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Institutional Repositories: Strategies for the Present and the Future



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Institutional Repositories: Strategies for the Present and Future

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by

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Abstract

Institutional repositories are tools to support, disseminate and showcase the scholarly communications and intellectual life of an institution. A successful repository requires planning and a defined focus, as well as an attractive name and design. To achieve success, the IR must serve faculty on faculty's terms; the librarian's role is to collaborate with faculty and ensure that the services of the IR meet their needs. Foster, Bankier and Wiley offer strategies for success drawn from their work creating successful institutional repositories.

“Staffing is a *major* consideration in whether to customize and host one’s own repository or outsource to a ready-made publishing platform and server space.”

Introduction

Have you ever searched the departmental web site of a prolific science or psychology faculty member who receives frequent accolades for presentations and publications? Can you find their research and link to it, or even pinpoint their recent articles under departmental listings? Results of this endeavor can be quite frustrating. While an institutional repository (IR) will not solve all of these access and retrieval difficulties, it can offer a way to bring together much of the intellectual and creative efforts of a university in one place and establish a permanent path to discovery and open accessibility for faculty and student research projects to researchers worldwide.

While some academic IRs arose from the need to combat or present an alternative to the high cost of publishing journals and to engage in broad-based aspects of scholarly communication, government funding for research projects, publisher page charges, etc., not all institutions establish or implement an IR because of these issues and discussions. A rationale and definition could be one like that of Western Kentucky University’s (WKU) TopSCHOLAR™:

A digital research repository, dedicated to scholarly research, creative activity and other full-text learning resources that merit enduring and archival value and permanent access within a centralized database that supports, reflects, and showcases the intellectual life of the University through easy searching and retrieval, and universal access and indexing.

Getting Started

Successful repositories involve *planning, commitment, and a defined focus*. What follows are some guidelines that convey elements of the authors’ experience, success, and serendipity.

Start with a Task Force to present recommendations. The idea or directive will have come from somewhere, so get a planning group going from Day One.

Develop a statement of purpose to convey what an institutional repository is and what will be placed there. What is the collection policy? Where will the IR fall within library and university priorities, and who will manage it? Have a philosophical and financial commitment from the “top down” in the university administration and the library leadership for this collaborative effort. Many libraries are fortunate to have well-staffed systems departments to implement an IR; others must rely on the university’s IT staff. Staffing is a *major* consideration in whether to customize and host one’s own repository or outsource to a ready-made publishing platform and server space. How will the system run, be serviced and supported, be customized, be enhanced? What will the response time be to problems and changes?

²Alma Swan and Sheridan Brown, *Open Access Self-Archiving: An Author Study* (Truro, U.K.: Key Perspectives Ltd., 2005). Available at <http://www.keyperspectives.co.uk/openaccessarchive/reports.html>.

ⁱThe MIRACLE Census reports that in all applicable cases responding universities ranked as their top two sources of funding “Special initiative supported by the library” and “Costs absorbed in routine library operating costs.” See Markey et al. “Census of Institutional Repositories in the United States.” Available at: <http://www.clir.org/pubs/abstract/pub140abst.html>.

ⁱⁱThe University of Georgia’s Law School offers an instructive flow chart. See Watson, Carol A. and James M. Donovan. “Behind a Law School’s Decision to Implement an Institutional Repository.” Available at: http://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/law_lib_artchop/15.

ⁱⁱⁱThese points were modified from the Institutional Repository Task Force Report at Western Kentucky University, http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/top_pres/2/.

Weigh the financial implications of a hosted and a local (open source software) repository. What do you get for what you are paying? Nothing is truly free. Both architectures have associated costs. The hosted system has an annual subscription fee; the local one has staffing considerations and server space. Calculate the total cost of ownership. If the initiative receives special funding for a year’s pilot project, as many institutions do, and the IR succeeds, what plans are in place for subsequent years? Most of the time, the library becomes the funding source.ⁱ Regardless of how costs are distributed, think about long-term options.

Acknowledge and be knowledgeable about the university’s intellectual property policies and ethics policies. Create a separate copyright form for authors to deposit content in the repository. The university’s lawyer or another administrator with suitable background can draft, review and also work with the service provider to craft suitable terms not only for the copyright form but for the service contract for the university if using an outside provider.ⁱⁱ

Consider the name. Name and publicize the repository something other than an institutional repository. Early in the development of repositories on campuses, Susan Gibbons stressed this point, believing that the phrase conveys a mandate-like quality.ⁱⁱⁱ Names gravitate towards “scholar,” such as Scholarly Commons@, ScholarWorks@, eScholarship@, and DigitalCommons@. UR Research is the name for the University of Rochester’s and ScholarsArchive at OSU represents Oregon State University. WKU’s is named TopSCHOLAR and Glen Wiley found that renaming Cornell’s IR from Dspace@Cornell to eCommons@Cornell contributed to a sea change in perception about the IR. Various faculty approached him to commend him for “leaving that DSpace” and to express their excitement about “eCommons.” Redefining the IR as the “research showcase” specific to the university creates a sense of ownership and excitement across the campus.

