Not Just the Means to an End: Repositories, Marketing, and Development

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Introduction

Academic libraries continue to expand their use of institutional repositories. Awareness of institutional repositories and their benefits for the institution, faculty, and students has grown over the past several years. These repositories are known as useful and effective tools for increasing visibility of the research and academic output of higher education institutions.

University or college admissions, marketing and communications, and development offices are constantly working to create visible and targeted messaging that will attract students, faculty, and donors. These offices use the stories and experiences of the students and faculty to create these unique and effective messages.

This paper explores the use of the institutional repository as a tool for marketing and communications and other offices to provide the increased visibility for the research and academic output of St. Catherine University (St. Kate's). An exploration of higher education and institutional repository literature reveals that a case can be made for sustaining a relationship between outwardly facing departments and the library. At St. Catherine University the institutional repository was used to create content about the research and the research experience of faculty and students during a student-faculty collaborative research program, the Summer Scholars program.

Literature Review

The higher education literature shows that admission offices use information and publicity about collaborative research programs for successful student recruitment. From the Council of Undergraduate Research there are several examples of using collaborative research as a recruitment strategy. At the Kapiʻolani Community College there are student research teams that participate in international events. The media coverage as well as the presence of the college at the events is viewed as a form of marketing.[1]

Some admissions offices have incorporated the projects into their office environment as is the case at Unity College. Their marine biology major is used as a marketing tool at Unity College because of the experiential education through the program and the heavy research focus of students in the program. The admissions office has put a fish tank into their space as a talking point for prospective students.[2]

Another side of higher education literature focuses on the factors involved in college choice. Perhaps not necessary to state, but the academic and scholarly reputation of an institution is one of the key factors for prospective students. There needs to be a connection made for the student from the choice that they make for college and the subsequent degree and what that degree will provide for them as they move forward in life.[3]

The literature and data show that institutional repositories increase the visibility of research. They provide this visibility in several ways. Because they are open access they provide access to research not previously available to a wide array of researchers. Historically, scholarship has for the most part been disseminated through subscriptions to journals and databases of journal literature.

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The research on the visibility of research through institutional repositories shows that the increase is dramatic and positive. It has been discussed that the increase in research disseminated by an institution increases the academic standing and perceived rigor of said institution. Michael Robinson performed a study at the Hong Kong Institute of Education to determine if the institutional repository increased the visibility of the research at the institution. In his findings he states, "that the making available of academic research through this means can have an immediate impact on making research more visible.[4]" And a very important note is also that this occurred with little to no intentional marketing of the new repository.

The combination of the higher education and institutional repository literature leads to the conclusion that the content of institutional repositories could be used to help market a higher education institution effectively. Because of the focus on research and because it is a unique hands-on exploration of St. Catherine University student and faculty research there is potential for provision of content to be used by many of the offices and departments for external communications.

Objective

This project is designed to use the features of an institutional repository, particularly the ability to increase visibility of the research and content within it, for presenting stories of successful collaborative research experiences at St. Catherine University. As the literature shows, collaborative research, as well as the academic rigor of an institution, can make a difference in the decisions of prospective students.

In conjunction with offices responsible for the messaging of the University, research experience stories were collected and stored in St. Kate's Libraries institutional repository (known as Sophia)for increased visibility through the Web. The Summer Scholars program, one of the undergraduate collaborative research programs at the University, provided a small group of faculty and students from which to gather information and stories. These stories could easily be used to attract and retain students and faculty, as well as attract and retain donors for the program. The goal became to make these stories and experiences easily available through a web page designed for Summer Scholars by linking to the stories in the institutional repository.

Background

In the summer of 2010 the director of our Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) approached the library to create a visual showcase of the research experiences of some of our undergraduate students. She was aware of our recent implementation of Digital Commons, the institutional repository program from Berkeley Electronic Press and wanted to take advantage of its capabilities for her department's efforts. The software provided an infrastructure that created organization and templates for metadata and provided a more departmentally controlled environment than the University website at the time. While the system is robust it still presented a challenge for creating a series of stories about research experiences, particularly as the goal was to create something visual rather than a listing of project titles.

