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### From Digital Commons to Scholar Profiles: Implementing a New System to Raise College Academic Distinction

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# **From Digital Commons to Scholar Profiles: Implementing a New System to Raise College Academic Distinction**

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## **From Digital Commons to Scholar Profiles: Implementing a New System to Raise College Academic Distinction**

Institutional repositories, or digital archives, are a fundamental part of an academic institution in higher education. Saint Mary's institutional repository plays an integral role in supporting one of the goals in the College's Strategic Plan: "Raise the Academic Profile and Distinction." This case study describes the benefits and challenges of institutional repositories for small institutions, the launch of Saint Mary's Digital Commons, and the implementation of its new scholar profiles system. The Library is proud to be recognized for its expertise as the manager of the College's institutional repository and its new research information management system.

Keywords: institutional repositories, open access, scholar profiles, research information management systems, academic distinction, strategic plan

### **Introduction**

Institutional repositories are digital archives that collect, preserve, and disseminate the intellectual output affiliated with or owned by an institution. Clifford Lynch, the Director for the Coalition for Networked Information, defines his vision for an institutional repository:

...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. 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... a mature and fully realized institutional repository will contain the intellectual works of faculty and students--both research and teaching materials--and also documentation of the activities of the institution itself in the form of records of events and performance and of the ongoing intellectual life of the institution (Lynch 2003, p.2).

Lynch's statement still rings true today, but institutional repositories have also adopted new purposes. Not only the intellectual works of the institution (and its community) are preserved for posterity, the scholarship could now be accessible on open access platforms. Open Access (OA) refers to works that are digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions (Suber, 2015). As new open access tools such as arXiv (full-text repository), OAIster (catalogue of OA resources), Open Access Button and Unpaywall (browser-based extensions to facilitate OA discovery), and SHERPA/RoMEO (aggregators of publisher open access policies) become available, contents in the repositories are available on the open web in compliance with copyright and indexed by major search engines.

Institutional repositories are the most prevalent type of repository among the others (disciplinary, aggregating, and governmental). According to OpenDOAR (Directory of Open Access Repositories), there are 3767 (87%) institutional repositories worldwide out of 4345 open access repositories as of September 2019 (OpenDOAR, 2019). Institutional repositories that provide access to users outside of the institution are also known as open-access repositories. Within the open access categories, green open access is a version of self-archiving model, which is the practice of placing a version of

an author's manuscript into a repository, and making it freely accessible for everyone. An essential element of a sustainable institutional repository is green open access. The green open access "self-archiving" model is currently the recommended archival model for institutional repositories. The statistics in SHERPA/RoMEO shows that approximately 81% of publishers--out of 2560 publishers--formally allow some form of self-archiving of preprint or postprint of articles (SHERPA/RoMEO, 2019).

An institutional repository has become a fundamental part of an academic institution in higher education. The archival function of an institutional repository is not simply an end in itself but is often connected to the mission of the institution. At Saint Mary's College of California, the new institutional repository plays an integral role in supporting one of the goals in the College's Strategic Plan: "Raise the Academic Profile and Distinction." The College recognizes that an institutional repository would be an invaluable system to collect, organize, make accessible and provide impact metrics for the College's intellectual corpus and key administrative documents. In addition, the repository would be an effective tool to improve the prestige of the College by showcasing the scholarship of their community in an institutional repository that adopts the green open access model. This case study describes the launch of Saint Mary's Digital Commons and the implementation of its new scholar profiles system. The Library is proud to be recognized for its expertise as the manager of the College's institutional repository and its new research information management system.

## **Literature Review**

The purpose of the literature review is to explore the trends of institutional repositories, and how small academic institutions perceive the benefits and challenges of launching and implementing their own institutional repositories.

