically for members of the Art Department:

Goldsmiths Research Online (GRO) is Goldsmiths' open access institutional repository which seeks to make the full range of Goldsmiths research output publicly available.

Benefits for Goldsmiths researchers

Communicating research outcomes to peers, advancing knowledge as well as career are key motivations for researchers. Depositing your work in GRO represents a potent and effective way to accomplish these goals, increasing works' visibility, distribution and circulation. This, in turn, leads to greater impact, broader audiences, more frequent usage and citation.

Output from the practice-based research in the arts

GRO can supplement subscription-based access to journal articles with open access using self-archiving, in a way which is compliant with existing conditions. GRO also
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encourages the deposit of audio-visual material and other output from the creative and performing arts. We recognise that copyright issues might be limiting the extent to which materials can be made publicly available, which is why GRO offers a range of different ways to document and showcase your work.

You can deposit a description pertaining to the artwork, recording or performance (name, media, composition type, commissioning body etc.) as well as details about its display or performance (venues, dates, festivals) and links to relevant websites (festival websites, reviews, gallery website etc.). Furthermore, GRO lets you deposit items such as talks, seminars, workshops, conference papers, articles, reviews and any attendant objects such as PowerPoint presentations.

In addition, you can deposit documentation (photographs, press releases, artist statements etc.) as well as excerpts of the composition or of video and film work. In this respect, GRO functions not just as an archive but as an additional public platform to showcase your work and its context.

Fig. 2 Email sent to Art Department staff.

This was sent to the Director of Research Studies who incorporated it into her message informing staff about the presentation and workshop. Of the 48 staff members, 22 attended the presentation.

The presentation sought to highlight the use of Goldsmiths Research Online to a. reach a wide audience; b. archive ephemeral material such as press releases and c. help conceptually and practically translate artistic work into research output. The use of the following elements proved especially useful:

- A map view generated by Google Analytics showing the geographical spread of user access to Goldsmiths Research Online.
- A Google search where a Goldsmiths Research Online item would appear on the first page of results.
- Excerpts of requests made by users for items that have no documents associated with them.¹

¹ Where an EPrints record only consist of a reference/citation, a request button can be used to send an email to the creator and/or repository staff, asking for the materials.
Google searches (text and image) related to staff members of the Art Department. Similarly, user requests would be shown that enquired about repository items from the Art Department. At the same time, the repository team made use of its knowledge regarding some of the Department’s previous efforts to present and archive their work while also referring to concrete examples of staff member’s work to illustrate ways of depositing.

The repository team made sure that the presentation was relevant to the department’s research:

For research output in the creative and applied art, GRO can function as a showcase and archive that weaves together different kinds of materials to create a stable trace of your work. Consequently, GRO can potentially increase the circulation of research output and therefore, provide a form of tangible evidence for the elusive impact of research. In addition, it provides a workflow and framework for self-archiving, which lets you keep track of the process of research.

Following the presentation, the Director of Research Studies instructed staff to deposit 4 items each in the repository in a test run for the REF. Taking note of these questions, comments, and concerns also enabled the repository team to further develop and customise the repository for use by artists and arts-based researchers.

3. The clinics and continuing support

At the end of the presentation, the repository team offered to guide people through the process individually (through so-called “clinics”) and answer any further questions that might arise, providing email and phone contacts. This offer was quickly taken up and the repository team soon received messages such as:

“I am part of the art department, I came to a training session the other week, have started to try and upload my items but am getting in a mess as IT is not my strong point. I was wondering if I might pop over in the morning to go through some things with you?” (Artist, Lecturer in Textiles)
Six individual clinics, one session with two staff members and one “phone clinic” were arranged. The clinics were conducted in the repository team’s offices as well as in staffs’ offices and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. In addition, numerous queries via email were received which the repository team tried to respond to within 24 hours.

In addition to support provisions, the appointment of “editors” and the development of customised applications facilitated continued engagement.

Editors
Since Goldsmiths Research Online has adopted self-archiving as the preferred method for deposit, the repository team leaves it to each department as to how the “review” section is managed. In consultation with the Art Department, the Director of Research Studies identified 6 editors from the 48 members of staff. Consequently, the repository team created an email group for “Art editors” to which communication about specific workarounds, tips, and pertinent developments has been directed.

Dear Art editors,
Having met with Vail this morning, here are a few tips to facilitate editorial tasks:

1. To look at a person's GRO entries, click on Browse (menu to your right) and select "Person". Navigate to the person and click on their name, you'll then see their records (which you can order by date or item type)

2. If you wish to create a "selection", it depends on whether the item is in the live archive or in the review section:
   a. live archive: navigate to the item and click on "View item" at the left-hand bottom of the screen. Then click on the Actions tab and select Edit item. This will take you to the first step in the depositing process. Click on the Select stage and make your selection. Once you've done this click on Save and Exit.
   b. review: Click on Edit item (the icon showing the piece of paper and the pencil). This will take you to the first step in the depositing process. Click on the Select stage and make your selection. Once you've done this click on Save and Exit.

3. To search for items that have already been selected, click on Admin (in the top menu) and, under Editorial Tools, select Search items. For Item Status (4th down the list), tick Under Review and Live Archive. For Departments, select Art and click on Search. This will generate a list of all items which have been selected.

Any questions/comments/suggestions please email or call me.

Fig. 6 Email to Art editors

Such communication ensures continuous presence of Goldsmiths Research Online as well as fosters in-depth understanding of its function and operation.

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2 EPrints distinguishes 3 stages: work area (for authors), review (for editors) and live archive (for the public). The “review” stage functions as a buffer zone between the authors’ private space and the public archive. It is used to check, edit, approve, or return deposited items.

