

Institutional Repositories Provide Open Access to Scholarly Communication

By

Anthony Holderied

Instructional Services/Reference Librarian

University of North Carolina at Pembroke

anthony.holderied@uncp.edu

In the fall of 2008 the North Carolina Digital Online Collection of Knowledge and Scholarship (NC Docks) became the pilot institutional repository of five universities within the University of North Carolina system. If you haven't heard, institutional repositories present academic institutions with the opportunity to provide global open access to the scholarship that is created within that institution without going through the traditional scholarly publishing model. By doing so, these colleges and universities are making their scholarship more readily available to much larger audiences, and without restrictions, outside of having a basic Internet connection.

IR's Defined

Clifford A. Lynch stated that "A university-based institutional repository is 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." The primary purpose of creating digital IRs is to provide a system of long-term preservation along with the organization and distribution of research to a larger audience. Digital repositories use technology to preserve and provide greater access to works created by faculty and students in electronic formats that include journal articles, book chapters, presentations, graphical works, and performances.

Of course the NC Docks pilot is not the pioneer repository in the United States. In fact, many IR's have come online long before the NC Docks project debuted. Since the early part of the 21st century, IR's have been cropping up at many of the major research institutions in the nation. The very first institutional repository was started at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 2002, known as DSpace. It was at this time that technology and publishing had evolved to the point where colleges and universities could begin thinking about preserving their own scholarship. With the skyrocketing increase in the costs associated with the traditional model of scholarly publishing, and a desire to make research more widely and freely available, IR's attracted the eye of larger institutions that were bustling with scholarly activity.

Since that time, MIT has become the global leader of digital repositories, offering its DSpace software freely to any library system that wishes to employ it, while also providing a community of user support. In a 2007 study conducted by The University of Michigan School of Information, 2147 academic libraries in the United States were surveyed on their involvement in creating and maintaining institutional repositories. Over 10% of the respondents indicated that they were already participating in an institutional

repository, a little over 200 colleges and universities nationwide. Research institutions vastly outnumbered the colleges that were involved with IRs, as expected.

NC Docks

In the fall of 2005, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) created a task force consisting of librarians and faculty members charged with investigating a potential institutional repository for the university. The discussion became much broader as the task force shared its findings at a meeting of The University of North Carolina University Librarians Advisory Committee (ULAC) in the spring of 2007. The idea of a consortial approach had been proposed at previous meetings, thus giving way to a special meeting scheduled to consider the viability of such an endeavor.

Following the ULAC meeting, it was decided that two separate committees should be created to investigate the feasibility of creating a UNC system-wide repository (16 universities) and to begin planning for a smaller pilot project among five of the system's university libraries. The University of North Carolina at Pembroke was included in the pilot study, which was to last for three years after the initial development, in order to provide data necessary for further exploration of creating an official statewide repository. Other UNC system schools such as The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and North Carolina State University had opted out of the pilot concept because they had already been running homegrown repositories of their own.

Moving forward to present day, the five school pilot has taken off and gained momentum as each school has since begun populating NC Docks. Using a homegrown platform for the repository provided by UNCG, librarians at Appalachian State University, East Carolina University, UNCG, The University of North Carolina at Pembroke, and The University of North Carolina at Wilmington began filling NC Docks with scholarship from their respective universities in 2008. Some schools are further along than others to this point, but you can get a taste of what the IR looks like by pointing your browser to <http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/>. Although in its infant stages, the universities have worked hard to create policies and market NC Docks to their respective campus communities in order to populate the IR. The pilot is currently in its first active year.

Institutional Challenges

As we have found out at The University of North Carolina Pembroke (UNCP), participating in an institutional repository requires a lot of time and effort, not to mention costs on the part of the Library. Because the technological platform was developed by one of the institutions in the consortium, costs were significantly lower than what they could have been. Nonetheless, UNCP is required to pay \$3,500 a year during the course of the three-year pilot, mostly for the development of the software. Some of the categories of costs that were considered by UNCG from the beginning were related to staffing needs to maintain the technical infrastructure including hardware, software, servers, workstations, storage areas, and scanners. Other cost considerations include the physical work environment such as space, furniture, and offices.

For UNCP, cost was not really a challenge. The three main challenges that faced our institution included marketing initiatives, campus buy-in, and publisher relations. In regards to marketing the IR, we formed a committee that would work to create a campus-wide onslaught of information about the new IR. Since most faculty were not initially familiar with the concept, we sent out a mass e-mail to the faculty listserv to introduce the IR. We created flyers that went out to every faculty member's mailbox on campus. We arranged for departmental meeting presentations in every major academic department on campus. We also made multiple presentations at workshops and conferences on campus in order to get the word out.

Marketing the IR required and still requires a good deal of time on the part of librarians who have to find time in their busy schedules to add yet another important task to their 'to-do list'. And yet through all of these marketing initiatives, we've barely scratched the surface in getting faculty buy-in. Faculty have many questions regarding this new format of publishing – and rightfully so. In a 'publish or perish' world, faculty take very seriously the issues that affect their scholarly output. Because of this, our IR population has been slow to take off. Confusing issues regarding copy right, the time it takes to submit works, and questions about format are all areas of concern that we deal with in facilitating an IR. And because we require faculty to complete forms and submit abstracts with each piece of scholarship they are contributing, some see it as just another thing to put on the backburner.

Copyright seems to be the toughest issue to deal with. The nature of our IR requires that faculty must submit the pre-print of any article they are contributing to the IR. Of course, to submit a work, we also have to have permission from the publisher who may or may not have exclusive rights to the content. Getting these rights often involves having to 'wrangle' with publishers who are not always inclined to relinquish sole rights to a work. If a publisher does not sign off on the work, it does not go into the IR. And sometimes faculty members are even skeptical about submitting their own pre-prints after the publisher has approved. Some are worried about the potential of someone accessing their research before it has gone through the official editing process.

Conclusion

Despite the challenges faced with participating in our consortial IR, we see many benefits in moving forward with its population. Studies have shown that getting faculty buy-in takes time and does not happen overnight. Copyright issues are such that you take what you can get and leave behind what you cannot. Often librarians do not have any control over these matters, so it is not worth losing sleep over.

The future of IR's seems to be moving in a positive direction, but many questions remain before the determination of their viability as a true competitor to the traditional publishing model can be made. In the mean time, we will keep marketing and continue populating so that others around the world can enjoy research and scholarship that it may not have had previous access to.

Cited

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Anthony Holderied is the Instructional Services/Reference Librarian for the Mary Livermore Library at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke. Mr. Holderied has an M.L.S. and is currently working toward a Master of Arts in Educational Media. Mr. Holderied's primary professional responsibility includes instructing university students, faculty, and community on the use of library resources and technologies.

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