### *Trends of Institutional Repositories*

SPARC (the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition) and COAR (Confederation of Open Access Repositories) are two international pioneers that set the global trends of open access and digital repositories. SPARC's position paper "The Case for Institutional Repositories," and COAR's two subsequent reports "Next Generation Repositories Recommendations" and "Building a Sustainable Knowledge Commons" offer practical insights on the background, trends, and future of institutional repositories, especially on the role of institutional repositories in higher education.

In "The Case for Institutional Repositories: A SPARC Position Paper," Crow, the Senior Consultant of the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC), lists the four essential elements of an institutional repository: Institutionally defined; scholarly content; cumulative and perpetual; interoperability and open access (Crow, 2002). The interoperability or compatibility of an institutional repository, with both existing systems and potentially with future systems and digital collections, is a vital consideration for an institutional repository. By making their digital collections open access, institutional repositories become critical components in supporting the system of scholarly communication, advocating a new scholarly publishing paradigm, and demonstrating institutional visibility and prestige in academia and professional communities (Crow, 2002).

More than twenty years after SPARC's position paper "The Case for Institutional Repositories" was released, the Confederation of Open Access Repositories (COAR) published a report on the adoption of new technologies and protocols that enhance the function of repositories. While reaffirming the basic tenets and rationale of institutional repositories in SPARC's paper, the report amplifies the scholarly

communication aspect of institutional repositories, and recommends centering the efforts towards the “next generation repositories” on five principles: fair governance and distribution of resources, inclusiveness and diversity, public good, openness and accessibility, sustainability, and interoperability across repositories (COAR, 2017). COAR’s companion report “Building a Sustainable Knowledge Commons” builds on the “next generation repositories” and stresses the need to establish sustainable repositories or knowledge commons beyond open access by reassessing the institution’s existing allocation of resources, improving workflows and processes, and strengthening infrastructure, services, and network connections across the global research community (COAR, 2018).

### ***Benefits and Challenges for Small Institutions***

Implementing a new institutional repository for small colleges and universities has certain benefits and challenges. Many institutions which launched and maintained their institutional repositories successfully have become excellent case studies e.g. Eastern Illinois University, Valparaiso University, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Texas Tech University School of Law, and Roger Williams University, Rhode Island (Gonzales, 2018).

Weighing the pros and cons of an institutional repository for its parent institution is an important consideration during the planning process of creating a project plan. There are three noteworthy studies that provide a balanced analysis on the benefits and challenges of institutional repositories. Davis and Connolly (2007) explored the attitudes, motivations, and behaviors for non-participation in institutional repositories among faculty members in Cornell University. Cullen and Chawner (2011) highlighted the conflict between the traditional and alternative publishing models and

the benefits of Open Access. Sheret, Walker, Beach, and Zhang (2015) examined the future usefulness and relevancy of an institutional repository that better serves the Marshall University's mission and strengthen the partnership between the University and the library. While it is helpful to learn the broader survey and the growth of institutional repositories around the world in Cullen and Chawner (2011), case studies like Davis and Connolly (2007) and Sheret et al. (2015) that described the implementation of an institutional repository at its parent institution are particularly applicable to institutions that are new to the institutional repository scene.

For smaller institutions, institutional repositories can be an affordable long-term means to preserve scholarly research, university records and other institutional documents in digital format (Bruns, Knight-Davis, Corrigan, & Brantley, 2014; Davis & Connolly, 2007). A robust institutional repository increases visibility and access to faculty scholarship, encourages new and current research in academia, and directly contributes to the teaching, research, and learning mission of the institution (Davis & Connolly, 2007; Exline, 2016; Miller, 2017). On a larger scope, institutional repositories compete with traditional forms of publishing by serving as a platform for scholarly communication and participating in open research initiatives (Cullen & Chawner, 2011; Davis & Connolly, 2007). Furthermore, institutional repositories could be an effective marketing tool to increase the visibility and prestige of their parent institutions (Sheret, Walker, Beach, & Zhang, 2015).