Make it look good. The appearance of database results, a “vanilla” instance, and the word “pilot” generally look bad to faculty and imply that the library has not fully committed to the project of showcasing and promoting its faculty’s research. Cornell’s IR achieved a great degree of success from its redesign. It went from looking like a standard, out of the box instance of DSpace, to having a visual identity unique to Cornell.

Logged in as gsk5@cornell.edu (Logout)

DSpace at Cornell University >

Welcome to the Cornell University DSpace Digital Repository!

This repository is open for anyone at Cornell University as a place to capture, store, index, preserve and redistribute Cornell faculty, staff, student or organizational research materials in digital formats.

For information on protecting your rights to your intellectual property [Click Here](#).

If you would like to be included in our repository, please contact us at dspace-admin-l@cornell.edu

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Cornell's DSpace implementation, before redesign.

Cornell University

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(Centralized, searchable access to institutional digital resources maintained by Cornell University Archives)
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Related Web Sites:

- [Internet-First University Press](#) (A new approach to scholarly publishing)
- [Quantum Physics Made Easy](#) (Three Lectures by Hans Bethe)

Other Cornell Digital Repositories:

- [arXiv](#)
- [DigitalCommons@ILR](#)
- [Cornell University Law Library NELLCO Repository](#)

The Cornell University Library offers a wide variety of digital repositories and collections. For a complete list visit our [Registry of Digital Collections](#).

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Cornell's repository after redesign.

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The repository is a service of the Macalester College library. The DigitalCommons@Macalester was implemented in 2005. Coordination for the project is by the Digital Assets Management working group. The Digital Collections Master Plan for content management will be found under library reports in the DigitalCommons. See [Digital Collections Master Plan: Content, Systems, Access and Comprehensive Management Framework](#)

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Please contact [Janet Sietmann](#) if you have any questions.

What faculty say

"This is an important way of sharing your insights with the broader scholarly community (and it is another way of giving back - and moving away from a model of extractive research). I really hope you will share your honors thesis in this format - in addition to the traditional paper copy."

Bill Moseley - Geography Department

"Just a quick note of appreciation: the Digital Commons is an outstanding aid to my teaching. Not only is this form of publication something to which students can and do aspire, but I also assign past student papers as standard readings on my syllabus, all of which is made easy with the Digital Commons."

Paul Dosh - Political Science Department

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Macalester College's Digital Commons after redesign.

“Remember, the institutional repository does not begin or end with preprints and postprints. Faculty flock to opportunities to create original content.”

^{iv} Salo, Dorothea. "Innkeeper at the Roach Motel." *Library Trends* 57:2 (Fall 2008). Available at: <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/22088>.

Strategies for Success

What makes an IR flounder? First, one must understand that campus "awareness" does not equal campus participation. In other words, just because faculty know about the IR doesn't mean they will flock to it. Generally, the compelling value propositions for the library, like persistent URLs, handles, and long-term accessibility, are not as attractive to faculty. It is not enough to tell faculty and students about the new "features" of the IR, they must believe it is vibrant, active, and offers them useful services. Dorothea Salo, Digital Repository Librarian for the University of Wisconsin, explains, "The institutional repository and services associated with it must provide value to faculty on *faculty terms* before it will see more than scant, grudging use."^{iv} The librarian at the helm is not only responsible for keeping the IR up and running; he or she is also a collaborator and a promoter. The librarian must know how to speak to faculty's needs and values, often via one-to-one contact. Frame the library as a service provider, and begin to ask faculty, "What can I do for you?"

Faculty want clerical and consultative services. These services could include scanning, mediated deposits, copyright advising and rights-checking. Easy as you think it may be for faculty and students to upload content, for initial and even subsequent database building, do it for them! Paul Royster, Scholarly Communications Librarian at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, asks faculty members to send him a CV, then searches and uploads their work himself.

Remember, the institutional repository does not begin or end with preprints and postprints. Faculty flock to opportunities to create original content. Widen your definition of content, and begin to consider how "original content," content created by faculty and published by the library in the IR, can be valuable, both to the careers of individual scholars and to the branding of your fledgling IR. Most repository platforms are full-text indexed in search engines which offers scholars as well as the publishing institution high discoverability and wide dissemination opportunities. Conference proceedings, working papers, newsletters and electronic theses and dissertations are also excellent additions to IRs. Traditional archival materials are possible areas for content growth. WKU recently published several early WKU essays compiled by the president in 1926. These are the library's first project under Presidential Papers.

E-journal publishing generates additional original content and offers the opportunity to expose paper publications to the digital world. Offer faculty the opportunity to transition current paper publications to digital, and provide them help to start new born-digital journals. Digital Commons has seen a rapid uptake in electronic journal creation and adds at least five new journals a month across its near-100 institutions. Within weeks of initial training, Foster fielded a call from a WKU professor of exercise science who wanted to start a journal in his field. Within a year, the *International Journal of Exercise Science* be-

“How do you prove to the university community that the IR is working? Give them ways to assess the impact of their scholarship.”

