

Digital Publishing at Feinberg Library: The Institutional Repository as Outreach Initiative

Joshua F. Beatty
SUNY Plattsburgh

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Feinberg Library is a medium-sized academic library at SUNY Plattsburgh, one of New York's teaching-oriented public comprehensive colleges. In 2012 Feinberg librarians launched "Digital Commons @ SUNY Plattsburgh," (<http://digitalcommons.plattsburgh.edu>) an institutional repository and publishing system hosted on Berkeley Electronic Press's (bepress) Digital Commons platform.



Outreach Philosophy

From the beginning our Digital Commons has been conceived of as an outreach initiative rather than a systems-side initiative. This initially came about as a practical decision, as the library needed to fill a reference and

instruction position and added research of an institutional repository (IR) to the job duties. But the decision was fortuitous, as the view of the IR as a tool primarily for outreach grew into a central tenet of our vision.



This philosophy has led us to deemphasize the traditional role of the institutional repository as an archive of previously published work. One of our primary concerns has always been to avoid “roach motel” syndrome, in which data enters the digital archive and never comes out (Salo, 2008, p. 98). We wanted to ensure that whatever documents we had in the repository mattered to faculty or students currently at the college. This meant forgoing sources often used to rapidly populate a repository. For example, we decided that we would not start our Digital Commons by digitizing old masters’ theses.

Instead of archiving previously published work, we have instead focused on publishing original student and faculty materials. Thus, we wanted to allow Plattsburgh faculty and students to showcase their work in ways that simply were not possible on any other college-run service, such as personal or class websites. The goal is to put in materials that people from both inside and outside the college community will want to see. And the best way to do that was to work with individual faculty and their students to identify the work that excited them, and that they wanted to make available.

Publishing Process

Thus, we have made it a key tenet of our repository to encourage faculty and students to take part in the publishing process. We do not want to just publish materials for students or faculty, but to work with them to build something new and to best showcase their work within the particular space of the repository.

As a result, we have relied on word of mouth to find materials for the repository. All librarians at Feinberg serve as liaisons to several departments. Those librarian-teaching faculty contacts have been key in identifying professors who want to be engaged in publishing material with us. Though we are publishing undergraduate and graduate student work as well, we are not directly contacting them; the first meetings are always with a faculty member mentoring students.

In theory, the repository manager and the faculty member have clearly delineated roles. The repository manager has responsibility for setting up the series, training the faculty member, and troubleshooting any issues. Faculty are expected to upload documents, add metadata, and make any necessary edits. In practice, the repository manager shoulders some of those duties. They step in more often to assist faculty who are less comfortable with technology. And if administering a series means simply uploading two text documents a year, it is just as easy for the manager to quickly add the materials. But for more complex series requiring more frequent maintenance, we insist that the faculty member take at least an equal share in administrative duties.

The repository manager meets in person with the interested faculty member. Here we listen to the patron and find out what material he or she wants to publish, and if he or she has a pre-existing idea for how the material should appear in the repository. Digital Commons has a number of different “gallery” types appropriate to different collections of work. We often open up a three-way conversation among the repository manager, the faculty member, and bepress’s (outstanding) support staff to discuss the best way to publish the material.

The repository manager and library staff might upload some of the materials themselves, but we do not want this to be fully our responsibility. Instead, we add the faculty member as an administrator of their materials. We sit down with the professor for a one- to two-hour session to show them the ins and outs of the Digital Commons interface. During this session we walk the patron through the publishing process, showing the faculty member how to upload materials and how to enter metadata for the collection.

The repository manager, to be sure, will still have to troubleshoot issues. The point is not to push the faculty member or student to shoulder all administrative responsibilities, but to actively engage them in the process of digital publishing. By understanding the particular platform on which they publish, they will be better able to communicate their needs back to the repository manager. The instruction session, we have found, serves much the same purpose as a reference interview. Through the process, the librarian comes to better understand the patron’s specific needs and can, when necessary, suggest solutions that neither would have considered otherwise.

Digital Commons, we have found, is particularly well suited for a repository in which responsibility for administration of individual collections is shared by librarians and teaching faculty. It is based on the EduKit publishing platform. Neither the librarian nor faculty member needs programming knowledge. The interface is Web based and fairly simple. After an initial

instruction session, even faculty with limited computer skills have been able to manage their own materials. And they can very quickly see the results online. Digital Commons is particularly strong at search engine optimization. When we post work, we find that it shoots to the top of Google searches within days. Authors are invariably delighted when they Google themselves and see their repository publication near the top of the results.