Unlike large research institutions, smaller teaching-oriented universities and colleges often face certain difficulties and challenges in budgeting resources, recruiting participants, and sustaining their institutional repositories (Bull & Eden, 2014; Giesecke, 2011; Nykanen, 2011). There are a few reasons that lead to the general lack of faculty participation and interest. Some faculty members do not understand the



potential benefits of institutional repositories for their research (Wu, 2015), while others are not motivated by the incentives or prestige of institutional repositories and prefer to publish their works in traditional publishing venues (Cullen & Chawner, 2011). Some faculty members are also concerned about the potential plagiarism and copyright restrictions imposed by publishers. Many faculty members are also weary of the extra work and time involved on their part to deposit their research in their institutional repositories (Corbett, Ghaphery, Work, & Byrd, 2016; Burns, Lana, & Budd, 2013).

The trends, benefits, and challenges of institutional repositories in professional literature provide the foundational understanding of institutional repositories in academic institutions. In the realm of higher education, the purpose of a sustainable repository or knowledge commons is to promote scholarly communication services by create an open and fair system for sharing research contributions in a local, regional, national, or global network. As small and medium academic institutions assess the strengths and opportunities of the current and future state of their institutional repositories, they should set SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely) that align with the vision and mission of their parent institution.

### **Saint Mary's College Strategic Plan and Library Initiatives**

Saint Mary's College of California (SMC), a private college rooted in Liberal Arts, Catholic, and Lasallian traditions, launched its five-year Strategic Plan in 2015. The first strategic theme of the Plan, "Raise the Academic Profile and Distinction," is to be "nationally recognized for academic excellence." One key element in achieving academic excellence is to showcase faculty achievements and scholarship (Saint Mary's College of California, 2015). Under the direction of the Provost, and in collaboration with the Office of Research, the SMC Library embarked on a two-part initiative to

highlight the impact and quality of faculty teaching, their extensive scholarship, and dedicated service to the College. The first part of the plan is to implement Plum Analytics, an alternative metrics tool for measuring the impact of faculty scholarship, creative works, and community engagement. The second part of the plan is to build an institutional repository enabling faculty scholarship to be documented, collected, and preserved properly. The Plum Analytics project was implemented in 2014-2015 (Wong & Vital, 2017). Saint Mary's institutional repository (aka Digital Commons) was launched in spring 2017, while the new Scholar Profiles went live in fall 2019.

## **Digital Commons: Publishing Campus Publications and Tracking Faculty Output**

### ***Methods and Implementation***

In December 2016, the Library made a case to the SMC campus stakeholders (top-level administrators, directors, and faculty members) that institutional repositories should be part of the College Strategic Plan to increase scholarly output, demonstrate the impact of academic scholarship, and raise the distinction, visibility, and prestige of SMC among its peer institutions. DSpace and Digital Commons are the most common and affordable IR software platform for smaller institutions (Wang, 2011; Tzoc, 2016). SMC needs an affordable institutional repositories software platform that emphasizes extensibility and flexibility (Simons & Richardson, 2013). The Library was tasked to compare various open-source and commercial institutional repositories software (Digital Commons, CONTENTdm, DSpace, EPrints) based on relevant factors like cost, services, support, reporting, design, system interoperability, authentication, accessibility, content discoverability, and preservation (Gonzales, 2018; UNESCO, 2014), before signing on with bepress's Digital Commons.

After nine months of planning and setup, Saint Mary's Digital Commons was launched in spring 2017. The purpose of SMC Digital Commons is to “collect, organize, make accessible and provide impact metrics for the College's intellectual corpus and key administrative documents.” The institutional repository aligns with two goals in Saint Mary's College's Strategic Plan:

- Goal 1: Raise the Academic Profile and Distinction. By providing worldwide discoverability for scholarly and creative work of SMC faculty and students, the Digital Commons will support the College's goal of being “nationally recognized for academic excellence.”
- Goal 6: Ensure Saint Mary's Financial Stability. As an efficient, cost-effective publication and access platform for administrative documents, Digital Commons “optimizes quality” while ensuring “disciplined cost management.” (SMC Digital Commons Working Group, 2017)

