Library Faculty Publications   **University Libraries**

11-29-2023

Building an Institutional Repository with Student Scholarship

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Recommended Citation

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Student scholarship should be an integral part of any institutional repository, as it can showcase the important work that students do during their time at the institution. This chapter proposes that an initial focus on student scholarship can aid colleges and universities in building their institutional repositories quickly. This method of collection building can also help to quickly achieve buy-in from campus stakeholders. University administrators will like seeing strong initial usage numbers and can feel confident that the repository will be a good project to fund into the future. Faculty members will see a stable system in which they can feel confident in self-archiving their scholarship. Current and prospective students will see the opportunities available to them to publish their work and disseminate it widely. Focusing on student scholarship has allowed Coastal Carolina University's institutional repository, CCU Digital Commons, to quickly facilitate others' engagement with our student work and has revealed the great extent to which our institution's student scholarship is shared and utilized globally.

In 2017, the Office of the Provost at Coastal Carolina University created a program called Student Achievement Funding, a grant program to fund campus initiatives that contribute to the achievement of the university's students. The main goals of this initiative were to increase student achievement, engagement, and success. CCU Libraries saw this as an opportunity to fund an institutional repository program, as it would be easy to demonstrate student achievement, engagement, and success by showcasing student scholarship on the IR. CCU Libraries purchased a Digital Commons subscription, branded the repository as CCU Digital Commons, and published its first collections in August 2018. The initial focus was on uploading student scholarship and creative activities to fulfill the objectives of the grant. In the first few years, collections uploaded to the repository included graduate theses and dissertations, honors theses, the student newspaper, student magazines, a student research journal, and the annual undergraduate research competition. Looking back at the first few years of this project reveals how important it was to focus on student scholarship in the institutional repository as a catalyst to making the above goals achievable.

CURRENT PRACTICE

Institutional repositories have grown over the years from a "risky and unprecedented enterprise"[1] to a critical component in the scholarly communication infrastructure. Student scholarship has been a part of repository collections since their inception, especially electronic theses and dissertations. Some institutions even initially launched repositories as a means to publish their students' dissertations.[2] But student scholarship today encompasses much more than ETDs. Non-traditional student scholarship, or scholarship apart from theses and dissertations, has become more accepted as a normal part of institutional repository collections. So, while the bulk of institutional repositories that accept student work have theses and dissertations collections as a major showcase of student scholarship, ETDs are by no means the only important collection to include in the IR.

At one point, at least in academic repositories in the United States, institutional repositories consisted mostly of student work, especially graduate and honors theses and dissertations.[3] This is not too surprising when several factors are examined: student work amasses in larger numbers than faculty work because there are more students creating more work; new students are cycling through the institution and depositing publications in the repository on a regular basis; many journals do not allow versions of record of faculty publications to be uploaded to IRs; and faculty have more options now to share their work openly than self-archiving in IRs.[4]

Student work may be represented in larger numbers in small and medium-sized academic institutions than in large academic institutions, as the latter

