

The Handy IR Manager: A Toolkit for Recruitment, Intake, and Promotion

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Abstract

Drawing on our own experience, the Scholarly Communications team at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, presents successful strategies for recruitment, intake, and promotion of institutional repository (IR) collections. We discuss how to identify potential collections that align with your goals, how to market repository services, and how to foster collaboration with IR partners. Next, we show you our process for ensuring metadata is complete and accurate in order to enhance discoverability and increase usage statistics, which document your collections' impact. Social media promotion also improves discoverability and usage; we explain how to select appropriate platforms, manage accounts efficiently, and create engaging posts. Most important, we introduce our toolkit with templates, guidelines, and forms that you are welcome to use and adapt.

Keywords: institutional repository, metadata, social media, digital collections

Introduction

Launched during the summer of 2015, ScholarWorks@UARK now offers a great range of content highlighting University of Arkansas, Fayetteville (U of A) research, journals, student work, and instructional

materials for a variety of audiences.¹ The Scholarly Communications team introduces our most successful strategies for recruitment, intake, and promotion of institutional repository (IR) collections and share our Handy IR Manager's Toolkit so you, too, can build collections that draw attention and forge partnerships across campus.²

First, we show you how to identify high-profile collections and market your IR with a combination of direct outreach and networking. Then we introduce tools for ensuring quality metadata, which enhances a collection's discoverability and boosts usage statistics. In our experience, promoting the IR and celebrating partners' achievements through social media also improves discoverability and usage. For this reason, we offer suggestions for selecting a social media platform, managing an account, and creating posts. We invite you to try our strategies and adapt our toolkit to advance your own IR.

Goals and Strategies

Recruiting material for an IR has three components: defining your goals, identifying potential collections, and reaching out to the owners of those collections—that is, future repository partners.

Defining Goals

Before you start looking for collections, you want to clarify your purpose and your goals. Here at the U of A, we have three goals:

- gathering prestigious, high-visibility research
- serving our land-grant mission
- developing partnerships across campus

To achieve these goals, we target research centers whose high-profile reputation enhances the reputation of our IR. By conducting research on Arkansas' natural resources, politics, economy, and culture, research centers advance the U of A's mission as a land-grant institution; and

the IR opens this research to the community. Finally, partnering with research centers leads to further collaboration with faculty and campus leaders throughout the university.

Marketing Strategies

After you have identified goals and potential collections, you are ready to market your IR. Broadcast-style advertising has its place but it is not enough. We have used a combination of direct outreach, networking, and opportunism. Starting with direct outreach, we compiled a list of research center directors and sent each a standard email. Although only a few directors responded initially, we contacted a director again whenever we found a pretext—e.g., to congratulate a grant recipient or to offer to host webinar recordings. Such persistence paid off as directors began bringing us content. In the Handy IR Manager’s Toolkit, you will find the template for our direct marketing message and the “quick facts” flyer we attach to the email.

The second marketing strategy is networking. Satisfied partners and fellow librarians are our best allies, spreading the word about the IR. They also alert us to incoming grants, changes in center personnel, and upcoming events; this kind of news gives us opportunities for direct outreach. Equally important, everyone on the Scholarly Communications team uses every opportunity to promote our services. For example, when one member of our team served on Staff Senate, she made contacts with key center administrators who eventually contributed collections to the repository.

Although opportunism may not sound like a strategy per se, recognizing the right moment and responding quickly require persistence and preparation. Whenever we learn about an upcoming event, a new campus initiative, or a major research grant, we consider if it might produce material for the IR. If so, we tailor the email template for the occasion and attach the “quick facts” flyer. We have used this combination of marketing strategies very successfully. Our IR now features more than a dozen research centers, with collections ranging from

nutrition science to Middle East studies, and from education reform to Arkansas elections.

Serving Repository Partners

Most of our partners already have their own websites or YouTube channels. The IR enhances their online visibility with university branding, search engine optimization, high-quality metadata, and easy accessibility and attractive displays of their materials. Greater visibility of collections results in greater usage.

Discovery

Like many repository platforms, Digital Commons offers standard layouts, including the book gallery, the image gallery, and the journal, as well as options for hosting audio and video files. Because it is a proprietary platform, currently owned by the RELX Group, there is limited flexibility within the layouts. Nonetheless, we have adapted them creatively for various collections. For example, we use the image gallery for poster competitions and the book gallery for illustrated reports. If your platform offers standard formats, we encourage you to use and modify them to create layouts that invite web visitors to explore the content.

Of course, visitors must first discover the content. The Digital Commons platform is built for search engine optimization; we ensure that search engines find accurate, complete metadata. Our IR partners provide metadata for each item on a fillable form with a section for each metadata field. You will find our forms for text files, image files, and audio-video files in the Toolkit. (Note that the forms include a section regarding rights and permissions, for which the IR partner takes responsibility.) When we upload an item, we review the metadata provided and add information as needed.

We continually look for new ways to attract web visitors. For example, ScholarWorks@UARK collections are indexed in the Digital

Commons Network, and we've listed our IR in the Registry of Open Access Repositories (ROAR),³ the Directory of Open Access Repositories (OpenDOAR),⁴ and EBSCO Open Dissertations.⁵ In 2021, for certain collections, we also began registering Direct Object Identifiers (DOIs) and adding this information to the metadata.

Usage Statistics

Increasing our collections' discoverability in these ways drives up our usage statistics. We give IR partners access to the Digital Commons dashboard, which displays the number of hits and downloads as well as the geographic location and institutional affiliation of web visitors. Research center directors use the data to document their program's impact. We use it to demonstrate the IR's value and attract new partners. If your repository platform does not record usage statistics automatically, you might consider other tools, such as Google Analytics, to gather similar data.