### ***Results***

The contents of the SMC Digital Commons have grown holistically since its inception. As of this writing, the Digital Commons houses the following collections: EPiCHE (an open access journal), community handbooks, course catalogs, campus newspapers, bulletins, SMC Magazines, and High School Librarian Workshops (Saint Mary's Digital Commons, 2019). In terms of faculty scholarship, the Library has elected not to add full text content during the initial launch. Instead, the Library focused on adding metadata and citations of faculty scholarship of all types (publications, presentations, honors, awards, and grants) from past decade to present. The Office of Research will be relying on Digital Commons to keep track of SMC faculty scholarship, and to use Digital Commons to produce reports on annual faculty research, scholarship,

and creative activities.

## **Scholar Profiles: Highlighting Faculty Expertise and Enhancing College Distinction**

### ***Methods and Implementation***

The SMC subscription bundle with bepress includes Digital Commons and Expert Gallery Suite. When SMC adopted Digital Commons, the College had already planned to use Expert Gallery Suite as the College's new Research Information Management System (also known as Current Research Information System) to increase the visibility of faculty scholarship, teaching, and service (Givens, 2016). The Expert Gallery Suite has three components: Expert Galleries, Scholar Profiles, and Impact Dashboard (bepress, 2019). Expert Galleries showcase groups of Scholar Profiles that could be embedded into any websites.

The faculty profiles migration project from SMC website to bepress Scholar Profiles commenced in January 2019. The old SMC faculty profiles were static web pages that were difficult to update and there was no reporting capability. bepress Scholar Profiles are built to integrate Digital Commons with portfolios that are optimised for search engines and discovery systems. These professionally designed portfolios highlight faculty professional experience and scholarship beautifully. The portfolios also include a dashboard for authors to track the impact of their work with detailed analytics.

The migration project was implemented in three phases. The old SMC faculty profiles were published on a home-grown platform where there was no batch export capability. During the first phase (January-March), all 500 profiles were divided among

all subject librarians. The team populated the Scholar Profiles by copying and pasting faculty biographical details from the old platform to the new system. After the scholarship information (such as publications, presentations, awards, and grants) were reviewed by librarians, the citations were added to spreadsheets for batch upload into Digital Commons. In the second phase (March-May) the Digital Commons technical staff uploaded the spreadsheets into Digital Commons and ran reports to review for errors. During the third phase (May - August), after subject librarians participated in training as Scholar Profiles administrators, they imported works from Digital Commons into the scholar profiles, and conducted a final review before making the profiles live.

### ***Results***

The new Scholar Profiles debuted on New Faculty Orientation Day in August 2019. The Library created a LibGuide and conducted multiple training sessions for faculty and administrators. The new Scholar Profiles generated a lot of excitement among SMC faculty members who were impressed by the layout, organization, and presentation in their new Profiles. Despite some criticisms that the new Scholar Profiles are visually confusing and less intuitive than the old interface, faculty generally appreciated that the subject librarians are managing their scholar profiles to make sure that the scholarship in their profiles are up to date.

### **Discussion**

#### ***Going Forward with the New Systems***

Saint Mary's College uses Digital Commons to track all SMC faculty scholarship, much of which is displayed in the Scholar Profiles. Most of the works in Digital Commons are metadata-only records, which were exported to Scholar Profiles in

the current workflow. The integration between Digital Commons and Scholar Profiles certainly still has some room for improvement. The Library is not currently using Digital Commons in a typical manner by including metadata-only records in the repository. Hopefully Scholar Profiles will be enhanced to display metrics and run inventory reports on the works in the future, so the Library could just use Scholar Profiles to manage the citations, and Digital Commons as a full-text, open access repository. The Digital Commons team is currently assessing existing workflow and staffing for the next new projects. For example, the Library plans to expand the collection beyond faculty publications to include works by staff and students, and apply various meaningful analytics in Digital Commons and Scholar Profiles (Duranceau & Kriegsman, 2013; Bruns & Inefuku, 2016).