usually focus their funding and support on faculty research. Xia and Opperman conducted a survey focused on medium- to small-sized institutions and found that "nearly half of the total content of the repositories" was comprised of student works and that this was likely due to "the strong emphasis of these institutions on undergraduate education."[5] Wu found that small institutions' greater focus on teaching and lesser focus on research causes many smaller institutions to focus on collecting student works.[6] The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education classifies CCU's size as *medium* and the Enrollment Profile as *very high undergraduate*,[7] and because the institution strongly supports the undergraduate research process, it is no surprise that, in terms of scholarly works, the repository as of the time of this writing contains mostly student works. Figure 11.1 shows the percentage of student versus faculty scholarship in CCU Digital Commons before and after non-scholarly work is removed from the count.
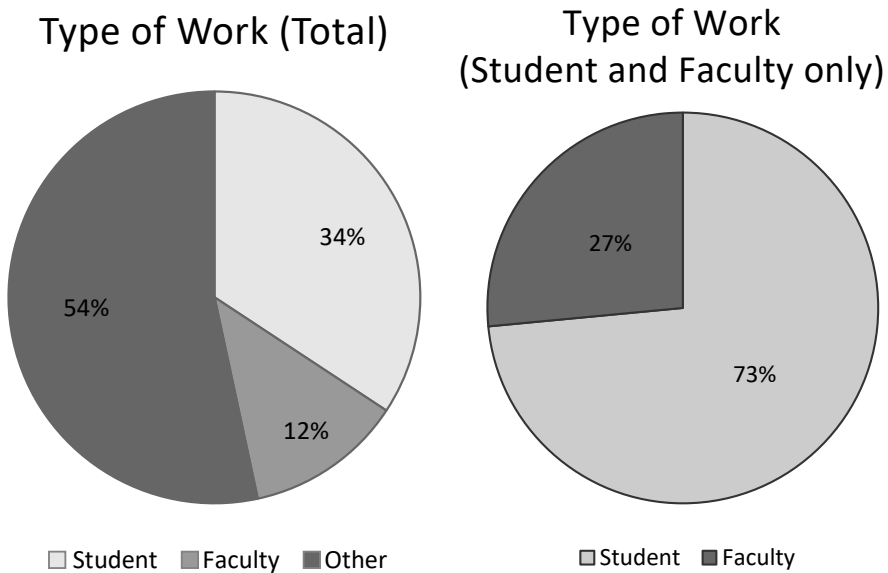

Figure 11.1
Percentage of Student and Faculty IR collections in relation to total number of collections.

However, not all stakeholders agree that student scholarship is acceptable as the type of work to feature in an institutional repository. Issues include the level of rigor exhibited in student work as opposed to that of faculty scholarship.[8] Questions of the rigor of student scholarship are exacerbated by some IR manager practices, where filling the repository with items is seen as a measure of success. This practice potentially forsakes quality for quantity.[9] Faculty involvement in

shepherding or mentoring student work into publication may mitigate the sentiment against including student work in an IR.[10] The CCU Digital Commons policy for accepting student work includes the process of having faculty mediators upload works for students. Adding this procedural step is a method of quality assurance, and that extra level of review by a faculty mentor has led to higher quality metadata for student works in the IR, most likely because faculty feel that they are in a sense vouching for the work that they are uploading for their student mentee.

WHAT IS STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP?

CCU Digital Commons features student work from a variety of sources, including work created as part of normal honors courses, journal articles, student-created publications, and student conference presentations. Many IRs contain student scholarship by way of graduate theses and dissertations, honors theses, and other capstone materials,[11] but it is less common for IRs to feature student work performed as part of normal coursework.[12] To denote scholarly versus non-scholarly work, some repositories organize student research work separately from other student scholarship. Research scholarship can be easily identified as ETDs, honors theses, symposia presentations and publications, and journal articles. Other forms of scholarship are more difficult to codify. Is the work performed by students as part of regular coursework deemed scholarly work, especially if there is no peer review embedded in its publication process? As an example, viewing an English 101 paper as scholarship may be stretching the concept, but a student features magazine is comprised of the publication of an array of student work that requires research, article drafting, review, and publication involving editorial processes, so this work seems like it passes the research test if not the scholarship test. Therefore, collections such as the student newspaper, student literary/art magazine, and the student features magazine are included in this chapter on student scholarship. But several non-scholarly works uploaded to the IR are also included in this discussion because providing access to non-scholarly works contributes to a more holistic understanding of the type of student work that takes place at a university during the undergraduate experience.[13] Shearer notes that "IRs aim to collect scholarly content exclusively; however, the word scholarly is used in a very broad sense."[14] So, although the IR should include "research" as well as "scholarship," it will also accept some other student materials that may contribute to the reach, reputation, and rigor of the institution.

WHY STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP?

Beyond the mandate for the Student Achievement Funding grant to focus on featuring student work in the IR, multiple factors were considered when

discussing the types of student work to accept. Repository staff wanted to be sure that the student work published in the repository was of high quality. Was the work peer reviewed? Was it above and beyond normal coursework? Did a faculty mentor vouch for the work? Was it important to the history of the institution? If the work passed these and other quality control factors, it was eligible to be uploaded and disseminated to the public through the IR.

