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### Establishing and promoting an institutional repository and research information management system

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# Establishing and promoting an institutional repository and research information management system

*Darren Sweeper and Karen Ramsden*

## Introduction

Montclair State University is the second largest public research university in New Jersey, the USA, located just outside of New York City. The University opened as the New Jersey State Normal School at Montclair in 1908, with the initial mission to educate and train an initial class of 187 students in the science of education. Traditionally known as a teacher's college, Montclair State College became Montclair State University in 1994. Since then, the University has grown from roughly 8,000 students to a current enrollment of more than 21,000 students. In early 2019, the University achieved the R2 designation indicating high research activity, from the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. This achievement quickly followed the University's initial research designation, and as a result, disseminating its scholarly output became a high priority. Additionally, the University was designated a public research University by the State of New Jersey in July 2017, with this designation further highlighting the impact of the University and its role in providing a high-level research portfolio to support innovation initiatives in the state.

## Tale of two research platforms

The purpose of this paper is to share our experiences and to highlight lessons learned from the establishment of our institutional repository (IR) while collaborating in a state-wide initiative to showcase the scholarly output of New Jersey researchers. We will discuss how we collaborated with multiple stakeholders from across the

campus to establish an open, discoverable and sustainable resource to support the University's vision and strategic plans, with the overarching goal of connecting users to our scholarship, creative works and expanding the University's portfolio of research in the digital age. Through the implementation of new technology, we preserve the history of our University and provide access to the intellectual capital of our faculty and students. The research platforms used invite collaboration with the other research universities in New Jersey while promoting a deeper awareness of the University's research portfolio.

## Establishment and purpose of an institutional repository

Specially designed to collect, preserve and provide greater access to the scholarly output of faculty, students and staff, IRs play a vital role in academic institutions by raising the research profile while preserving the institution's history. The IR serves as a great marketing tool with the capability to reach large audiences throughout the world to promote research and break down barriers to information. [Nagra \(2012\)](#) argues that IRs allow institutions to share their research output globally. She goes on to further state that "research becomes more valuable when it is shared and marketed to the global community." An IR, often referred to as a disruptive technology, has found its traditional home under the purview of an academic library.

In the case of the Montclair State University Digital Commons, our repository has become a foundational pillar in the establishment of the new strategic plan and the impetus for creating both a culture of research and

an IR culture at our University. As the University has worked toward becoming a leader in research in New Jersey, showcasing our research output and introducing our research to a global audience has become a priority as well.

Publicly launched in April 2018, Montclair State University Digital Commons aligns with the University's emphasis on research, as it relates to the new university strategic plan and other university researched-based initiatives. One of our primary goals in establishing an IR was to break down the barriers to access. Additionally, the repository aligns with the State of New Jersey's emphasis on research, innovation and collaboration.

"The fact that researchers, the media or simply interested individuals are able to download this free knowledge from literally anywhere around the world, offers incredible opportunities to engage with faculty across nation-state boundaries and communicate with stakeholders that are miles away from our actual work location," says Arnaud Kurze, assistant professor of Justice Studies and frequent Digital Commons contributor who has connected with students and researchers through the repository.

## It takes a library (and university)

To provide oversight with all tasks and workflows associated with our IR, our Dean of the Library and Library Administration formed an internal library committee to guide the process of setup and content maintenance. [Bruns et al. \(2014\)](#) state that "no less important to robust repository growth are the human challenges in terms of appropriate staffing."

All current employees of the University can upload their scholarly

Figure 1.

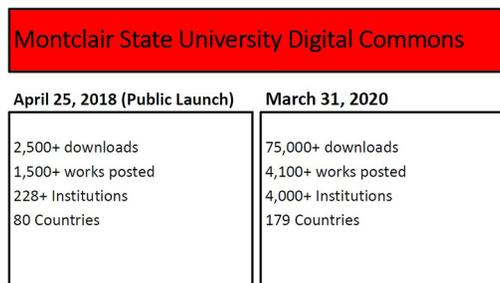


Figure 2.



works into the repository; members of the internal library committee are then charged with approving the content uploaded. Approval in this sense does not mean limiting academic freedom but instead ensuring that the metadata is correct and identifiable. As Mering (2019) indicates, researchers, librarians, university administrators, publishers, funders and other stakeholders in the academic community properly identifying authors, and their work is crucially important. Giesecke (2011) discusses two major stakeholders that repositories serve, the institution and its faculty, and the balancing of different viewpoints and needs for how a repository should be structured.

