Making the Case for an Institutional Repository to Your Provost

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The Case for the Institutional Repository

You’re likely reading this because you need to present the case for an institutional repository to your provost. As far as timing is concerned, you just might be in luck! 2009 is a good time to be talking about repositories, research distribution strategies, and publishing services with your Office of the Provost.

Over the last year, the university-wide research distribution strategy has become a hot topic amongst provosts and other senior administrators. Recent work by prominent thinkers and associations has galvanized the community into action. Amongst Digital Commons repositories, we’re even observing a growing trend toward provost-driven initiatives, spurred by the recognition that an institutional repository serves two valuable roles: it is critical to establishing the university’s research distribution strategy; and, it enables the Office of the Provost to better serve the university’s mission.

A research distribution strategy is essential in the digital age. According to David Shulenberger, Vice President for Academic Affairs at the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, a university-wide research distribution strategy would represent an institutional “shift from a passive role in research distribution to an active one.” He further argues that institutional repositories and research distribution strategies are tightly intertwined. “The effort,” he says, “to develop policy and strategies will undoubtedly cause greater appreciation of the value of university research within the university community and enhanced distribution will increase research value externally.”

Though your provost may already know that a research distribution strategy can maintain and increase institutional relevance in the digital world, he or she may not yet know that an institutional repository works to make that strategy achievable.

Shulenburger’s work, coupled with “The University’s Role in the Dissemination of Research and Scholarship,” jointly put out by several higher education associations, makes a strong case for establishing an IR in the service of research distribution. We highly recommend that you read these works, and get them
into the hands of your provost. (Check out “Further Resources” at the end of this article for more.)

But only you can speak to the unique goals and mission of your institution. Ultimately, when you meet with your provost, it will be essential that you align the strengths of the repository with your provost’s mission. With this paper, our goal is to help you maximize the effectiveness of your message when you are ready to “sell” your provost’s office on the value of the repository. Through our research, we’ve identified four key value propositions, or benefits, that have proven to resonate with provosts. To illustrate those benefits, we provide stories, screenshots and weblinks. A good anecdote is worth its proverbial weight in gold. Win your provost over with solid plans, great stories and compelling live examples.

Why Include Your Provost’s Office?

Some libraries seek funding from the provost and so bring the office in from the beginning; others grow the repository in a grassroots manner, presenting to the provost one or two years into the process; others, still, begin as provost-driven initiatives. Regardless of when the provost becomes involved, successful IRs have the campus-wide support that comes from a committed stakeholder at the top. Your provost’s office is essential to open doors for you to speak about the repository, and to have others market it for you. With provost support, you’ll likely have dean support as well, and therefore faculty uptake. Your institutional repository needs the provost but now the question is, Why does the provost need the institutional repository?
Aligning the Repository with the Provost’s Mission

At its core, the Office of the Provost seeks strategies to expand the reach and value of the scholarship produced at the institution.

When you speak with the provost, target your message to the mission of the Office. Show that the strengths of the institutional repository enable your provost to better fulfill the core components of his or her mission by:

1. Improving community outreach and engagement
2. Increasing institutional visibility and improving brand awareness
3. Enhancing the quality of teaching and research
4. Facilitating institutional advancement

Use your provost’s mission statement to show that the institutional repository is mission-critical to the university’s strategic development. Your senior administrators will commit when they understand that the repository’s services enable them to do their jobs better—to further the strategic vision and mission of the institution, and to raise funds to continue to support the advancement of knowledge.

“...The real strength of the IR is in its ability to collect, preserve, and project the scholarly output of the University and make it available to the people of the state and beyond.”

- Richard Clement, Dean of Libraries, Utah State University

http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/lib_present/1
How Does the Institutional Repository Serve the Mission of the Provost?

Community Outreach

The IR enables the university to return the fruits of its research to the local community.

As an online, open access collection, the repository is a tangible way for your institution to communicate with the public and to contribute to the betterment of the community. IRs preserve and improve access to regionally-valuable content that would have otherwise been lost or difficult to access.

Why is this important to your provost? Your provost cares about improving community engagement services. It is an integral part of his or her mission to ensure that the production of institutional research benefits the community in which it takes place.

