Strategies for Populating Your Institutional Repository

Thanks for asking me to consider the topic of populating an institutional repository. As many of you know, this is easier said than done, so please recognize that many of the suggestions I am providing today fit into the category of "do what I say, not what I do".

The exercise of thinking this through has shown me some paths that we have not fully explored at the University of Calgary and made me more resolute to follow up on them.

I believe that there is a tremendous need for a tool like the institutional repository, not only from the scholarly communications and open access perspective, but also in the interests of our organizations. Traditionally, libraries and archives have provided the means to collect and access material purchased to support research and teaching. We have had much more modest success in bringing grey literature under some sort of control. Too, we have not had the tools to collect effectively and preserve unpublished or collateral research materials that are so fundamental in advancing the research agenda.

Institutional repositories can put us right in the middle of the research endeavours and provide a true service for both institutions and individual researchers. I believe we need to look, not only at the repository functions, so familiar and obvious to us as information workers, but also at the workflow features that will insinuate the repository right into the research process and provide the means to get research 'front and centre' for our institutions.

You might want to consider four steps in populating your institutional repository:

- Define your repository and where it fits in your service offerings.
- Be ready to accept deposits,
- Model repository use in your own organization, and
- Provide incentives for use

I'll expand on these topics a bit before I tell you that really you should throw away the steps and be open to the possibilities of this new tool. I suspect your users will come up with many ideas that you didn't think of. You have to be flexible and agile to meet user requests, always in the context of priorities and sustainability.

To conclude, I'll comment briefly on our experience in identifying likely users and early adopters.

DEFINE YOUR REPOSITORY

- Why do you have an institutional repository?
    - It's the current vogue? A need has been expressed internally in your organization? You have been reading all the material on IRs and are convinced that you should be leading the way on campus in this area?
    - The motivation makes a difference when you are deciding how to populate the repository.

- What is your repository – A preservation tool? A workflow tool? An all-purpose inventory tool? All things to all people? Have you set priorities for adding collections? Do you need to?
    - This is where you need to decide if you are to be opportunistic in developing your repository or develop a firm plan and strategy for adding collections. In our case, we are opportunistic, while keeping in mind two major projects – electronic theses and the scholarly output around our university strategic plan. Just for your information, one of these is modestly successful and one has yet to show results.
- Does one size fit all? Could you use a second iteration of your repository platform for a specialized project?
    - The idea here is that the software you are using may support a number of ideas. You may not want to mix "apples and oranges" in your university repository.
- How does it fit with other repositories (local and national), the library catalogue, courseware tools, electronic reserve? Why would it be better (advantageous) to use the IR rather than setting up a web site using html or an underlying database? After all, the web site will be searchable on google.
    - You need to have a good understanding about where this new tool will fit locally and how it is to be integrated. Most of the IR projects are working toward a national metasearch capability, but how does it all fit together at the local level?
- Determine if you are marketing a workflow tool or a static repository
    - As I mentioned, I believe the workflow aspects of the repository are strong selling points. However, we are using DSpace also as a repository for some electronic products to which we need to provide access. Understanding your software and its possibilities will open more avenues for you.
- Can the staff understand this environment and express which tools suit which projects?
    - You may have to do some staff training or provide tools so that the staff, who are already busy on many other things can do a good job selling the repository. Communication information – a web site, brochures, etc. Have you publicized the repository – seminars, meetings, talk, talk, talk, take advantage of opportunities e.g. the "Elevator speech" at the MIT web site, brochures, etc.

BE READY TO ACCEPT DEPOSITS

- Most repositories are moving out of the experimental stage now
- Is it easy to use the repository?
- Can you set up communities in a timely way?
- Do you have a "sandbox" to test out new ideas?
- Do you have documentation and training materials for the users?
- Have you got staff (or can recommend staff) to help?
- Are you able to provide scanning assistance/facilities for retrospective projects?
- Have you got a cost model for adding material?

- Is user authentication worked out?
- Have you got standards for metadata? Details on the formats for preservation?
- Are there interfaces to other campus systems? Links to other full text documents?
    - I'll just comment briefly on this aspect. With the proliferation of courseware and other systems supporting full text, your repository needs to interface effectively with tools others are using. Keep this in mind as you are developing your project. Faculty will need to know why they should add a document to yet another system when they could just put it in their blackboard folder or use existing staff in a department to add it to their web site. The long term implications of storage and preservation don't compete with the short term needs of getting material to students on time.
- Have you got a strategy for growing the repository/upgrading software/etc.

MODEL REPOSITORY USE

- Is your unit using the repository?
    - If your own staff don't want to use it, why would the faculty?
- Can you demonstrate that this is a "best practice"?
- Are you evaluating the use of the repository?
- Are they testing the various features (workflow, uploading records, testing particular file formats, linking to the catalogue, etc.)?
    - Staff are the best ones for testing specific situations and will provide lots of critical (and sometimes helpful) suggestions
- Have you got the Dean/Director's research in the repository? Other academic staff?
- Does the repository work for other applications?
- Find the "low hanging fruit"

PROVIDE INCENTIVES FOR USE

- Copyright assistance – getting and ensuring correct permissions
- Seed funding to add particularly interesting collections
- Competitive research grants (Cornell)
- Develop research projects (for example, how might citation analysis change in the world of institutional repositories?)
- Workflow aspects may save time or improve processes
- A powerful incentive is the promise to sustain the site and add improvements as they come with the software

To summarize, you need to put some structure around the repository project, even if it begins as an experiment. I think many of our current projects have suffered from the "if you build it, they will come" syndrome. A recent OCLC Press Release [advertising a presentation by Dr. Paul Conway, Director of ITS] at Duke noted:

> *According to Gartner Research, the concept of the Institutional Repository (IR) in higher education has just traversed the "peak of inflated*

> *expectations" and is headed toward the "trough of disillusionment." As the hype cycle continues, so too does the outpouring of published literature on why an IR is such a good thing and what it takes to make it work.*
>
> *In some ways it seems that the promise of a vital service to scholarship has turned into a giant public relations headache.*

Knowing where we are going with the repository will help us to deliver on the promise.

Back to our discussion. Having suggested four steps for populating your repository

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you always want to put these in the context of being flexible and open to possibilities for the use of the repository

- A look at several institutional repositories showed a wide array of projects and files that spanned much more than the narrow view of scholarly communication
- In fact, the sky's the limit in looking at repositories which include research reports and results, data files, music scores, sound and video files, photographs and other digitization projects, grey literature, even access to licensed materials (California Digital Library)
- Organic growth of your repository may not be a bad thing, as long as you are able to sustain the variety of projects.

In our experience, who are the likely users?

- Get a champion in Senior Administration and HELP her add her information
- Graduate students – we have found that they understand the concept right away and are open to exploration and testing
- Professors who are retiring and have a body of research that they would like to make available. They appreciate that the organization sees their work as valuable and is interested in preserving it. Be aware, though, that this will require some work – copyright clearance, digitizing, links to online resources, etc. The professors will not likely at this stage have the support to do this on their own.
- University documents – particularly theses
- Institutes and Centres that are producing scholarly output. In my experience, particularly the new institutes have tremendous demands put on them, including requests for scholarly output. By providing a tool and being part of the solution, you can win excellent content providers and examples for other groups
- Your own organization – At UofC, we have focused on theses, some subscription documents, our information literacy group, individual research, including that of the Director . . .

In conclusion, the institutional repository is a new tool and one which can enhance your services and allow you to support the research endeavours of the university.

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