Social Media

Another way to increase usage statistics – and simultaneously increase your team's visibility across campus – is to promote the IR and your partners' accomplishments through social media. Launching and managing social media accounts can be challenging. Let us walk through the process that we followed – conducting research, setting up accounts, implementing and building the program – to achieve our current success.

Getting Started

If you do not already administer an institutional social media account, check your institution's guidelines regarding opening one, proper use of branding logos and colors, and permissible content. There are dozens

of platforms available, and it is worth taking some time to investigate your options. We conducted research and engaged in what we call “soul-searching.” First, we asked the most important question: given our target demographic, which platform is most appropriate? How does the platform work? We made a short list of candidates and investigated those specific platforms more deeply. Next, “soul-searching” demanded that we seriously consider who our specific audiences are and what we want to share with them about our team, the IR, and our partners. Then, we did some sleuthing to find out where these audiences “hang out,” electronically speaking. We decided on Twitter and Facebook, although we do not discount the possibility of creating accounts on other social media platforms in the future.

Managing a social media program can feel overwhelming. New activity multiple times a week keeps your accounts in the public eye, and you want to follow other accounts regularly. Sharing the work with other members of your team can help – especially if you coordinate efforts. Planning posts in advance and filing information in one place can also increase your productivity and efficiency. We utilize an Excel spreadsheet to keep track of the information needed to put together each post, such as the subject, text, associated image, bit.ly link, hashtag, accounts to tag, and posting date. Look for this spreadsheet template in the Toolkit.

Content

When we launched our social media accounts, we set out to forge relationships and establish our credibility. On the first day, we had zero followers; but we swiftly built a following using a variety of strategies that we want to share with you. Utilize already-established hashtags and engage with existing social media accounts with interests similar to yours, such as the accounts of other university units or local organizations, to participate in conversations with your intended audiences. Look for opportunities to begin new relationships and generate goodwill. Students may submit materials to the IR someday, so

court them early and often. For example, you could follow accounts and hashtags related to the Honors College or research competition teams. Definitely follow your IR partners; they will soon rely on you to help spread the word about research, publications, and awards. Make sure to tag them (with the @ symbol) when the content you are posting is applicable to them and especially when promoting their achievements. Constantly build and maintain your network because these relationships could benefit not only the IR but also your library in general. To keep these relationships organized, we developed a cheat sheet listing the account names of our IR partners and the campus organizations we follow. This list is especially useful since Facebook is finicky about capitalization and spaces—we do not want to tag the wrong account accidentally. You will find the template for this spreadsheet in the Toolkit as well.

As you know, credibility matters more than ever. Even if you intentionally avoid addressing controversial topics, you want your accounts to be considered a source of unbiased facts. Systematically offering trustworthy content is the best way to achieve a reputation for impartial, factual content. On the flip side, a social media account is not merely a bulletin board. Do not limit your posts to dry, matter-of-fact reportage. Most social media users are interested in the actual people behind an account. While you should post news that might be pinned to an old-fashioned bulletin board, do so in a personable way and invite engagement in an authentic manner. For example, you could occasionally interact with university or local accounts with light-hearted, fun posts.

Statistics

The number of followers, the number of likes on a particular post, and other statistics offer measures of your social media program's impact. Lively content can improve your statistics. Rather than posting a long string of plain text, we recommend incorporating graphics and images. There are plenty of tools available, both free and subscription, that can

make your posts look attractive and professional. Try a few different options to find the one that works best for you. For graphics, we use a combination of a free Canva account and our university's subscription to Adobe products. We choose images from free photo-stock sites; the Toolkit includes an infographic showing our favorite sites. We want to call attention to Nappy.co, a great resource for photographs of Black and Brown people. Representation matters!

Accessibility also matters. The simple act of making sure everyone has access to your content enhances your credibility and puts your values into action. Although learning and implementing accessibility standards require an investment of time and effort, creating accessible posts quickly becomes second nature. Check your institution's accessibility guidelines and find out if your campus IT department offers training. On the internet, you will also find global standards and instructional videos for different types of software. Social media platforms make accessibility simple. For example, to add alt-text for an image on a Twitter post, simply click the "Add description" button and enter a description. Facebook has similar capability for alt-text.

As mentioned previously, you can gather many kinds of social media statistics; you decide which ones best measure the impact you want to make. We focus on the number of followers, which is easy to find without consulting Twitter or Facebook's analytics, and the engagement rate (i.e., how many individuals interact with a particular post), which Twitter and Facebook calculate in somewhat different ways. We opened our social media accounts in early 2020. At present, we have 151 followers on Facebook and 292 on Twitter. But there is no way to quantify the abundant goodwill we have generated among our IR partners and colleagues across the university.

Conclusion

We hope you will benefit from our experience and borrow some of our successful strategies for recruitment, intake, and promotion of IR

collections. Please feel free to adapt the templates, guidelines, and forms in the Toolkit as you advance your own IR.

Contributer Notes

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Notes

- 1 University of Arkansas, ScholarWorks@UARK, accessed November 7, 2022, <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/>.
- 2 Melody Herr, Jessica Kelly, Cedar C. Middleton, "The Handy IR Manager: A Toolkit for Recruitment, Intake, and Promotion," accessed November 7, 2022, <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/liblearn/2/>.
- 3 Registry of Open Access Repositories, accessed November 7, 2022, <http://roar.eprints.org/>.
- 4 Directory of Open Access Repositories, accessed November 7, 2022, <https://v2.sherpa.ac.uk/pendoar/>.
- 5 EBSCO Open Dissertations, accessed November 7, 2022, <https://biblioboard.com/opendissertations/>.