Determining who would be responsible for undertaking workflow tasks in the repository was an issue our internal committee discussed at length.

As the digital commons' coordinator and scholarly communication liaison for our internal committee, we believed it was important to have committee members to work in areas that best suited their professional strengths and experience. For example, our library archivist was charged with uploading the student newspaper and historical photographs. A reference librarian who serves on the committee was responsible for crafting succinct copyright policies.

Additional librarians on the committee work in technical services and were charged with overseeing metadata and the managing of electronic theses and dissertations. Important lessons emerged from the point of the development of, and subsequent interactions amongst, the internal repository committee. First, and foremost, while paying attention to detail

is important, and in our case, it delayed the public launch of our repository. The importance of policies and procedures cannot be overstated; however, in hindsight, it is more efficient to develop basic guidelines and instead focus your energies on populating scholarly content, with the goal of public launch. Policies and procedures can be amended and further developed along the way. We created harvesting plans and data integration goals as part of our workflow, particularly targeting faculty who had a record of scholarly activity and an interest in sharing their research and collaborating with other scholars in their fields.

The University stakeholders are involved in a wide variety of research areas and receive federal funding from various agencies such as, but not limited to, the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, NASA, among others. They also receive funding from corporations, foundations, organizations and NJ State agencies. The IR provides a home for our funded research to be housed, along with data if applicable, and open to the general public for inspiration, reuse, replication and collaboration.

### Montclair and a state-wide network

In late October 2017, discussions emerged to include Montclair State University in a state-wide database to showcase the research output for five of the state's research universities, both public and private. The state system, ResearchwithNJ, is under the direction provided by the New Jersey Economic Development Association. As a part of the state project, the university was given an opportunity to create its own similar-in-scope research platform, Research with Montclair. By February 2019, both research platforms were launched using Elsevier's Pure software. There are some key differences between these two platforms and the existing IR. The state system and its offshoot platform are managed by a team involving key university stakeholders. The IR coordinator also serves as the lead administrator for the two additional research platforms and oversees all efforts in the population and management of content for these platforms. Additionally, all content in these additional platforms is populated using the Scopus database, and

no full-text downloads are available, as they are in the IR. Citations and links to the publications are included with the Scopus information. However, only science, technology, engineering and mathematics faculty research is included in the research platforms, while all scholarly output from all areas of the university is included in Montclair's IR.

Both ResearchwithNJ and Research with Montclair align with the research mission of the university and complement the information available in the IR. They work in tandem in showcasing the University's scholarly output and serve as an impetus to inspire collaboration among faculty, both within the university and globally.

### **Institutional repository stakeholders**

One of the most important components involving any research platform outside of its setup is outreach. Identifying stakeholders that can be "champions" of the repository is key. These initial key stakeholders can assist in providing guidance but more importantly spreading the awareness and the importance of the IR. Key stakeholders should include university administrators such as the provost, deans and vice presidents, particularly in alumni and media/marketing areas. Of course, the University administrators should be made aware of the platforms and kept informed of progress and milestones.

Associate Professor of Sociology Christopher Donoghue offers an innovative use for the platform: "I've been using it to show students where they might find professors that share their interests and who might want to work with them on projects."

### **University mission and strategic and vision plans**

As the University embarked on the path to creating a new strategic plan in the Fall of 2017, we became critically aware that the IR needed to be an integral part of the University's strategic vision. When the new strategic plan, Project Soar, was ratified by the University's Board of Trustees in December 2019, we were pleased to learn that not only was research a high priority for the University but so was the IR. The University also crafted a

vision plan to complement the strategic plan, and this vision plan includes the wording "acclaimed for its research contributions." Further, one of the goals of the plan is that the University "will embrace and fulfill its identity as a public research institution, expanding both its national and international research impact, enhancing its research portfolio, and reputation." This objective in the plan mentions fully populating our IR to broaden access to the scholarly output of the faculty and students.

### **Creation of a research landing page for university**

In late Winter of 2019, the University debuted its new research focused landing page. This page is a one-stop-shop for research activities at the University. It prominently features the research and scholarly activities at the university and provides links to all the research platforms. Another way to showcase the IR is by providing links to it on various websites maintained throughout the University. Doing so provides another opportunity to collaborate, disseminate and archive the research being produced by faculty. We look at these webpages as prime "real estate" that should not be overlooked when promoting the importance of usage the repository.