Find the applied research at your university and highlight it in your presentations. For example, which centers or programs work with community organizations to improve local health or business? Do you have a cooperative extensions program? What departments produce regionally-relevant research? The content hidden amongst your departments is valuable to your local community—more than you might expect. Applied research and regionally-specific research documents are often the most downloaded content in the repository.

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The job of digital repositories is to ensure that the extremely valuable scholarly or creative products that have been paid for by the public or by donors are ultimately accessible to them, as well as to students, faculty and researchers everywhere.

- David Shulenburger, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU)

http://www.arl.org/sparc/meetings/ir08/closing_keynote.shtml
Serving the Community at the University of Nebraska - Lincoln

The University of Nebraska - Lincoln serves the particular needs of its predominantly rural farming communities by publishing and preserving beef cattle reports, wildlife damage management research, and tractor test reports reaching as far back as 1915.

Tractor tests? Yes. In the early 1900's the state of Nebraska decided it didn't want East Coast farming manufacturers to sell shoddy machinery to Nebraskans. From 1915, the state began to require that every tractor sold in the state be tested through UNL, the print reports of which were housed for decades at the campus-based Lester F. Larsen Tractor Museum. http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tractor_museum

Today, this content is some of the most popular in the repository—it is clearly important and relevant to the local communities in Nebraska. Data from Google Analytics (below) shows the regional importance of these documents, which, without the repository, would have been near impossible for the community to access and use.

Interested in more? Check out:

- **University of Massachusetts Amherst's Cranberry Station.** Cranberry Station publishes and disseminates applied research on cranberry cultivation. The recipient audience is local cranberry growers and farmers seeking improved cultivation methods. The Station serves as a resource to Southern Massachusetts communities engaged in cranberry farming, the largest agricultural enterprise in the region. http://scholarworks.umass.edu/cranberry

- **Texas State San Marcos's Applied Research Projects.** Students in the Master of Public Administration program (MPA), offered through the Department of Political Science at Texas State University-San Marcos, have the option to undertake an applied research project in partial fulfillment of the degree. These projects primarily examine municipal and state-based issues in terms of theoretical and applied approaches to management. Mandated early on to be posted to the repository, the ARPs have become some of the most popular content in eCommons @Texas State. Though regional in topic, the ARP scholarship receives global interest too, with inquiries coming from as far as Japan and India. http://ecommons.txstate.edu/arp
Visibility and Brand Awareness

*The IR enables the institution to improve its visibility and standing in the academic enterprise.*

By offering the opportunity to consolidate, showcase, and enhance the discovery of research within the institution’s fields of expertise, the repository has the potential to increase the institution’s global visibility and improve its “brand awareness.” IRs expand the opportunities for institutional research to be discovered and used by a global audience, including members of the media, legislators, grant-makers, corporate entities, and other research institutions.

Why is this important to your provost? Your provost cares about improving the institution’s global presence. It is an integral part of his/her mission to ensure that the full value of the institution’s scholarly output is realized by reaching the widest audience possible.

Focus first on what your institution does best and highlight that. Build and strengthen areas of specialization by showcasing them in the repository. In what fields of research and teaching does your institution excel? What special work is being done only on your campus? In what fields does your institution hope to focus future resources? What prominent partnerships does the institution engage in? Does your institution steward special collections of great historical value? Showcase all of those. The value of your institution’s brand increases every time its research is discovered and used.

**Regional Research with Global Value**

Interestingly enough, the Tractor Museum traffic that we would have expected to be purely Nebraskan in fact comes from all over the globe! The tractor tests alone have been accessed by users in over 40 countries. Recently, a Finnish tractor club contacted the UNL repository manager to ask for permission to copy and translate a particular tractor report into Finnish.

When University of Nebraska - Lincoln’s tractor literature is discovered by folks outside of Nebraska, it benefits the repository in an entirely new way. By making all kinds of scholarship available online, the university has the opportunity to increase both its community value and its global reach.
Visibility and Brand Awareness at Cornell Industrial and Labor Relations School

Cornell ILR’s repository is used heavily by researchers, government policy makers, corporations and unions, and members of the media seeking primary documents and authoritative research on labor issues. The ILR repository features several special collections on its homepage, including Collective Bargaining Agreements and Key Workplace Documents, focusing on employer-employee relations. The ILR School also publishes the quarterly Industrial and Labor Relations Review, and highlights the expertise of its individual scholars through faculty bibliography pages.