A student employee from ORSP worked with the institutional repository manager to determine the visual appearance of the showcase of research experience stories which would appear in an area of Sophia called the Student Research Experience. The gallery module, a structure within Digital Commons used to present and describe visual objects, was chosen to allow for a picture to be the connection to the students and their stories through the Student Research Experience. Users selecting a picture would see additional information in a detailed record, including a title and abstract of the research project along with the collaborators. The two primary parts of the record were the photograph of the student and the narrative of their experience.

Establishing a connection between all of the collaborators and the research product using embedded links in the descriptions was very intentional. The goal was to enable linking to all of the work by any of the collaborators, to their own stories about the research experience, and to the final product of the collaborative research. This would create a complete picture of the project, both the research activities, and the successful experience of the student and faculty. This could then be used for the development and marketing of the program to outside donors and prospective students. The story of the research process would also be displayed through this circular route while telling the stories of the faculty and students.

The first showcase provided a framework for the new, more intentional and sustainable group of experiences and research being pursued for the Summer

Scholars program. There was also a need to move toward coordinating these efforts with the Office of Marketing and Communications and away from presenting the stories outside of the larger context of the University and their messaging.

During 2012, the staff in the Office of Marketing and Communications became familiar with the institutional repository and began to develop strategies for incorporating repository content into the web plan of the university. Ideas for ways to use Sophia beyond the traditional repository continued to develop with a primary goal of providing access to the research and experiences of the Summer Scholars students and faculty to the donors and potential donors who support this program, as well as to prospective students. This quickly grew into a larger project of using the institutional repository as a vehicle for telling the story for more purposes including admissions and marketing and communications of the institution.

Project

This project highlights the student-faculty collaborative research and the experience using an institutional repository. It focused on the experience story piece and uses the repository as a tool for making those stories widely available. The Summer Scholars program provided an existing and predetermined group of students and faculty from which to draw experiences. The defined group and short time frame of the program provided a benefit to using this program for extending and restructuring the existing student research experiences within the institutional repository, Sophia.

The library had started conversations with the director of undergraduate collaborative research to integrate the Summer Scholars program into the repository in spring 2012. After investigating the capabilities and goals of the repository the director of undergraduate collaborative research agreed that expanding the role of the repository would be beneficial for the Summer Scholars program and the institution, particularly in reaching out to perspective students and donors. They had already been reaching out to perspective students through admissions events, and this would provide another venue.

The director provided access to the faculty-student teams and approval for highlighting the project. Marketing and Communications provided input about how best to present the information. Through

conversation as well as decisions to highlight the Summer Scholars program through a unique web page within the University's website, the organization of the Student Research Experience showcase began to take shape.

At this point, the existing Student Research Experience was re-evaluated for how it was structured, and whether it should remain more visually focused or provide more text-driven access. These discussions occurred with Marketing and Communications staff as well as the directors of the undergraduate collaborative research and ORSP.

Infrastructure

The structures, capabilities, and restraints of the Digital Commons system were evaluated and analyzed for the re-creation of the Student Research Experience. These discussions included database structure, tags, and the various ways in which the data and content might need to be organized to support the different departments and messages of St. Kate's. This evaluation took into consideration not only the needs of the Summer Scholars Program, but those of the entire institution as it moved forward with using the repository as a tool for outward communication.

The structure and hierarchy of the repository and the infrastructure of Digital Commons was of great import since the organization of the content needed to be accessible and effective for all of the departments using the content. One scenario used to discuss the abilities and restraints of the current structure was the need for ORSP to be able to identify all research sponsored by a particular funding body. Other scenarios included finding all the research that was done during the Summer Scholars program or by the faculty of a department. There had been a hierarchical structure put into place two years earlier when the system was first implemented, but through the growth and development of the repository, this initial structure needed reviewed. The highest level in the hierarchy is 'communities'. Communities were based on the type of content (graduate research, faculty research), departments and schools, events and conferences, and non-academic offices. Communities did not contain any publications, but provided the structure for the series of publications at the next level of the hierarchy.

The publication series contain the content of the repository. These included the research documents by departmental faculty or students. For example,

the faculty research of the art department was one series under the School of Arts and Humanities community. The graduate student research was a series in the Nursing Department and housed in the School of Health community. There were also a few conferences and events that had content as well as the Student Research Experience and grant showcases in Office or Research and Sponsored Programs community.