### **Outreach, outreach, outreach**

One of the most important actions you can undertake in making your repository viable and successful is by positive and continuous promotion. Antelman (2004) studied four disciplines and found that freely available articles have a greater research impact, and the more a paper is downloaded, the more it is cited. You need to inform your stakeholders as to what purpose the IR serves and how it can help them such as for tenure and promotion and obtaining grants. Use every opportunity you can to do this. If you are serving on a university or college-wide committee share the benefits of the repository with people who may not be familiar with it.

Be a champion for the repository within your organization/library and do your best to not let the organizational culture stand in your way. One of the first partnerships we developed was

with our Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. They offered to help us with our outreach initiatives and to recruit faculty. They were active participants in the development of our research data management plans.

Faculty are your most vital stakeholders. Use the relationships that you have already established to recruit them as users. Find out who is up for tenure and promotion and who just had an article accepted for publication. Reach out to the department chair and attend a departmental meeting if possible. Make sure you have something to show once you get in front of them. Upload some of their research beforehand to get the process started. Additional opportunities for outreach also lie in attending programs and talks on campus.

Review your school's mission and vision statements and how it aligns with the IR you develop. There will always be some concerns and misconceptions about the repository. Be prepared to address those concerns by focusing on the benefits of the repository for them and the University. When our university obtained R2 research status, we seized on the opportunity to promote the repository. We were able to make the argument as to why having an IR was important for our new research status. Focus on your institutional goals and mission. Use the strengths of your internal committee. We all have different strengths and weaknesses; use that to your advantage. Do not get bogged down by the process or try to plan for every eventuality. Stay positive and focused!

### **Challenges and successes**

Associate Professor of Justice Studies, Arnaud Kurze points to the boon for students and those outside of academia, calling Digital Commons "a Trojan horse for the democratization of higher education knowledge dissemination" – making research available through open sources while still assuring crucial quality through peer-review mechanisms. "Our intellectual property, rather than being locked up behind expensive gatekeeping mechanisms, has become readily available to be read and spread across the web. It is a first step in the right direction."

Even the most daunting of challenges can have a successful outcome. During the process to establish the IR,

our committee encountered a lack of interest from some faculty and librarians and had creating too many bureaucratic layers. We also faced time constraints, staffing issues and organizational inertia. These challenges can often impede the establishment of an IR. One of the most common refrains we often heard was “I just don’t have the time.” Wong (2020) cites several authors when she writes “Many faculty members are also wary of the extra work and time involved” when discussing their additional concerns about plagiarism and copy-right restrictions. We viewed this as an opportunity to harvest faculty works.

Through the assigned library liaison areas of internal committee members, we gathered the CVs of faculty members and uploaded their work into our digital commons. We then reached out to various department chairs to ask if we could attend a faculty meeting to introduce our repository to them and to demonstrate how effective IR could be as a teaching tool. For example, we used the departmental digital commons page, such as the one for justice studies, <https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/justice-studies/>, to showcase to faculty the work that we had already done on their behalf. Many of our first champions came from the programs and departments that produced the most research. Being able to demonstrate our commitment to sharing their research by posting their works ourselves bolstered existing relationships and forged new ones which could envision the value of our IR to future users.

## Conclusion

The definition of what constitutes a successful repository continues to evolve. Using the criteria developed by Wong (2020), we measured the success of our repository in three ways. Our first success was the launching of the repository in a timely manner. As we near the second year of our public launch, we see a significant growth in downloads. The process took about 16 months from the time the platform was made until we actually publicly launched the IR. Our second success was the enhancing of the scholarly profile of our university researchers while meeting our primary goal to break down barriers to access.

A third success, which we are very proud of, is recently receiving the Karen Hunter Memorial Award, for recognition of our best practices. Additionally, Bepress/Elsevier has included our repository in a globally distributed case study document, along with three other schools, to showcase and highlight our innovativeness and best practices.

Our work involved months of hard work, consistent outreach and collaboration with our stakeholders and a successful launch of the repository. We realize that there will always be room for improvement and that the IR will continue to evolve. We are confident that we have the mechanisms to meet the challenges to come as the IR continues to grow. To support our university’s mission, share faculty research and raise the University’s profile.

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