ScholarWorks at WMU

By Maira Bundza, ScholarWorks Librarian

Imagine going to one website and accessing the scholarly, research, and creative works of Western Michigan University faculty, staff, and students! Not just a bibliography in a CV or an abstracting index, but links to actual full text documents. Not just from a few departments, but from all the colleges and all the departments. Under the auspices of the University Libraries, WMU has just opened such a site and such a scholarly repository—called ScholarWorks at WMU (http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/).

Because this repository has “gone live” only in the last few months, we don’t have something from every department, but do have eight out of the nine colleges represented. At the time of this writing—late December 2011—17 departments and six other units have posted entries and links with more “getting on board” every week.

The Challenge

The University Libraries has been collecting books and other publications of our faculty and students since we first opened our doors over a hundred years ago. Our Archives and Regional History Collections, a branch of Waldo, has acquired and indexed WMU’s official archives, papers, publications, and miscellaneous items since 1956. However, as needs and formats change, the Libraries must collect, preserve, archive, and manage today’s scholarly output in a digital format that makes access easy as well as essential.

As a catalyst to our efforts, the WMU Academic Strategic Plan of 2010, Strategy 5.5, instructs the University to: “establish an electronic repository for research and scholarly communication,” and assigned this task to the University Libraries. The Libraries’ administration researched options, and with funding from the Provost, established ScholarWorks at WMU on the Digital Commons platform, which is owned by Berkeley Electronic Press or bepress—http://www.bepress.com/.

ScholarWorks at WMU Emerges

The ScholarWorks Implementation Team in the library consists of Associate Deans Barbara Cockrell and Scott Garrison; ScholarWorks Librarian Maira Bundza; Manager Paul Howell, Digitalization Center; Head Miranda Howard, Technical Services Department; and Director Sharon Carlson, University Archives and Regional History Collections. This team first established the overall goals of the WMU repository.

1. To increase the visibility of and access to WMU’s intellectual output worldwide
2. To collect WMU’s research, educational and creative scholarship in one place
3. To provide a way for WMU scholars to disseminate work while retaining copyright
4. To preserve and provide long-term access with a static WMU URL

Although the University Libraries will administer the scholarly repository, departments will be able to control their own content and submit it to the repository themselves.

Since January 2011, the Libraries has been training faculty, staff, and graduate students to administer parts of the repository and the Digital Commons platform. This education also involved a few select departments and units on campus who agreed to place materials into the repository. We needed to build a foundation so when we announced ScholarWorks at WMU to the full campus in late 2011, all faculty, staff, and students could see examples of the types of scholarly contributions that can and should be included. Once started, the momentum has energized across campus. By Thanksgiving 2011, we had our first 1000 documents in the repository.

What’s There Already?

Faculty publications will be a major focus although there are some difficulties with previously published articles since most publishers do not allow someone to take the PDF form of his/her article and place it in a repository. Many publishers do allow pre or post-prints to be in the repository, i.e., the manuscript that was first sent in to the publisher, or the manuscript after editing. Fortunately, there are procedures to check ownership rights and faculty are encouraged not to sign away their rights in order to put their work in a repository. Moreover, faculty not only publish articles, but have conference presentations, reports, posters, project descriptions, images, performances, and other documentation of their work that they may have the rights to put in a repository. An example of a selection of a department’s work can be seen under the Library Faculty and Staff Publications in ScholarWorks.
Student work comes in many forms from dissertations and master’s theses to honors theses, capstone or senior projects, research posters, etc. This is one instance where we will not necessarily be putting up full text of all the work and making it available as open access to the world until we have permission from the students, and, in some cases, the faculty, to do so. The Lee Honors College has asked our Digitization Center to digitize all the past honors theses—about 2200 of them. Over 500 have been digitized and entered into ScholarWorks, but only the most recent, where the student had the opportunity to sign the permission form, are actually available full text. The Honors College will be contacting all alumni and asking for permission to make their honors theses available publically. We will then be able to go into the system and turn “on” the full text. The chair of one of our departments had written an honors thesis at WMU some years ago, and he has given permission to make his public. Other repositories have reported that student work quality improves when students know their work not only will be reviewed by their professors, but also made public to the world, and especially to potential employers.