Due to the recent trends of Open Access (OA) and Open Educational Resources (OER) in higher education, institutional repositories have become more important than ever. The SMC Library has adopted OA and OER initiatives as part of the Library's strategic plan. The Library's OA/OER Committee is exploring common best practices to implement OA and OER using our institutional repository, drafting an OA policy, creating a targeted outreach plan to engage in conversations with faculty and administrators on the values of OA and OER, and seeking funding to establish OA and OER incentives (Duranceau & Kriegsman, 2016; Wesolek & Royster, 2016; Scherer, 2016).

### *Strategies for Success*

Despite the challenges in resources and recruitment, many universities and colleges employ effective strategies to implement and maintain successful institutional repositories. It is important to align the goals of one's institutional repository with their

institutional strategic plan. Selection criteria, collection scope, and workflow guidelines should be established based on the industry's best practices. Given their expertise on organizing scholarly work and archival materials, it is no surprise that libraries often bear the primary responsibility as the manager of the institutional repository. Smaller institutions struggling with funding and staffing need to be creative in repurposing staffing while balancing an efficient workload between the institutional repositories and other responsibilities (Miner & Davis-Kahl, 2012; Simons & Richardson, 2013). A good relationship with campus stakeholders would be beneficial as the library conducts targeted outreach to specific departments (Miller, 2017; Scherer, 2016), and identifies potential collaborators and champions for the institutional repository (Bull & Eden, 2014; Chant, 2016; Giesecke, 2011; Sheret et al., 2015). Distributing pertinent information and resources about authors' rights, research life cycle in scholarly publishing, and open access principles at the right opportunity would also help to recruit support and participation from faculty, staff, and administrators (Davis-Kahl, Fishel, & Hansley, 2014). Last but not least, sustainable institutional repositories should be promoted as a part of the library services for those who are in need of consultation in the areas of copyright, data management, open research, and archiving (Bull & Eden, 2014; Luther, 2018; Sheret et al., 2015).

This case study would speak to small and medium academic libraries that are exploring the potential opportunities and challenges in launching and managing an institutional repository: from selecting software/platform, accessing budget and staffing, to implementing and maintaining the repository. In the case of Saint Mary's College, the benefits of building a centralized digital repository of faculty scholarship and raising the academic distinction of SMC among its peer institutions outweigh the budgetary costs in labor and time. The purpose and value of an institutional repository should align

with mission and the strategic plan of the parent institution. The institutional repository has the greatest chance at success when there is a majority of buy-in from campus stakeholders in administration and grassroots community.

## **Conclusion**

The definition of a successful repository has evolved over time. During the initial development of institutional repositories, a successful repository was seen as an “OAIS [Open Archival Information System] that functions in a reliable and trustworthy manner” (Thibodeau, 2007, introduction). While usage, location of visitors, number of items, number of participating faculty/campus units, and social media engagement remain the standard reporting metrics (Bruns & Inefuku, 2016; Holmberg, Haustein, & Beucke, 2016), additional benchmarks such as content recruitment, services, sustainable funding, and user acceptance are also recognized as critical success factors of repositories (Lagzian, Abrizah, & Wee, 2015).

Launching the Saint Mary’s Digital Commons and Scholar Profiles is one of the first steps in library initiatives towards achieving the goals in the College’s Strategic Plan. The library will continue to develop effective strategies to recruit content and manage records in the institutional repository and scholar profiles, and the integration between the two. In the current planning for the new College Strategic Plan 2020-2025, the Library needs to demonstrate the value of library initiatives in terms of transparency and accountability. The Library needs to identify and assess the key performance indicators to measure the success of Digital Commons and Scholar Profiles on an institutional level. It is crucial for the Library to continue to collaborate with campus stakeholders in order to ensure the sustainability and return on investment of these two systems.



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