

[Previous](#)[Contents](#)[Next](#)

Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship

Spring 2014

DOI:10.5062/F4MS3QQV



Liberating the Publications of a Distinguished Scholar: A Pilot Project

Julie Kelly
Science Librarian
Magrath Library
University of Minnesota
St. Paul, Minnesota
jkelly@umn.edu

Abstract

Many distinguished scholars published the primary corpus of their work before the advent of online journals, which makes it more challenging to access. Upon being approached by a distinguished Emeritus Professor seeking advice about getting his work posted online, librarians at the University of Minnesota worked to gain copyright permissions to scan and upload older works to the University's Digital Conservancy (UDC). This project then uniquely took the process one step further, using the sharing option of RefWorks to make these works accessible to the widest possible audience while concurrently offering the sophisticated functionality of a citation manager. With open access repositories gaining acceptance as an authoritative long-term venue for making resources available online, including older content that can be digitized, the methods developed in this pilot project could easily be followed by others, thus greatly increasing access to older literature from distinguished scholars.

Introduction

Educating researchers and students about copyright and informing them of their rights and responsibilities as authors is an important goal of academic librarians ([Jones 2013](#); [Disclafani et al. 2012](#)). Often this conversation is a one-on-one exchange, with an author approaching the librarian with a question about an individual paper.

In this project, University of Minnesota Emeritus Professor Dr. Eville Gorham

initiated an effort that encompassed the entire corpus of his work. The process of posting older research articles can be labor intensive, but Dr. Gorham believed that retired or soon-to-be-retired faculty members may have both the time and the motivation to undertake a project of this nature. Dr. Gorham retired from the University of Minnesota, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology after an illustrious research career. He is a member of the National Academy of Sciences and holds the special rank of Regents Professor, the University's highest honor. His groundbreaking research on acid precipitation jump started the work in that field, and his other areas of interest include peatland ecology and chemistry of lakes and wetlands. Dr. Gorham has long been interested in the literature of his field, publishing a paper in 1988 about limnology journals ([Gorham 1968](#)).

Dr. Gorham approached the library in the final stage of drafting a proposal for a small grant from the local association for retired faculty. His goals were 1) to create an online bibliography of all of his publications which could be searched and browsed by topic; 2) to make as many of his publications as possible freely available on the Internet; and, 3) develop a protocol for other retired researchers to follow. He assumed that the bulk of the work would be scanning and uploading the papers, and planned to hire students to do the work.

During our initial conversation it became apparent that gaining permission from publishers to upload the materials would actually be the biggest challenge, so library staff volunteered to contribute their expertise working with copyright and publishers.

Methods

The first step was creating a database that contains all of the publications listed on Dr. Gorham's curriculum vitae. RefWorks was chosen, mainly for its ability to allow a searchable version to be shared globally on the Internet. It also proved useful in managing the project as the bibliography was being developed. Its folder structure was used to group papers through the process, e.g., those that been sent to be scanned or others needing action of some sort.

After the RefWorks database was created, we determined which articles needed copyright/permissions work and which did not. Dr. Gorham's research appeared in a wide variety of venues, including government publications which could be scanned and uploaded without additional permissions. In each case these were checked in Google and Google Scholar to be sure they were not already freely accessible online.

For resources that we did not have permission to post, we looked first at the methodology used by Economists Online, a project funded by the European Union, which included renegotiating the copyright status of journal articles authored by a group of distinguished European economists ([Puplett 2010](#)). They provided us with advice about approaching publishers and sample letters to use when seeking exceptions to current copyright agreements.

Before contacting publishers we researched the copyright policies posted on their web sites. A few allowed final published PDFs of papers to be made freely

available, so no contact with the publisher was necessary. Some publishers used the Copyright Clearance Center's RightLink tool as the exclusive route for placing reprint or copyright exception requests, but in most cases we e-mailed the publishers directly.

Most publishers had some restrictions, and in those cases an exception was requested. When contacting these publishers we noted that Dr. Gorham's work was groundbreaking and he is a very distinguished scientist. His publications span over 60 years, from 1946 to 2013, so in many cases the point could be made that any lost revenue to the publisher would be negligible.