Examples

Student Work: Expeditionary Studies

Because our repository intends to emphasize student work as well as faculty work, we want to work with enthusiastic faculty to help put their students' best work online. Perhaps our most successful initiative so far has been a partnership with Plattsburgh's [Department of Expeditionary Studies](http://www.plattsburgh.edu/academics/exp/) (<http://www.plattsburgh.edu/academics/exp/>). During their senior years, students majoring in Expeditionary Studies first plan for and then travel on an adventure expedition. Their plans are the length of a typical senior thesis and include an itinerary, a list of supplies, and a detailed description of their emergency preparations. After the plan is approved by a department committee, the students then follow through on the plan. In recent years, students have kayaked around the Isle of Skye and through the rivers of the Mekong Delta, climbed Devil's Tower in Wyoming, and skied the backcountry of the Sierra Nevadas.

In December 2012, working with the department chair Larry Soroka, we began putting the [expedition proposals online in our Digital Commons](http://digitalcommons.plattsburgh.edu/expeditionproposals/) (<http://digitalcommons.plattsburgh.edu/expeditionproposals/>). The response was immediate. Students were happy to have a place to show off their proposals to the world. It became easier for juniors beginning to plan for 2013–2014 to get a sense of the task before them. And interested people from beyond the college wrote the students to ask for more information about their trips.

As the proposals were so well-received, the department has asked us for help in making further materials available. After returning, each student makes a presentation about their expedition. The form of the presentation varies by student. It might be a PowerPoint or a slideshow; it might include video or audio footage. Working with the faculty and the students, we plan to begin adding these presentation materials to the Digital Commons. Our goal here will not be to archive everything, but to use the particular form granted by our publishing platform to tell the student's story through a selective group of materials. In other words, it will be curated content.

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SENIOR EXPEDITION PROPOSALS

The Senior Expedition is the culminating class of the bachelor's degree in expeditionary studies at SUNY Plattsburgh. It is the second of two capstone courses, requiring students to meet specific expedition guidelines as evidence of having successfully fulfilled the goals of the expeditionary studies curriculum.

Theses/Dissertations from 2013

[Sawtooth 2013: An Expedition into the Idaho Wilderness](#), Davidson & Mossey

[Backcountry Skiing in Alaska's White Pass](#), Charlie Stewart

Theses/Dissertations from 2012

[A Sea Kayak Circumnavigation of The Isle of Skye](#), Sydney Aveson

[The Mekong River: An Expedition Proposal](#), Garrett Cooper

[A Circumnavigation of Isla de la Guarda](#), Gary Goldfinger

[Climbing Expedition: The Wind River Range and Grand Teton National Park](#), Keith Madia

[The Sierra: Discovering the Backcountry](#), Tova L. Soroka

Theses/Dissertations from 2010

[Threading The Needles of South Dakota and Storming Devils Tower of Wyoming](#), Brandon Commanda

[Sea Kayaking North Carolina's Outer Banks](#), Allison Waring and Kari Dahlquist

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SENIOR EXPEDITION PROPOSALS

A Circumnavigation of Isla de la Guarda

[Gary Goldfinger, SUNY Plattsburgh](#)

Date of Award
 Fall 12-15-2012

Degree Type
 Thesis

First Advisor
 Steve Maynard

Second Advisor
 Laurence Soroka

Abstract
 The senior expedition is our final capstone of the Expeditionary Studies program at SUNY Plattsburgh. This is basically what we have been training for during our university career. Since being a student here, I have seen many of the senior expedition presentations and even went along on a few of the trips, but I had no idea what I would be doing for my own. Starting out exclusively as a climber, a climbing trip was the obvious choice, but as I continued my education, many other disciplines came to be a part of my regular schedule. In fact, climbing recently has taken a back seat to other sports such as white water kayaking and sea kayaking. In the last couple of years with the extensive traveling I have done, I thought about what my expedition would entail and ideas came around every corner. Many of these ideas were way over my head and I realized that after looking into them more extensively. Someday I would like to complete these more rigorous expedition ideas, but for now, I need to do something in my skills set. First I needed a discipline, and as climbing has slowly been moving out of the spot light, I decided sea kayaking would be a great plan. Climbing has always been a challenge for me to push my limits and I see that in sea kayaking too. Dealing with tides and currents, flat water, rough water, and the dynamic setting allows me to be

Included in [Kinesiology Commons](#)

SHARE

Faculty Partnerships

We are also using our Digital Commons to identify and publish work that, while worthy, cannot be published via traditional methods. The scholarly publishing crisis is real; the humanities, in particular, are in a difficult spot. Many university presses are closing and those still open now release fewer books, even as there is more and more pressure for faculty to

publish. Thus, we want to partner with faculty to publish work that would otherwise not see the light of day.