3 “Selection” is a separate stage in our workflow for editors. It allows editors to “select” a deposit for particular exercises (such as the REF).
Applications
The Director of Research Studies required further instructions as to how to analyse her department’s research portfolio through Goldsmiths Research Online. Discussing relevant indicators (around questions of what constitutes impact and how to measure it) and their corresponding repository fields, the repository team:

- Expanded the set of fields for some item types (e.g. “exhibition” now includes separate field for “country”).
- Developed, with the help of IT Services, a tool to simplify Goldsmith Research Online’s export function so it now generates a file showing only fields relevant for the Director of Research Studies’ audit.

4. Statistics

The current total is 526 deposits, 217 of which had been automatically imported from tables prepared for the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2008. Over the period from 28 April to 28 July 2010, Goldsmiths Research Online had received 232 deposits from the Art Department, 90 of which included images, PDFs, and other materials. Disregarding the RAE import, which was done through an automated import (and hence does not reflect self-deposit), this represents a 75% increase in items. The breakdown by item types is as follows: 84 exhibitions, 44 book sections, 38 articles, 19 conference items, 10 projects, 8 performances, 8 books, 7 artefacts, 5 edited journals, 2 videos and 1 digital object.

5. Issues, queries and feedback

A number of questions and issues followed the presentation and clinics. These helped identify certain general problems as well as problems that arose out of specific item types. Concurrently, it created a better understanding of the kinds of work produced and afforded an assessment of the strength and weaknesses of Goldsmiths Research Online in relation to arts-based research outputs. The queries can be divided as follows:

- How to deposit?
  This involved very specific questions such as how and where to credit contributors, how to categorise works or how to record relationships (for example, between exhibition and exhibition catalogue).

- How does Goldsmiths Research Online work?
  This comprises questions about the “internal logic” of the repository such as how to edit an item already deposited or how the repository displays certain types of information and materials.

Questions like these continue to inform repository development work. In addition, some queries could not be addressed by solutions or instructions but required more discursive engagements:

“I spoke to you yesterday about not knowing quite what to do about my solo career and that of SAMPLE [collaborative art group] re GRO. I have now deposited four exhibitions. Two are my own solo shows. Two are SAMPLE shows. Each of my solo shows had either a published catalogue or an artists book and I'm not sure whether I need to deposit those, or how... Perhaps the artist's book is a seperate (sic) deposit. Also, I kept being warned that I've not deposited any documents. I don't understand what that would mean with regard to my practice. Whatever, I am..."
At times, queries did in fact relate to more general issues of bringing together, communicating and preserving a project or oeuvre. In one case, the staff member’s art practice, concerned with as he puts it “issues of communications being developed through the Internet”, made discussions around Goldsmiths Research Online relevant to his work. Instead of imparting instructions, many encounters involved more conceptual dialogues about ways of seeing and knowing works of art. Here, it proved helpful that both members of the repository team had an academic background in the arts.

The feedback received so far indicates that although the deposit process remains too complex, there is a general understanding that Goldsmiths Research Online delivers increased exposure. The style of presentation and, in particular, the range of help and advice offered was greatly appreciated.

Conclusions

Despite the immediate success of the advocacy programme, only a small number of staff members continue to deposit work in the repository. The programme coincided with the Art Department’s efforts to prepare for the REF. This helped corral interest and participation. Given the repository team’s small size and limited resources, it proved essential to “appropriate”: using the Research Office gave access to university-wide meetings, using the REF made Goldsmiths Research Online interesting for departments’ heads of research.

It is helpful to think about advocacy as a “dialogue” rather than an instruction. The repository team has, for example, received considerable amounts of feedback which directly translated into enhancements to the interface and workings. In that sense advocacy can be seen to further innovation. At the same time, entering into a dialogue also ensures a more sustained engagement: members of staff that have attended the clinics still deposit their work and send us queries.

Lessons-learned

On the basis of the repository team’s advocacy, a number of lessons can be learnt:

- Get to know the department and design your presentation accordingly. This means familiarising yourself with the kind of work done in the department. Are there many video and film artists? How does the department present its staff profiles and portfolios?

  This will help anticipate questions and assemble and structure your presentation’s elements. For example, the presence of film and video work might entail questions as to what formats to use, the file size limit, the end-user viewing interface but also questions and concerns regarding copyright, distribution rights (if production companies and/or galleries are involved).

- Establish an advocate within the department who can act as your liaison and who can also encourage and support other staff members in their dealings with your repository.
Be strategic and appropriate. Enrolling other support departments (for example research offices) or university-wide bodies (for example research networks) can further the promotion of your repository.

Make sure the repository and its interface do not exclusively refer to text-based research. For example, in EPrints the default notice displayed for items that have no documents attached reads “Full text not available”. Similarly, the workflow specifies “Abstract”.

Expand your repository’s selection of item types and think about their make-up more closely in dialogue with departments and staff members. For example, “artist book” includes “contributors” and “dimensions” fields.

Be familiar with the file formats for multi-media objects and their respective advantages and disadvantages (for example, in terms of preservation or end-user delivery).

Present concrete examples of how people outside the university would use the repository. For example, a visiting curator was putting together an exhibition of genre paintings. Browsing through the repository like a catalogue helped the curator identify suitable art works for inclusion.

Consider the aesthetic dimensions of delivering your advocacy, for example, the design of materials such as brochures and PowerPoint presentations and also the choice of venue for presentation.

Ensure timely and simple responses to queries.

Keep a record of queries, questions, comments, and concerns.

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