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No Fees Required: Opening Access to University Content

by Michelle Armstrong and Julia Stringfellow

This article shares information from a presentation at the 2011 Southwest Idaho Library Association Regional Conference, which explored increased access to university collections and scholarship and the great benefits this provides for all library communities. Access to university records and scholarship, both born digital and originally in paper, is improved by providing them in an open, electronic format. The session featured examples of institutional repositories and the types of digital content they include, and provided resources with information on creating and implementing an institutional repository.

For several years universities have been actively working to make their scholarship openly available on the Internet. Several factors have influenced this trend. Universities have to find ways of serving researchers wherever they are, even if it is far away from the actual library building, and for many patrons the Web, not the library, is the first stop for research resources. Universities have also been responding to respond to federal mandates requiring them to make their federally funded research data and scholarship available to taxpayers. Meanwhile, the growing Open Access movement promotes the idea that information, especially university scholarship, should be easily accessible and not limited only to those who can afford it. Finally, with limited and strained resources, universities are rethinking the services they provide to their researchers, as well as the value they offer to their funders. Making research and other university collections openly available is a powerful way to illustrate this value.

Universities have used a variety of approaches to provide access to their scholarship, including digital collections, institutional repositories, university-based open access publishing, and data management systems. In particular, institutional repositories have been used to capture and showcase the scholarly output of universities.

Institutional Repositories and their Digital Content

In 2003, **Clifford Lynch** described the institutional repository as:

[A] set of services that a university offers to the members of its community for the management and dissemination of digital materials created by the institution and its community members. It is most essentially an organizational commitment to the stewardship of these digital materials, including long-term preservation where appropriate, as well as organization and access or distribution (n.p.).

Since Lynch wrote this definition, universities have embraced his idea by creating over 200 repositories in the United States alone.

Often housed in academic libraries, repositories are hosted on a variety of platforms, including open source options such as **DSpace**, fully hosted platforms such as **Digital Commons**, and hybrid approaches such as **ContentDM** and **ePrints**. Most repositories have similar features, such as management tools for uploading content, options for assigning descriptive metadata to documents, and the ability to host and display a variety of file types. Additionally, many repositories are designed to showcase individual departments, collections, or faculty members.

Repositories do have some weaknesses that can create obstacles for libraries managing these services. No repository system has infrastructure support for libraries offering a "mediated deposit" model to their faculty. As one of the most effective methods for including individual faculty scholarship, university libraries are usually left to create their own systems. Also, as a recent development for disseminating research, many repositories have to deal with copyright

clearance issues when trying to share older, published university creations. Finally, since every institutional repository defines itself differently and there are limited standards which are inconsistently applied, repositories can struggle to establish themselves as valued information providers.

Examples

Digital Commons at Utah State University includes research papers and posters done by undergraduate students and a collection of course syllabi and class materials named OpenCourseWare. The USU Press section features full-text books and other publications published by the university's publishing company.

ScholarWorks at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, features a section devoted to publications on the Community Engagement programs done by the university. Photographs of the projects, as well as statistics and fact sheets are also provided. This is an important resource given the increasing popularity of Community Engagement programs at universities.

The University of Utah includes an **Electronic University Archive** in its institutional repository that showcases university records, including yearbooks, university catalogs, and other university publications.

ScholarWorks at Boise State University features the McNair Scholar Research Journal published by the university, as well as surveys, podcasts, and publications on Idaho topics that are part of the Boise State's Public Policy Center. ScholarWorks also includes electronic theses and dissertations and university documents, including university catalogs and Commencement programs. Its home page includes usage statistics.

Resources for Further Information

Two web sites, **OpenDOAR** and the **Registry of Open Access Repositories**, provide comprehensive lists of institutional repositories. In addition to searching individual repositories, resources can also be found in other ways. Since repositories are designed to make their content openly available, materials can be found using search engines such as Google, Bing, or Yahoo. Tools like Google Scholar specifically crawl institutional repositories, indexing the basic metadata provided.

Other specialized resources that are built on open access protocols established by the library community can also provide access to institutional repository content. The **Digital Collections Gateway** via **WorldCat** and the **Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations** are examples of these kinds of resources.

There are also many resources that provide assistance if your institution is looking to create an institutional repository. The **Association of Research Libraries (ARL)** provides information regarding institutional repositories, including papers, presentations from workshops and conferences, news on current issues regarding IRs, and an e-mail list. It also offers workshops and other events throughout the year that provide training on IR systems and open-source software.

The **Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC)**, developed by ARL, is an international group of academic and research libraries striving to improve access to scholarship. Their website provides a wealth of resources on institutional repositories, including guides and papers, current news and a news blog, a newsletter and forum, and information on different kinds of open-source software. SPARC offers workshops and other meetings throughout the year, as well as webcasts and podcasts. The guidelines provided by SPARC are the closest thing the United States has to standards for institutional repositories.

Joint Information Systems Committee infoNet (JISC), a company based in the United Kingdom, *provides standards for institutional repositories in the UK. It promotes strategic planning, implementation, and management of information and learning technology* for the education sector. JISC provides "infokits" on its website that serve as a guide for digital repositories and open-source software. It provides structures to enable the sharing and protection of the scholarship of an institution.

Securing a Hybrid Environment for Research, Publishing, and Access (SHERPA) is a research program in the United

Kingdom that started with funding from JISC. SHERPA explores issues related to the future of scholarly communication and develops open-access institutional repositories in universities to facilitate dissemination of research. One significant feature of SHERPA is Romeo, a service that provides the copyright and archiving policies of publishing companies through a searchable database. Another service is the worldwide Directory of Open Access Repositories, the Open DOAR. This resource provides a complete list and links of every open-access repository in the world. SHERPA is based at the University of Nottingham's Center for Research Communications.

Conclusion

The conference session concluded with a lively discussion and questions from the audience. For additional questions about institutional repositories and ScholarWorks at Boise State University, contact **Michelle Armstrong** or **Julia Stringfellow**.

Reference

Lynch, C. (2003). **Institutional repositories: Essential infrastructure for scholarship in the Digital Age**. *ARL*, 226, 1-7.

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