

Institutional Repositories

By Joyce Rumery

Institutional repositories are online services that allow a library staff to help promote the intellectual work of their institution or community. The services also allow for the management and preservation of materials, including items from special collections. Repositories have been available for more than a decade at universities and colleges and have often been the collaboration of partnerships on a campus to create and populate the repository.

Fogler Library staff had long been interested in acquiring a repository for the university. The options for a repository when it was first considered were largely open-source solutions. One example is DSpace created by MIT. Open-source solutions can be resource heavy in the staffing needed to set up and manage the repository. We were looking for a service that we could implement, but one for which we would not need to devote hours of staff time. We found the Digital Commons by bepress to be the answer. As we explored

the acquisition of this service, we hoped to bring it to all University of Maine System libraries. This was unsuccessful, but we moved forward in setting up our own repository at the University of Maine. We were able to purchase the Digital Commons services through funding from the Office of the Senior Vice President and Provost, the College of Education and Human Development, the Honors College, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the Division of Lifelong Learning as well as our own budget.

We believed that the Digital Commons would contribute to the university's tripartite mission of teaching, research, and public service. It would improve collection of, and access to, the intellectual work of the university and would showcase scholarly, educational, and creative works to prospective students, collaborators, donors, and alumni. Materials would be searchable and downloaded worldwide from the Digital Commons site, or through Google and other web-based discovery tools. It would also maintain a secure space for the material. In addition we expected that Digital Commons would provide a venue for discovering new collaborations and would foster exploration in multiple disciplines.

We wanted to focus on faculty research and to get us started we used a service from the Digital Commons called Kickstart. This service, just as it sounds, gives a new repository a way to quickly add faculty research. The library staff identified departments, and the bepress staff added faculty articles to the repository. Although each college at the university has its own home page on the university's web site and each department has faculty pages, adding material to the repository provides for more access. The Digital Commons uses an algorithm that makes the material within the repository appear high in Google searches. The decentralized approach of departmental web pages does not offer a prospective student, employee, donor, or alumni the ability to see the entirety of the intellectual output. It is even difficult for individuals in colleges to be aware of the work of colleagues.

The main purpose of the repository at the university is to highlight the work of the faculty, but we have also pursued other collections. Some of these collections are from Special Collections at the library and other areas. Adding these has helped the staff learn

How Do Users Access Content in Digital Commons?

Many users will come upon articles or other materials on Digital Commons sites through searches on Google or other search engines. Authors and others may provide direct links to works on their own web sites or in course syllabi or other materials. Each Digital Commons site has a front page that allows users to browse by various categories (e.g., journals, theses, research unit, department, or center). On the front page and all other pages, there is a search box where the user can put keywords or author names, with a choice to search in that repository or to search in all repositories. Searching all repositories opens the search to finding material at all institutions that have Digital Commons.

about the process for including material in Digital Commons. Early on, we also made the decision to have a decentralized approach to adding materials. We knew the library staff could not handle all the work that might come from faculty and our own collections without being a bottleneck to building the repository. We, therefore, worked on training university staff so they could add their own content. We worked with the bepress staff so they knew we were decentralizing, and we allowed university staff outside the library to work directly with bepress on their own content. We believe this has made for a more responsive repository and a feeling of ownership for the campus. It has also given us an interesting mix of collections at this early stage.

Digital Commons at the University of Maine, at almost two years old, is still young. Although fewer than 5,500 materials have been added to date (April 2013), they have been downloaded more than 128,000 times. It now has four journals (including *Maine Policy Review*), one of which will be published only within the Digital Commons; a song and story sampler from the Maine Folklife Center; Honors College theses; a poster gallery from Fogler Library; collections of photos from Special Collections; Maine town reports; graduate dissertations and theses; diaries; and publications of the Maine Agricultural and Experiment Station. These collections, along with the faculty materials, create a distinctive collection for the University of Maine. Our goal and the future of the repository at the university is to continue to promote the repository, train and help users to upload their materials, and to make it a part of the campus that benefits all departments and units.

The University of Maine was not the first institution to work with Digital Commons in Maine. Bowdoin, Bates, and Colby colleges have been using Digital Commons for their collections. After the University of Maine acquired Digital Commons, the University of New England and the University of Southern Maine purchased it. One exciting development was the acquisition of Digital Commons by the Bangor Public Library, the Maine State Library, and Portland Public Library.¹ These three libraries were the first public and state libraries in the country to acquire Digital Commons. Libraries are using it to promote their communities and collections, with the hope that

materials will get more use and visibility. In the case of the Maine State Library, it will be used to help disseminate material from state agencies. This is an exciting time for Maine. These repositories will make more material available to the public and to their institutions than was possible in the past. We expect that the value will grow and evolve as content is added. 🐼

ENDNOTES

1. Below are links to the Digital Commons sites currently available in Maine. The University of Southern Maine and University of New England are in the early stages of development and do not yet have live web links.

University of Maine — <http://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/>

Bates College <http://scarab.bates.edu/>

Bowdoin College — <http://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/>

Colby College — <http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/>

Bangor Public Library — <http://digicom.bpl.lib.me.us/>

Portland Public Library — <http://digitalcommons.portlandlibrary.com/>

Maine State Library — <http://statedocs.maine.gov/>



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