Cornell ILR has used the repository to demonstrate and strengthen its leadership in the field. http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu

Leveraging Partnerships at the University of Massachusetts Amherst

ScholarWorks, the repository of UMass Amherst, provided the opportunity for its Isenberg School of Management to partner with the International Council on Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Education to host two journals and, soon after, two symposia series for their 2009 Annual Meeting. Through the ScholarWorks interface, I-CHRIE is able to offer one point of service for its members to submit papers to journals or papers for the conference. In recognition of this service, I-CHRIE designated UMass Amherst as a Platinum Partner, the highest level of partnership within the academy, and the first university to be named such. The partnership brings UMass’s ScholarWorks prestige and broad exposure within the field of Hospitality and Tourism Management, increases the production of knowledge under the UMass Amherst name, and expands the reach of institutional services across the globe. I-CHRIE’s presence further serves to strengthen the UMass Amherst “brand” and leadership in the field. http://scholarworks.umass.edu

Interested in more? Check out:

- DigitalCommons at University of Maryland Law. University of Maryland Law School preserves and showcases congressional testimony given by its faculty. It also collects papers or abstracts of papers on Maryland history derived from court records and linked to images of the actual documentary sources upon which they are based. The repository has become a key location for researchers and others seeking primary and secondary documents particular to Maryland legal history and current legal activity. http://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/
Teaching and Research

The IR enables the university to enhance the quality of its scholarship.

By offering faculty and students the opportunity to reflect upon past research, find current research, and facilitate new research, the repository can significantly enhance the scholarship produced at the institution. IRs also facilitate collaboration and production of new scholarship by helping to share research across departments and colleges and by enabling the institution to deliver new publishing venues to its researchers.

Why is this important to your provost? Your provost must continually strive to improve the quality of teaching and research at the institution. As a reflection of past and current scholarship, the repository helps to improve institutional research and education.

Use the repository to create and improve research, and showcase work that is underserved by traditional publishing. Is your university working to increase its research focus? Which departments or colleges are interested in pursuing interdisciplinary collaboration? Do you know of niche and non-traditional scholarship in need of publishing? Target those.

Increasing the Research Focus at the Institution

Many institutions are working to move from a teaching model to a teacher-research model. Your provost may have strategic goals that include increasing the research focus of the institution. If this is the case, align the mission of the repository with this institutional strategic goal.

“Cal Poly’s President Baker sees the repository as a place to show off Cal Poly students’ senior portfolios. He got excited when he understood that he could point prospects and their parents to the portfolios as examples of what their student can accomplish at Cal Poly.”

- Michael Miller, Dean of Library Services, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo

Strengthening Student Scholarship at Illinois Wesleyan University

As part of the undergraduate honors thesis process at Illinois Wesleyan, students must review past honors thesis work. Once the repository was established and past projects uploaded, current students were able to easily browse or search for specific topics of interest. This review process affords the students the opportunity to learn from past research, and almost acts as a "measuring stick" against which students and faculty can assess the quality of their work, and a mirror to reflect upon and improve research.

Illinois Wesleyan also provides its students with services to create, manage, and publish peer-reviewed journals within the repository. Publishing niche, non-traditional, and student scholarship generates limited-to-no revenue, yet it is important for creating and improving future research and researchers. The low overhead cost of publishing, disseminating, and archiving in the institutional repository seems to make this an excellent venue for publishing underserved scholarly work. http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/peer_review_list.html
The Dictionary of Invertebrate Zoology, published by the University of Nebraska Lincoln Love Library

The Dictionary of Invertebrate Zoology was originally accepted for publication by one large western press then cancelled when the press decided to get out of the zoology field. Several other presses were deterred by the length—an 18 inch thick typescript—and the limited commercial appeal. The dictionary was ultimately published in the repository and within the first month received 1200 downloads. It continues to receive around 1000 downloads a month, and can now also be ordered in bound hardcover at lulu.com. [http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/onlinedictinvertzoology](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/onlinedictinvertzoology)

**Interested in more? Check out:**

- **University of Massachusetts Amherst’s Landscapes of Violence.** Landscapes of Violence began in 2008 as an interdisciplinary and cross-departmental conference, established by UMass Amherst Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Ventura Perez. Working with the library, he soon chose to also establish a journal of the same name, the first issue of which will publish the best conference proceedings as full-length, peer reviewed articles. [http://scholarworks.umass.edu/violence](http://scholarworks.umass.edu/violence)


Institutional Advancement

The IR is a timely, comprehensive collection of research output that can facilitate institutional advancement and fundraising.

