

Building an Institutional Repository in Hard Times

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This poster presents an overview of an exploratory research initiative to examine and assess the viability of development of an institutional repository system at a teaching-oriented four-year university with minimal monetary commitment. A need has been identified for an institutional repository and necessary steps have been taken to implement it. Several departments worked together to create a prototype Institutional Repository using DSpace, an open source repository software. This poster focuses on the steps taken to set up and the plans to maintain a quality Institutional Repository at Valdosta State University without placing a large demand on the institutions resources.

Introduction

Institutional repositories (IRs) provide a potential solution for creators of digital content to ensure the proper long-term stewardship of their creations. However, some institutions have been hesitant to implement IRs because of fears that it would be too expensive to maintain and most universities with IR programs as of 2005 tended to be large research-oriented universities with extensive funding for their repositories (Lippincott & Lynch, 2005). According to the Registry of Open Access Repositories (ROAR) which monitors overall growth of IRs worldwide, majority (over 60%) of IRs are still belong to research-oriented institutions (Brody, 2009). However, as the IR technologies mature and their value and impact are better understood, institutions with limited resources capitalize on their benefits and build their IR programs (Mueller, Shellhase, & Wrenn, 2009). This paper provides an overview of efforts and experiences of a group of faculty and students to implement an IR with limited resources at Valdosta State University to enhance its information environment.

Overview of the Institution

The Valdosta State University (VSU) is a regional library in South Georgia and is part of the University System of Georgia. About 11,000 students (spring 2009)

are enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs in the university.

Informal conversations with the library staff and MLIS faculty, lack of standards-based and reliable means to preserve and disseminate the VSU community's intellectual output including theses and dissertations, and challenges (e.g., loss of scholarly materials) posed by the VSU's migration to new web publishing platform revealed the need for such a system. The VSU digital repository (Vtext) (<http://vtext.valdosta.edu>) is developed as a pilot project to create a system to centralize, present, and preserve the intellectual output of our scholars and students in ways not currently supported by traditional library and publication models.

The need for an IR at VSU was first recognized in early 2007 and a pilot project was initiated by the University Archives and Special Collections, Automated Systems, and the Master of Library and Information Science Program. Knowing that any funding for such a project was limited, an open source solution was chosen as a way to move forward with the project. The open source program DSpace provided the software necessary for VSU's IR project. This was a logical step, as DSpace is an unofficial standard platform for IRs across the University System of Georgia.

The project at VSU has taken certain steps to implement the repository that can serve as a model to other institutions with similar characteristics. The process began by identifying willing parties within the library and evaluating how their skills could be best applied to the project. Next, the current web presence of digital content created by faculty and students was surveyed to identify candidate materials that could be used in the repository. Candidate materials for a repository were found in a number of faculty and departmental homepages and in student theses and dissertations. Because Valdosta State is not a large research institution, teaching materials were also identified as a potential source of content. Since the existing copyright release statement used for theses and dissertations did not address dissemination of such materials online, a new voluntary electronic thesis and dissertation copyright release form has been developed and the Graduate School has agreed to distribute this form to graduating students.

The next step in the project was to find the server space to host the repository. The Automated Systems unit provided a web space to install and experiment with DSpace software and technical support for the software. The project experimented with different work flows for uploading material that would prove most efficient for future content submission.

To further streamline the appearance and workflow process of DSpace, the Manakin interface (XMLUI) is set as the default interface to edit the look and feel of DSpace and personalize it to the institution's needs. Manakin uses Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) to customize the DSpace interface. In addition to providing a more appealing interface than DSpace's native interface (JSPUI), the Manakin interface spells out error messages if there are any inconsistencies in metadata fields and workflows, for example. A staff member with extensive CSS experience from the library's Automated Systems unit volunteered to learn and edit the Manakin interface to fit in with the university's existing web presence and guidelines. Though there are quick start guides available (Donohue, Phillips, & Salo, 2007) for an average user to customize JSPUI and XMLUI, the learning curve for XMLUI was steeper than for JSPUI.

The next step was to set policies and procedures for the repository. The project needed to set metadata guidelines, file types controls, and copyright controls. It should be noted that policy development can potentially be one of the more time consuming steps in setting up a repository. However, the Vtext team has chosen to save time by surveying other policies and adapting them where appropriate. Already, VSU has received permission to adapt existing policies from other established repositories such as at Georgia Tech and at the University of Texas at Austin.

There has been one notable cost associated with DSpace. Providing a persistent identifier to DSpace content requires a subscription to Handle, a system for provide unique persistent identifiers for online resources. A persistent identifier is essential for a successful IR because it ensures that the material can always be found using the same URL despite server changes, installation updates, and other routine repository upkeep.

Though developing an IR program may seem relatively cheap and easy to implement at minimal cost, sustaining such a program on a shoestring budget in terms of keeping the community engaged and maintaining institutional support are key to the success of an IR program. The project team plans for the future focus on a minimal cost approach to maintain VSU's IR. Plans are in place to use volunteers and interns to upload faculty and student content so there will be even more incentives for creators to deposit their materials in the repository. Though a release form for theses and dissertations exists, it has not been standardized and plans are in place to submit a standardized form to the Graduate School for students to submit with their theses and dissertations

electronically. A faculty outreach program in spring 2009 will be initiated to raise awareness about the repository and inform faculty and students about hosting and making their scholarly works available to the public through Vtext. The primary focus for future goals is on ensuring that faculty members have as much incentive as possible to upload material to the repository and that the uploading process is easy enough to keep contributions coming. The Vtext is also participating in the GALILEO Knowledge Repository (GKR), which is a program created to promote and enhance IR initiatives across the University System of Georgia institutions.

Conclusions

The results of the preliminary efforts to develop an IR program at VSU on a limited budget have been promising. With little required funding, the project has set up an IR community. The project plans to continue to expand, with the ultimate goal of implementing a sustainable IR for the university.

The project to create a sustainable IR at VSU serves as an example of how an institution can create a repository despite limited resources. By using open source software, working with existing employees, and benchmarking, the goal of a sustainable repository for a medium to small sized institution is a plausible one.

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