As we made progress through the list of publications, we decided not to request permission for a few items. These included chapters from books that were still available for sale. Also, we learned early in the process that some publishers would consider granting permission for older materials but not more recent ones. With publishers that we suspected might be more conservative with their copyright policies, we first requested permission to post older papers.

Upon completion of this project we produced a document that outlines the details of the procedures followed in the project, available at <http://z.umn.edu/cwprocedures>. The result of a good deal of trial and error and lessons learned, this template is now being used at the University of Minnesota to replicate the project with other Regents Professors. We hope librarians and faculty at other institutions will also find this interesting and useful for initiating similar projects.

The products of the project include:

A complete bibliography, available on the Internet at <http://z.umn.edu/gorham>

All 237 of Dr. Gorham's publications, scholarly and otherwise, are shared via the RefWorks sharing feature. Citations may be searched or browsed and downloaded, with links to the 133 that are freely available in full text.

Free access to the full text of publications
<http://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/101527>

This section in the University Digital Conservancy (UDC), the University of Minnesota's institutional repository running on DSpace, contains the full text of 123 of Dr. Gorham's publications.

Results

Before this project began only 25 of 198, or 13%, of Dr. Gorham's scholarly publications could be accessed electronically without charge. These were in periodicals that had digitized and made their older volumes openly available, or chapters in books published by non-profit groups. None of his 12 government documents were available online previous to the project. Now 115 or 58% of his 198 scholarly works are freely available in full text. See Tables 1 and 2 for a breakdown by type of document and type of publisher.

Table 1 - Type of document

Journal Article	145
Book Chapter	20
Conference Paper	18
Report	12
Book	2
Dissertation	1
Total	198

Table 2 - Type of publisher

Society	70
Commercial	65
Government	32
Non-profit	15
University	9
University Press	7
Total	198

One lesson we learned in obtaining copyright permissions from publishers is that persistence pays. Some publishers initially said no, or pointed to a policy that allowed the author's unedited manuscript (pre-print) to be posted. In these cases we responded that an exception was being requested, drawing particular attention to the fact that the manuscript was submitted perhaps 40 years ago, and it was doubtful that the author's pre-print was still available.

Some publishers that granted permission came back with a caveats or special requests. Several asked for a citation to the published article to be added to the notes field of the UDC, with a link to the journal's web site. Two declined to let the paper be scanned, but provided a free link to the copies on their sites.

The University of London, where Dr. Gorham got his PhD, scanned his dissertation for us free of charge after receiving a request directly from him. All other publishers accepted requests that librarians made on his behalf.

Requesting permission via RightsLink proved to be a bit problematic. Of the 16 articles that were processed that way, four remained "Pending" even after nine months and multiple attempts to contact the service and resubmit the requests.

Everyone involved in the project has been pleased with the use of the papers. Although they have been accessible via the UDC for just 22 months, the 123 resources available in full text have been downloaded over 1,700 times. One paper,

which is also Dr. Gorham's most cited publication, accounts for over 500 of the downloads ([Gorham 1991](#)).

Discussion

As with any experiment, the time and staff investment in the initial pilot was not insignificant. It would not be realistic to repeat the process if it took a similar amount of effort for subsequent faculty members. Fortunately this pilot led to the development of a process template that will greatly reduce the amount of effort and expense required to duplicate the process for other researchers, thus achieving one of Dr. Gorham's original goals.

A number of tasks undertaken in the original pilot could be done much more efficiently or eliminated altogether. In future projects, we recommend not spending time pursuing permission for books or book chapters that are currently available for sale. Some specific journal publishers that did not respond positively in this pilot could probably be skipped in future projects, although publishers' policies do evolve over time.

Since reports of similar projects were not identified at the outset, the path to completion led down a few blind alleys. Initially we thought it was important to have a plan for which publishers to approach first, but that did not prove useful. We started with a list of 30 broad subject terms assigned to the articles, to group the publications and enhance browsing, and we initially considered applying more specific terms as well. This idea was dropped when we realized many publications had full abstracts available. Search retrieval would thus not be enhanced much relative to the effort expended.