If the market for monographs is limited, the market for edited primary sources is even more so. In the fall of 2012, the library's liaison to the English department alerted the repository manager that a modern languages professor, Isabel Arredondo, had been unable to find a publisher for such a book. Arredondo had published a Spanish-language edition of a book of interviews with Mexican women filmmakers, but she was unable to find a press interested in producing an English edition. Arredondo wanted to make these interviews available to the public and to be able to cite them in an upcoming monograph. We have used Digital Commons to make the [English-language manuscript](http://digitalcommons.plattsburgh.edu/modernlanguages/1/) (http://digitalcommons.plattsburgh.edu/modernlanguages/1/) available—Arredondo, of course, retains the copyright.

Arredondo's monograph will be published later this year. The publisher of that book is delighted to have the primary sources available online. We are adding information about the monograph to the Digital Commons page for the interviews manuscript. That page is already very visible in search results; Arredondo hopes that by associating it with the upcoming monograph she can raise the profile of both.

The screenshot shows the Digital Commons @ SUNY Plattsburgh website. The header includes the Plattsburgh logo and the text "Digital Commons @ SUNY Plattsburgh". Below the header is a navigation bar with links for Home, About, FAQ, and My Account. The main content area displays a search result for the book "In Our Own Image: An Oral History of Mexican Women Filmmakers (1988-1994)" by Isabel Arredondo. The page includes a search bar, a "Download" button, and a "SHARE" section with social media icons. The abstract of the book is visible, describing it as a translation of Isabel Arredondo's Spanish-language work.

Peer-Reviewed Journals

One of the most powerful features of the Digital Commons platform is the ability to publish peer-reviewed journals online, and to conduct the entire submission, review, and revision process through Digital Commons. The author submits a .doc or .pdf file directly to Digital Commons. An editor receives the submission and passes it on to peer reviewers, who in turn read the manuscript and send back comments to the editor and then to the author. All communication among author, editor, and reviewers, then, is through the Digital Commons interface, and Digital Commons keeps track of where the article is in the publishing workflow.

We have encouraged existing journals and magazines to shift their digital publishing to our Digital Commons. And we have worked with our Center for Teaching Excellence to produce a new, born-digital journal. At the end April 2013 the CTE announced *The Common Good: A SUNY Plattsburgh Journal on Teaching and Learning* (<http://digitalcommons.plattsburgh.edu/commongood>). The journal is intended to feature cross-disciplinary writing in the new field of “scholarship on teaching and learning” and includes work by both faculty and students.



Setbacks

Our model of emphasizing outreach and shared responsibility has been quite successful as we come up on the one-year anniversary of opening our Digital Commons. But not all has gone smoothly.

The advisor of a student literary magazine asked us to help the students publish a digital version on our Digital Commons. The repository manager and the library’s Web design expert worked with two student editors of the magazine to design a site for the digital journal. The editors trained on the platform and practiced on a demo site. But, just before the final site was to go live, the other students on the magazine staff protested that the site did not properly reflect their individuality. The advisor bowed to pressure and abandoned Digital Commons.

In retrospect, the student advisor had not been fully engaged with the planning process, nor had she taken the training workshop. She had left execution to the two bright and dedicated student editors. But when the other students raised concerns, the student editors did not have the power to overrule them, and the advisor did not have the understanding of the platform to explain the benefits.

The Digital Commons site for the student literary magazine still exists; if the next year's students want to use it we will happily work with them. But our failure to make sure that the faculty advisor as well as the student editors was fully engaged with the publishing process led to disappointment for us, a lost opportunity for the students to publish on a professional platform, and a great deal of wasted effort by the student editors.

Conclusion

Our first year using our Digital Commons as an outreach initiative has, overall, been a success. But the success of each individual publishing project has depended on the rapport formed between the repository manager and the faculty sponsor of the work. When the faculty member has been fully engaged with the publishing process, their projects have attracted interest and led to further possibilities. When the professor has taken a hands-off approach, the projects have stagnated. It is thus the librarian's responsibility, under an outreach model, to listen to what is said and not said, to take the partner's hopes and fears into account, and to continually find creative solutions to problems expected and unexpected—the same, then, as in any other good conversation with our patrons.

References

Salo, D. (2008). Innkeeper at the Roach Motel. *Library Trends*, 57(2), 98–123.

Library Publishing Toolkit

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