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Working with the Research Services Office

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Abstract

The Australian and New Zealand university sector presents numerous permutations in regards to how institutional repository (IR) managers work with their local research office. The repository may be managed by the research office, the library (common), the information technology (IT) section, central administration (rare) and either singly or in a mixture of the above. At the University of Wollongong (UOW), for example, the open access institutional repository was set up in 2005 with the assistance of funding from the Research Services Office (RSO). The UOW Library has, since 2006, managed the repository – branded Research Online (RO) - and the RSO has, in turn, managed the research management system (RIS). This process has worked relatively smoothly, though it is a complicated one which gives rises to questions such as: • How best does the library, with responsibility for the IR, work with the research office? • Why is collaboration between these units so important? • What can be done to ensure appropriate lines of communication are maintained between the library and research office?

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Introduction

The Australian and New Zealand university sector presents numerous permutations in regards to how institutional repository (IR) managers work with their local research office. The repository may be managed by the research office, the library (common), the information technology (IT) section, central administration (rare) and either singly or in a mixture of the above. At the University of Wollongong (UOW), for example, the open access institutional repository was set up in 2005 with the assistance of funding from the Research Services Office (RSO). The UOW Library has, since 2006, managed the repository – branded Research Online (RO) - and the RSO has, in turn, managed the research management system (RIS). This process has worked relatively smoothly, though it is a complicated one which gives rises to questions such as:

- How best does the library, with responsibility for the IR, work with the research office?
- Why is collaboration between these units so important?
- What can be done to ensure appropriate lines of communication are maintained between the library and research office?

First, a quick survey of the audience of approximately 80 participants:

1. How many of you are directly employed by the library? [Answer: majority c.70+.]
2. How many by the research office? [Answer: a few c.4.]
3. How many by IT section? [Answer: nil (one shared with the research office).]

The triumvirate of library / research office / IT section is usually responsible for management of research-related issues and infrastructure on campus. The academics do the research and those three units help them manage the process through its numerous life cycles. IT and the library support curriculum development and delivery; the research office supports the research grant and funding process; and members of all three administrative groups can, on occasion, be involved in the actual research process, in collaboration with academics. More importantly, professional staff are usually involved in the administration of research and related processes, such as grants, HERDC, ERA and other policy related matters.

Do all three units naturally work well together? The answer is a definite "Yes" and "No", or "Maybe", such is the complexity of the higher education environment and unique organisational cultures. Australian universities are noted for "doing their own thing" both as individual institutions and also within institutions, often on a faculty or major organisational unit basis. Working together is not always easy or a natural fit, as individual units have unique functions and goals. Both the library and research office are good examples of this. There may be overlaps in the tasks addressed, but at their core the role of the research office is to support the research process; whilst the role of the library is to provide access to information resources for students, staff and researchers. A pertinent example is the issue of ORCID implementation: this highlights some of these differences between the two units. Librarians and repository managers may see ORCID as a godsend – an answer to their long-standing issues around author disambiguation and authority control. This group is also driven by academic requests for help and from their own experiences in dealing with systems such as the internal research management system, the personnel system, and the external open access repository. The IT office sees ORCID implementation as another technological problem, and not a simple one at that, as it can have a major impact upon system design across a number of systems. The research office sees ORCID as something useful, though not necessarily imperative. It will help them identify local and affiliated researchers so that metrics can be compiled and be more accurate for reporting purposes, whether that be to government of university administrators.

This example is given not to criticise any specific sector, but to highlight the issues of difference and differentiation between the three units. Working with the IT office is usually straightforward and comes down to the issues of: Can it technically be done, and at what cost? However, with regards to the research office, the case needs to be put in a more holistic fashion. “Yes” or “no” it can or cannot be done is easy; the hard part comes in regards to whether we want to do it or not, and whether it is strategic and fits in with corporate plans and the like.