This structure was evaluated within the context of how users would be looking for content in relation to how and why the institution wants to present the content of the repository to users. Three primary methods for content discovery were identified: web search engines, University websites directly linked to series of content in the repository, and users searching within the repository for specific content.

Digital Commons allows repository administrators to add publications to series throughout the repository by using the collection tool. This enables the creation of virtual collections from existing content. The collection tool uses a query of metadata fields of any or all series within the repository to collect like objects together in an existing series. This allowed for the creation of a graduate research series through the collection of all the graduate research across the repository without duplicating the document. This tool was selected to create these sets of content sought after for promotion.

Since the hierarchy of the schools and departments was already in place and a consistent and sensible structure existed it was decided to use the collection tool as needed to create the new series of content for messaging and marketing purposes.

Metadata and Templates

To use the collection tool, it was necessary to develop a standard set of metadata fields and vocabulary for all content ingested into the repository. This was developed with input from the Office of Marketing and Communications and the directors of ORSP and Undergraduate Collaborative Research. Feedback was obtained from other sources as appropriate to ensure that the fields and organization was user friendly and effective for the needs identified.

For each series of the repository, an ingestion metadata submission form can be customized. Fields can be renamed, added, deleted, made required, have drop-down selections identified, become free text input, or multiple choice. This allowed for great flexibility in describing the content being ingested. For this project we identified the fields that needed to be added. A subject category field, determined and created by Digital Commons, already existed.

Two additional fields had recently been added to help with departmental identification of research in the repository. An Academic Department field which listed all of the academic departments in a drop down box was added. A Department/School field had also recently been added to identify all academic disciplines (not just departments), administrative offices and departments, and the centers and institutes of the University. These two recently added fields addressed most of the needs of gathering content into the groupings that were desired.

There would also be fields added for funding agent or development fund, University program sponsoring the research, as well as other relevant fields to address the different needs of various departments as well as the marketing pieces for the website and web engine searching. These fields provided for the creation of series collecting similar content using the collection tool.

Within the literature about higher education marketing, it is clear that the message needs to be provided to prospective students. So, while determining metadata fields as well as the structure to house the research and/or research experiences, the literature and the university's goals needed to be considered. The decisions made about the Summer Scholars Program would need to be done in a broader context to ensure similar programs could fit into the organizational policy decided upon. Within this broader context and through re-examining how and why the University wants access to the resources it was decided that the programs such as this would be placed within the department, whether academic or non-academic, that supported or sponsored the program. The Summer Scholars program was supported through the School of Humanities, Arts and Sciences and so would be a series within the School. However, the structural hierarchy would have little effect on the access since the access would primarily be created through links outside the repository on other University web pages. The Summer Scholars website would link directly to the student or faculty or to the entire selection of research or research experiences for the program. As needs changed the links on the website could be updated to ensure the correct message was provided, but the content would remain consistent.

Next Steps

After the Student Research Experiences are fully developed and ingested in the institutional repository and the links created through the University portals, the access to these resources will be analyzed. Work with other departments across campus will continue through spring and summer of 2013 to provide awareness of this content and to determine how best to incorporate access to it on their websites.

Further Student Research Experiences will also be added from different programs and colleges within the University to continue telling the St. Kate's story. The Office of Admissions and Marketing and Communications will be involved in determining priorities for programs and departments to focus on growing in the repository.

Conclusion

The development of an institutional repository to be used for marketing or development is a new area that is supported by the literature from higher education as well as institutional repository literature. The content that higher education literature identifies as a factor for college choice already exists in the institutional repositories of our colleges and universities. The decision to intentionally involve marketing and communications departments in the growth, development, and organization of the institutional repository makes sense and helps to create a repository at St. Catherine University that is responsive to the needs of not only academic departments but the vital non-academic departments of the university as well.

Notes

1. Keoki Y. Noji, "Marketing and Recruiting through Undergraduate Research Teams," 32 (2011):16.
2. Emma Creaser and Alisa Johnson, "Undergraduate Research: A Key Marketing Tool for a Small Undergraduate Institution," 32(2011): 46.3
3. Eric Anctil, "Recommendations for Selling Higher Education," *ASHE Higher Education Report* 34(2008): 89.4
4. Michael Robinson, "Promoting the Visibility of Educational Research through an Institutional Repository," Serials Review 35(2009): 137.

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