As a current, comprehensive collection of scholarly production, an IR eases the process of browsing, searching, and reviewing the output of the institution. IRs have the potential to greatly support institutional advancement efforts by making it easier for top-level administrators to review and find research for fundraising purposes. In addition, increased transparency into the institution’s scholarly production can help the provost prove to investors that their funding is being used wisely.

Why is this important to your provost? A primary responsibility of the Office of the Provost is to work with the Office of Development to secure financial resources to support the continued advancement of knowledge at both the college- and institution-level.

To do this, the members of the Office of the Provost must continually stay apprised of the scholarship produced at the institution. It is a huge job, and impossible without a tool to allow for easy aggregation and review of research and teaching at the institution, college, and department levels. Provosts and deans need a way to quickly and effectively survey and find relevant research produced at the institution.
One dean of libraries told us that his colleagues recognized the value of the repository once they understood that they could go to the IR to easily access recent and relevant research when talking to donors and alumni. Across the board, provosts and deans report that their jobs are made easier when they can quickly search and find up to date research being conducted in a certain field.

Has your Office of Development come across a donor interested in funding a specific type of research? Is the Office seeking ways to further alumni relations? Point out that the repository allows them to quickly find research relevant to the interests of their prospective donors, and even allows them to showcase the results of funded research down the road.

“The folks who pay our bills need to and want to know how those investments in the university are benefiting them. Unlike most other enterprises, universities do a lousy job of letting their investors know what they are getting from their investment. It’s time to let the light of universities shine and allow digital repositories to entice additional funding.”

-David Shulenburger, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU)
http://www.arl.org/sparc/meetings/ir08/closing_keynote.shtml
Closing the Deal: Framing the High-Level Repository Message

When you meet with stakeholders, show that the repository provides a relevant, dynamic set of services that help the Office to expand the reach and value of institutional scholarship. Frame the conversation in terms of the benefits the IR provides to the Office of the Provost.

To the Office of the Provost, the IR is most compelling as a research portal—a timely, highly-visible, comprehensive showcase to the institution’s scholarship. This “research showcase” serves to expand the reach and value of the scholarly work produced at the institution. In short, the repository is an integral part of the university’s “research distribution strategy.”

At the same time, the IR is a service that plays a key role in helping your provost fulfill his or her mission. The IR serves your provost by enabling the university to improve its ability to: share research with local communities; increase global visibility and prominence; enhance the quality of its teaching and research; and, further institutional advancement by securing funding.

Legacy is a powerful motivator. Provosts care greatly about capturing the record of success they leave behind. Therefore, when concluding, make sure to emphasize that the IR is the provost’s chance to significantly advance the mission of the institution by taking steps to put in place a program for research distribution.

Socrates once said, ‘An unexamined life is not worth living.’ Universities fail in this regard. Institutional repositories should be the means by which a university examines itself.

- Robert Koob, Provost and Vice-President of Academic Affairs, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo

Opening Remarks, Putting Knowledge to Work: Building an Institutional Repository for Your Campus, October 10th, 2008.
Further Resources

Consider getting these into the hands of your provost ahead of time.

- “The University’s Role in the Dissemination of Research and Scholarship – A Call to Action.” Released jointly by: the Association of Research Libraries, the Coalition for Networked Information, the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, and the Association of American Universities (February 2009).
  
  **Available at:**
  

  
  **Available at:**
  
  [http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/lib_present/1](http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/lib_present/1)

  
  **Available at:**
  
  [http://works.bepress.com/marilyn_moody/1](http://works.bepress.com/marilyn_moody/1)

- Shulenburger, David. “SPARC Digital Repositories Meeting Closing Keynote” (November 18th, 2008).
  
  **PDF:**
  
  
  **Summary and audio:**
  
  [http://www.arl.org/sparc/meetings/ir08/closing_keynote.shtml](http://www.arl.org/sparc/meetings/ir08/closing_keynote.shtml)

  
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