Western Michigan University is known internationally for its annual International Congress on Medieval Studies. Congress organizers have been looking for a system to compile conference paper proposals, and the ScholarWorks platform has this feature. The Medieval Institute was also interested in making available the conference programs from all the previous congresses—all 46 of them going back to 1962. They had digital copies from the most recent years, but the rest needed to be digitized by our Digitization Center before they could be put up on the site.

ScholarWorks has the capability to support online journals—not only displaying the finished journal online, but facilitating the submission, review and subscription processes. Two journals are currently in ScholarWorks at WMU with another two to start asking for submissions in early 2012. Setting up a formal journal is a bit more complicated than all the other materials in ScholarWorks, so there is a one-time set-up fee of $1500.

Reading Horizons is a journal of literacy and language arts published quarterly since 1960 by the Dorothy J. McCinnis Reading Center & Clinic, College of Education & Human Development. The most recent years are now online, and we have digitized all the issues back to 1960 and will be placing all online in 2012. The journal hopes to go totally online with the next volume, giving it a couple of more issues in print to prepare everyone for the changeover.

The Open Journal of Occupational Therapy has been under discussion in the Department of Occupational Therapy, and it was fortuitous that the University purchased a platform that they can use as a vehicle for their journal since they now are ready to launch. The department recently received a $2 million gift to support its programs, and the new journal was announced at the same time as the donation.

Teaching/Writing will be a new journal for “writing teacher” education produced under the aegis of the English Department, which expects to publish its first issue early in 2012.

Green Manufacturing Research Journal, a project of Manufacturing Engineering Professor John Patten, was discussed first as possibly utilizing the full journal platform, but it was decided to create a page and upload articles as they become available. This basic approach has seen strong usage with a record of “some of the most accessed articles” in ScholarWorks—giving support to the flexibility of the platform to provide open access to our user communities.

ScholarWorks is a great place to put up departmental and other newsletters. These ephemeral publications often get lost both in print and on people’s computers. We have put up a complete set of Prismatic: Western Michigan University’s Newsletter for Academic Affairs from the Office of the Provost and Inquiry from the Office of the Vice President for Research. By the time you read this, all the issues of Gatherings from the Friends of the University Libraries should also be available in ScholarWorks.

And More...

There is an image gallery function, where images can be uploaded into the repository and displayed as thumbnails or in a slide show. Currently we have history professor Kenneth Steuer uploading World War I POW camp images in an image gallery. Single images can be added to departmental or project Web pages in ScholarWorks to make them more visually appealing. We are adding the cover of each journal issue, when we upload journals.

Incidentally, an added benefit is that authors and administrators of particular pages can get reports of how many times people have looked at the cover page or citation information and how many times someone has downloaded the full text of a document.

Not to be confused with ScholarWorks at WMU, we also have a companion system called SelectedWorks, where faculty, staff and graduate students can create their own professional pages. These are online CV’s where citations can be listed for books and other materials that cannot be uploaded full text into ScholarWorks. But, if full text is available, we can link out to it. The advantage of SelectedWorks over other faculty websites is that this will keep count of how many times someone has accessed a particular document. The current WMU homepage has not been always easy to use, and many faculty do not have more than minimal information about themselves on their departmental pages. They will be able to link to their SelectedWorks page from their departmental page, and if they ever leave the University, they will be able to take this page with them, as it is not on a WMU site. To start a SelectedWorks page, one must go to http://works.bepress.com and instructions for starting and editing a page are on the ScholarWorks guide at http://libguides.wmich.edu/scholarworks/.

Only a Beginning...

This report is just a first look at ScholarWorks at WMU. There is every reason to anticipate that the WMU ScholarWorks repository will become a “Point of Pride,” a valuable record — past, present and future — of the diverse, scholarly contributions of the many communities at Western Michigan University.

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