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IWU Archives Go Digital

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IWU Archives Go Digital

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Illinois Wesleyan University has created a digital repository for research and scholarly efforts of University students and faculty. Digital Commons@IWU (DC@IWU) is an online archive for documents created by administrative offices, departments and honors programs at Illinois Wesleyan.

A collaboration between The Ames Library staff, faculty members, library liaisons and students, this digital collection is at the forefront of liberal arts repositories, especially emphasizing the importance of showcasing student work. “The purpose of the repository is to promote faculty and student scholarship for long term access while creating a history of IWU scholarship over time,” said library technology administrator Suzanne Wilson. “We have placed more emphasis on student scholarship than most schools have.”

While promoting University scholarship, this digital initiative also aims to further long-term access so that the DC@IWU can be the central place for scholarly storage, research and exhibition.

Since its creation in January, the DC@IWU has become a landmark repository for liberal arts schools. “We were one of the first schools in Illinois to begin a repository,” said visiting archivist, special collections librarian and assistant professor Meg Miner. “Most repositories are part of large research schools, but for IWU, we have made our mark, especially highlighting student scholarship.”

DC@IWU commences Illinois Wesleyan’s part in a digital movement known as open access. Open access makes literature digital, online, free of charge and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions. The purpose is to provide literature and scholarly works to the world without an expectation of payment. “One of our main goals is to contribute to open access, not only on the academic level, but also on the tax-payer level as well,” said Miner.

DC@IWU is a central place for electronic content on campus, but it also allows for IWU work to be accessed by the public. “The host program used, Bepress, has a very good relationship with Google,” said Wilson. With the ability to appear on Google search results,

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IWU collections are more accessible to a wider audience. This allows IWU work to be more searchable, which in turn provides better research access and increases University publicity. Each search in the repository allows users to search within the IWU repository or across the network of repositories. It also searches entire PDF files to provide more accurate results.

Capitalizing on IWU's availability, the DC@IWU's relationship with Google can also be used as a recruitment tool. "When we have people from IWU recruiting students, wherever they are, they can access our scholarly output through DC@IWU as well as Google," said Wilson.

Because the content in the repository is public, DC@IWU also aims to educate students and faculty about their rights as creators so that authors can retain some if not all of their rights once their works are published. The library is working to address the tension felt by many libraries between providing access to resources the campus needs and paying for content created by IWU faculty. "The idea of not giving away all of your rights is tied into how IWU purchases journal and database subscriptions and also how information gets spread," said University librarian and professor Karen Schmidt. With an open access repository, people around the world can access scholarly works without cost.

There is no limit to how much work can be stored in the repository, but the selection process is rigid to ensure value. "It really matters to students that the pieces that end up on here are high quality; they really want this to represent strong scholarship and work they are truly proud of," said Schmidt. Student groups, faculty members and honors program have the option to add their work to the repository.

"It's a powerful thing to build a network of scholars sharing information on research regardless of ability to afford subscriptions to journals and/or databases," said digital and media initiatives librarian and assistant professor Stephanie Davis-Kahl.

For more information about DC@IWU, visit <http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu>.