^vFor example, Doug White, professor of Anthropology used download statistics and citation counts of his first issue of *Structure and Dynamics* to demonstrate the initial success of the project. See Bankier and Smith. “Establishing Library Publishing: Best Practices for Creating Successful Editors.” *ELPUB Conference Proceedings 2008*, p. 72. Available at: http://works.bepress.com/jean_gabriel_bankier/2.

gan publishing original, peer-reviewed research, and now has a second journal forthcoming.

Faculty are also intrigued by personalized services like grad student e-portfolios, or individual bibliography pages, both of which act as additional channels for engagement.

How do you prove to the university community that the IR is working? The solution is to give them ways to assess the impact of their scholarship. Scholars are most persuaded by measures of their own success and the success of their peers. Cornell and Digital Commons have found that download reports are absolutely essential to creating and maintaining investment in the IR.^v In addition to providing these monthly individualized usage statistics, Digital Commons offers top downloads, papers of the day, and most recent downloads on the home pages of its hosted IRs. With its new user interface design, Cornell is looking to add eCommons’s “Greatest Hits.”

Finally, consider the role of the librarian. Should the librarian be tinkering with code and making policy in a backroom? We think not. After the administrative considerations are tackled and you are ready to market the IR, be proactive. In the first stages of building the IR, one must target early adopters—young faculty looking to make their mark, proponents of open-access, and faculty who respond to opportunities for self-promotion, to name a few. It is important to seek out those sources of existing and potential original content—it’s everywhere.

If the library has a large enough staff, subject specialists and/or liaison librarians often work one-on-one with their faculty members to generate new content ideas and find existing content. Gradually identify knowledgeable, dependable series administrators across campus who can assume certain responsibilities, and top-level administrators (usually in the library) who can distribute the workload as it increases. Digital Commons librarians promote opportunities to publish electronic journals, conference proceedings and working paper series, and they give paper-published journals the opportunity to transition to paper-electronic hybrids, or go fully digital. Library staff members at Cornell have successfully begun to recruit from other sources. Cornell’s eCommons is now home to web site archives, materials from the established national conference USAIN (United States Agricultural Information Network), and materials that were “losing” their original home, for example, technical reports from two old IRs.

Don’t forget to market success. Show it off! Scholars are persuaded by the use patterns and successes of their peers. In addition to offering download reports, share your successes. Talk up the values and benefits. Create a marketing plan, regular outlets for implementation, training, and information, and ongoing meetings with individuals, departments, councils, etc. Seize every opportunity. Create talking points about the benefits and values so librarians and supportive administrators can engage in conversations with faculty. IRs represent a new

“ Don't forget to market success. Show it off! Scholars are persuaded by the use patterns and successes of their peers.

dimension in collection development. Librarians are indeed building a database for students to see research (and get their own posted), for faculty to showcase or present ongoing instruction, for primary source documents to be uploaded, and for scholars to create new content and new publications.

” Conclusion: The Second Year and Beyond

The experimental phase is over. Reality and growth set in, or the one-by-one phase. Serendipitous moments may occur, like Foster's phone call from that professor wanting to launch an electronic journal of student research in exercise science. Be ready for challenges and opportunities. Implementation brings to fruition what was recommended, planned, marketed, and launched. Strategies, while subject to testing and modification, lay the groundwork with intensive training and initial content.

Year Two builds upon this groundwork and one-by-one effort grows as the IR becomes an inextricable part of the university's scholarly landscape. The “container” swells as content increases. Within two years, Foster began receiving calls from the Honors College to promote TopSCHOLAR™ downloads in its promotional literature, emails from the provost reminding participants to send appropriate presentations from the annual faculty conference, *Engaging the Spirit*, meetings with the Graduate Council that finally result in the upload of masters theses on a regular basis and, always, those one-to-one contacts.

Success *will* come, but the commitment to nurturing that outcome is relentless. Each institution is different, but commitment from administrators is essential. Once identified and defined as an integral role for the library—to build this system for the institution—librarians become the true force behind it.

Keep the connections going; generate excitement about this new pathway of discovery. As Charles E. Glassick notes, “The process, the outcomes, and especially the passion of discovery enhance the meaning of the effort and of the institution itself.”^{vi} Discovery, accessibility, and permanence are the cornerstones of any institutional repository. The journey is challenging; not everyone will possess the same level of interest as you do, despite incentives. Be ready to experience endless and unparalleled opportunities as part of a growing effort in digital scholarship, scholarly communications, and opening up access to content and publishing opportunities that never before existed in this way. Digital repositories really do create information possibilities.

^{vi} *Scholarship Assessed* (San Francisco, CA : Jossey-Bass, 1997), 9.