As an outsider looking in, the research office may appear to be focussed on supporting research i.e. getting research grants and ensuring probity and all associated commitments are fulfilled. However when the grant is over they are not necessarily focussed on chronicling the outputs. They are more likely looking towards the next round of grant funding applications or announcements. However the repository and library sectors often come in at this end point, seeking to manage, archive and promote research outcomes and outputs. Convincing the research office that this is vital is not always a simple task, however in recent times the term “research impact” has gained wider amongst funding bodies such as the Australian Research Council (ARC) and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). With it comes the realisation that there is more to managing research than just getting the money and spending it. The standing of the university, and its ability to continue to be well funded, is contingent upon impact and reputation, and this is where the research repository and library enter the scene.

The library assists academics with their research output – recommending high ranking journals in which to publish, assisting in archiving open access copies and also dealing with major databases such as Scopus and Web of Science to ensure that the research is visible and accessible to students and the scholarly community. The research repository adds to this by exposing the output to the world and to that large section of the research community that does not have access to password protected library databases. So the library and the repository are now players in the research space. IT does not necessarily have an issue with this, as it has numerous stakeholders and deals with issues as they exist. IT is critical to all stages, however it is mainly concerned with providing access to information, infrastructure and storage or implementation of software and systems. The research office however is not necessarily used to dealing closely with units such as the library and an externally managed repository. Links therefore need to be built, both personal and at the unit level.

Many of us have worked for a long time with the research office, on projects and processes such as ADT, HERDC and ERA. The issue here is also one of communication. At the University of Wollongong, the Library and RSO have developed a strong relationship based on trust and shared goals. Sharing information through formal and routine channels is important. Formal channels include involvement on committees and working groups led by the RSO, where the Library is recognised as a stakeholder (e.g. ORCID, UOW Scholars (VIVO), Research Data Management).

The UOW Library has been clear in differentiating roles and responsibilities in research support, including defining metrics reporting. The Library has taken on individual publication reporting, whilst the RSO and Information Management and Technological Services (IMTS) report on higher level performance data. The Library also provides advanced bibliometric reports – using tools such as JCR – to provide journal reports for strategic activities, such as Laureate and Centre of Excellence submissions. The RSO has sought data and advice from the Library on these latter exercises. The Library's Academic Outreach Team undertake front-facing liaison with researchers. Information they collect is used to inform and develop Library services, but relevant information is also shared with the RSO where this impacts upon their activities and planning.

The RSO oversees administration of theses for examination - submission, IP, patents, etc. – as well as providing services and advice on the subsequent research and commercial application of this work. The Library provides long-term archiving and access of completed theses. Archiving and access are just two of the roles that the Library contributes to research activities. Others include: metadata, authorities, curation, outreach, preservation, training, metrics, and an understanding of scholarly publishing. The RSO also has oversight and governance of government assessment exercises, institutional reporting and compliance. The RSO and Library are key collaborators in the HERDC process. The Library is a user of the system administered by the RSO to manage UOW research and also contributes to research data management, collection, HERDC and ERA verification and development of name authorities. The Library primarily deals with information, whilst the RSO deals with technical and administrative matters. As users, the Library offers ways for the research management system to be improved to enable efficiencies in the provision of research support services.

The RSO initially partnered with the Library to establish the repository in 2005, feeding government funding through to the Library to introduce the repository and support staff. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) oversees governance of the repository, though much of the activity is business as usual archiving research outputs and enhancing visibility. This was demonstrated through the call made to the institution by the DVCR three years ago to achieve 65% full text of HERDC in the repository. The IR is viewed by the senior executive as part of the research support infrastructure, though managed day-to-day by the Library. Strategic decisions about the IR are made by the Library and RSO in partnership, with the recognition that the RSO has higher level oversight of research system data flows and address issues of system interoperability.

The relationship between the Library and the RSO, like the relationship between any units on campus, can be competitive and at the same time collaborative and supportive. We all want to be seen as vital to the success of the organisation, and performing at the highest standard. It is therefore imperative that the Library and RSO work together where necessary, or desirable, both for individual unit benefit and the benefit of the university as a whole.

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