Putting student work "on an equal footing" with other institutional scholarship can increase interest in student activities and show current and prospective students the options for research available at the institution.[15] Developing the expectation that student work is important enough to include alongside faculty work in an IR also follows Bruff's "Students as Producers" idea, which involves "students not only as consumers of information, but also as producers of knowledge."[16] If students know they are expected to publish their work, they may take extra care in producing it, resulting in more thoughtful and rich undergraduate scholarship. The anxiety and unworthiness many students may feel at the prospect of publishing their work are not so different from faculty, who also are putting their views forward in a public way for judgment and assessment. But this concept is a major part of the scholarly endeavor.[17] Faculty can assuage student anxiety by mentoring student work through the research and publishing process. They can help students identify and avoid pitfalls that they have encountered in their own publishing careers. Ultimately, faculty may be the most critical advocates in the publication of student scholarship.

When launching their institutional repository, Miner and Davis-Kahl found that plans to include student works generated the most interest on campus. They realized that "enthusiasm was much higher for student works because of their potential to promote the university's educational mission and programs in a manner that could personalize the experience for students."[18] Allowing student works in the repository can serve to increase the university's outreach to potential students. Promoting student scholarship in the IR can help to "communicate the value of student research to both prospective students and their parents"[19] and allows prospective students and parents to gauge the rigor of the undergraduate and graduate research programs. Seeing published student work also serves as a statement of support by the university for student scholarship. Providing students with the ability to show their works on the repository can instill a feeling of ownership over the university experience. Allowing students to take more control over their research agenda may serve to increase their engagement with the work and increase the feeling of empowerment over research outcomes. Students who see their work in the same repository as university faculty can feel a sense of pride that they are a foundational part of the academic and scholarly community. Student work also reflects well on faculty-student interactions, as faculty members are an integral part of any student scholarship, whether by

mentoring student work from initial ideas into publications or even co-authoring works with students.

There is a case to be made that student scholarship published in an open access repository can exhibit a wider reach and broader dissemination than expert faculty work tucked away in subscription-only journals and read mainly by other academics.[20] This also underscores the fact that faculty work by its nature is expected to be published, so it is available in some form somewhere and therefore is less of a preservation risk than student work, which is often not disseminated in a published format beyond ETDs. Libraries are enhancing an extant cycle of student scholarship by adding preservation and long-term access components to the cycle. The ephemeral nature of much of the university work of students means that libraries must take action to preserve and provide access to this work or risk losing it when the student leaves the university, and the content eventually disappears. Much student work is lost to history, as conferences capture only basic metadata and perhaps an abstract of the oral or poster presentation. Migrating resources like these to the IR allows the library to act as steward of important student materials by maintaining preservation and access in the long term. Students benefit from the ability to point to their scholarship on CVs and résumés by way of linking to an IR's stable URLs. Prospective employers can then gain an enriched knowledge of potential hires by experiencing their scholarship firsthand.
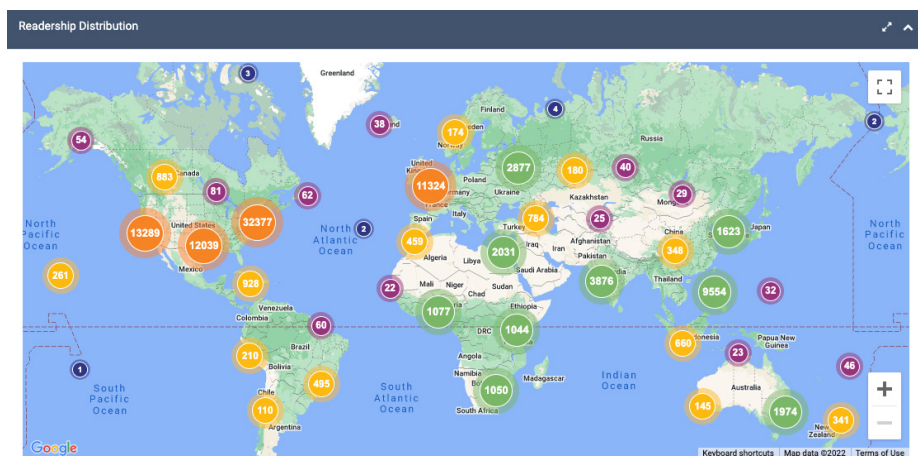

Figure 11.2
Usage numbers for our Theses and Dissertations collection, showing high worldwide engagement with our student works (date range: August 1, 2018, to July 31, 2022).

STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION

CCU Libraries was fortunate to have several fruitful collaborations early in the process of building CCU Digital Commons. Finding the right contact for each student research program is a key factor in the successful publishing of student work. It is challenging to locate and publish student scholarship in the IR,[21] and finding the right contact in a department can make or break a collection. An easy way to facilitate new partnerships is by solving problems administrators and faculty face. Providing a solution to tedious publication workflows makes administrators' jobs easier and can result in the library being viewed as an important ally in the dissemination of student research and scholarship. CCU's institutional repository hosts not only faculty, staff, and student scholarship from across campus but also journals, conferences, historical digital collections, and archival items. This variety of collection types usually necessitates collaborations with a diverse array of partners across campus. Fruitful collaborations included the director of Graduate Studies, the Honors Program director, the director of Undergraduate Research, and faculty editors of student journals.

Policy

IR administrators should have a set of policies describing what types of student scholarship are acceptable to upload, the licensing options available so that students can control how they want their works to be published, and take-down policies in the rare case where a student wishes to unpublish their work. Power dynamics are at play when we examine the publication of the work of students, especially undergraduate students. Denying students any authority or control over the publishing process can create the potential for issues after a work is published. Publicly available policies can act to educate students on the realities of professional publishing. They could inform students early in their careers about the importance of copyright and other author rights. To ensure that students are aware of the publishing expectations required of a specific degree, institutions should train administrators who are responsible for publishing student work to be clear in communicating these requirements to students early and often in the process and should create a take-down policy to mitigate contention in rare cases when a student wants to unpublish their work.

It is crucial for repository administrators to be aware of their role in student success as they work through policy issues like embargoes, licensing, and access restrictions. CCU's repository offers embargo functionality for any publication on the IR, so this need can be met by the IR staff, but IR managers can always do better in communicating and educating content authors as to their rights. Offering standard licensing functionality can go a long way toward assuaging fears that student authors may be exploited. It is widely understood

that student work such as theses are meant to be published, and publication of theses is not seen to be a violation of FERPA laws.[22] However, some repositories opt for having separate submission agreements for ingesting student work in order to include acknowledgments for FERPA law.[23] IR administrators must take care to follow their policies and procedures for gaining consent from participants in the process of student scholarship publishing and offer solid policies that empower their authors while allowing dissemination to the broadest possible audience.[24]

FUTURE PRACTICE

Focusing on student scholarship to populate the repository provided a great start in realizing the university's recent strategic goals of improving reach, rigor, and reputation. While this "3 Rs" concept is outside of the scope of this chapter, CCU Libraries will be adding these theoretical concepts to the assessment of student collections as trends in practice surface. In theory, reach should be improved as student work is disseminated on the internet, the widest venue for making work obtainable. Rigor should grow with a snowball effect as the more rigorous student work is cited, which further raises the bar for expectations of scholarship quality. Reputation could also be increased as an outcome of increased reach and rigor. As worldwide engagement with student materials grows, attracting better prospective student scholars and faculty mentors, CCU would develop a reputation for producing quality student work. And the realization of the above goals hopefully promises enrollment growth. As recognition of the quality of student scholarship grows, the university may garner increased interest from prospective students and faculty candidates who see the quality of work being performed at the institution and want to join this exciting community of scholars.

CONCLUSION

Providing access to student scholarship can reveal the quality of the scholarship produced by students during their time at the university and the important role faculty play in nurturing and strengthening that work.[25] It makes the institutional commitment to student scholarship public and preserves an important component of the scholarly record that might otherwise be lost. Now is the perfect time for repository managers to reassess their collection practices regarding student scholarship. Expanding access to student work beyond common collections can enrich any repository and provide a more holistic picture of the scholarly activities taking place at an institution.

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