We have recently undertaken similar projects with two other Regents professors at the University of Minnesota. The fact that Dr. Gorham was a highly decorated researcher seemed to make a positive difference with some publishers, so we decided to repeat the process only with other distinguished faculty. Also, retired and soon-to-be-retired faculty members could follow this template process with a minimum of effort and expense. Many faculty members could carry this project out entirely by themselves, with the possible exception of the scanning component. That being said, working with a librarian would offer significant advantages for both faculty member and librarian. Faculty members would benefit from a librarian's expertise with institutional repositories and citation managers, and the also possibility of having student workers in the library carry out some of the tasks. Knowledge about controlled vocabularies, copyright, and scanning options are also strengths that most librarians possess.

For a librarian, the careful study of an individual researcher's publications results in a greater understanding of the literature of a discipline. Working to make these publications openly accessible provides a chance to advocate and take action on the front lines of open access. It is also worthwhile for the library to take any opportunity to help enhance the profile of faculty scholarship ([Canick 2013](#)).

In addition to freely available full text of his publications, Dr. Gorham wanted to have a complete list of his publications online in a format that was useful to other

researchers. That proved to be one of the most challenging aspects of the project. Since this was a pilot with limited grant funding, neither Dr. Gorham's department or college nor the library were willing to take on a project that would involve ongoing platform hosting and maintenance or multi-year support for subscription fees. These same factors eliminated the possibility of using a commercial product, had there been a suitable one to purchase. Customizing blog software was considered, and some investment of staff time was made exploring the RefWorks API as a solution. In the end RefWorks was selected. While it does not currently allow the amount of customization and branding that Dr. Gorham wanted, the search and download capabilities are very good and the data is "in the cloud" so local hosting and maintenance is not required.

An unknown factor that would impact the time it takes to complete this type of project is that different disciplines rely on significantly different types of publications. Some disciplines rely primarily on the journal literature, others on books and book chapters, and some on grey literature such as working papers, extension publications, and technical reports. We do not know whether the breakdown of types of Dr. Gorham's publications, listed in Table 1, is typical of ecologists in general. Since this breakdown varies a great deal among researchers in different disciplines, that will affect the percentage of works that might be made freely available in full text. Faculty in fields that rely heavily on books and book chapters might face a bigger challenge convincing publishers to make exceptions to copyright policies, as would faculty in disciplines that favor journals published by a few large commercial publishers. Book chapters, for example, proved to be the most challenging type of publication when trying to obtain permission to make the full text available, with success in only 5 of 19 cases. As mentioned earlier, a number of the books are still for sale, so the publishers have a case for denying permissions -- the potential loss of revenue.

Along with the challenges in this project there were unexpected positive outcomes. The original budget for the project was \$4,000, but only \$885 was spent, all for scanning, most of which was outsourced. With the increasing availability of digitizing equipment in an academic setting, we now estimate is that for less than \$100 of student staff time we could carry out the scanning and uploading for a similar project. A faculty member with access to scanning equipment could accomplish this with at no cost beyond the investment of time.

Other University units including Dr. Gorham's home department and the Regents professorship office have linked to both his list of publications and the full text documents in the UDC. The primary advantage is the work of this esteemed scholar is now much more widely accessible than in the past, thus contributing to the global progress of knowledge in his areas of expertise.

Acknowledgements. Thank you to Linda Eells for valuable consultation on the manuscript.

References

Canick, S. 2013. Library services for the self-interested law school: Enhancing the visibility of faculty scholarship. *Law Library Journal* 105(2):175-98.

Disclafani, C.B. and Hall R. 2012. Stop saying no: Start empowering copyright role models. *Journal of Library & Information Services in Distance Learning* 6(3):251-64.

Gorham, E. 1968. Journal coverage in the field of limnology. *Limnology and Oceanography* 13(2):366-9.

Gorham, E. 1991. Northern peatlands: Role in the carbon cycle and probable responses to climatic warming. *Ecological Applications* 1(2):182-95.

Jones, D.R. 2013. Locked collections: Copyright and the future of research support. *Law Library Journal* 105(4):425-60.

Puplett, D. 2010. The economists online subject repository--Using institutional repositories as the foundation for international open access growth. *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 16(S1):65-76.

[Previous](#)

[Contents](#)

[Next](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

