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Flexible Marketing and Outreach: An Institutional Repository Case Study

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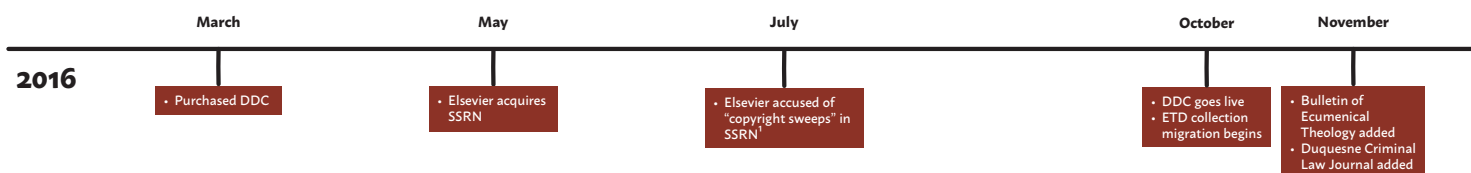
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Flexible Marketing and Outreach: An Institutional Repository Case Study

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Duquesne Context

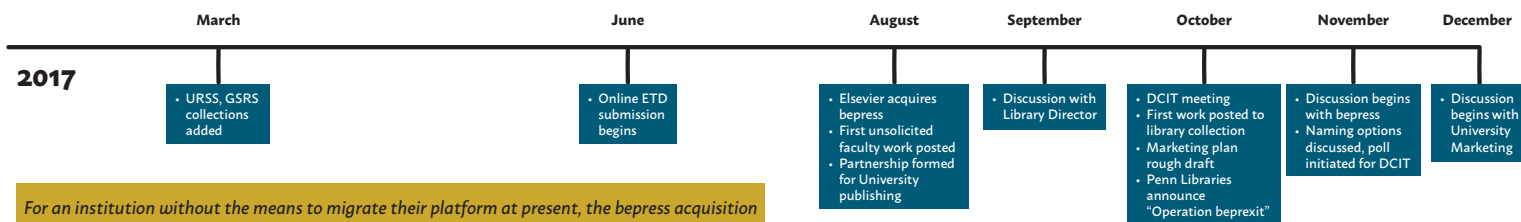
Gumberg Library acquired the bepress institutional repository platform, Digital Commons, in March 2016. The platform instance, named Duquesne Digital Commons (DDC), was purchased jointly with the Duquesne Center for Legal Information. A Digital Commons Implementation Team (DCIT) was formed, composed of representatives from both libraries. The team at Gumberg Library consisted of the Digital Scholarship Librarian, the Outreach & Communications Librarian, and the Systems Librarian.

DDC went live in October 2016, with the intention of using a period of "soft rollout" to collect content and recruit open access champions on campus. Limited marketing was conducted during this time, resulting in some interest by faculty members in mediated deposit; outreach efforts were more successful in recruiting individual collections such as student journals. The platform was intended to be marketed fully to the campus beginning in Spring 2017.

Wider Context

On August 2, 2017, Elsevier announced its acquisition of bepress. This announcement was perceived as being part of a greater strategy to focus more on the lifecycle of knowledge production.² Open access advocates warned that Elsevier's expressed interest in preprints—presaged by its purchase of SSRN—constituted an attempt to co-opt avenues for open scholarship, or "OA opportunism."³

The initial response to the bepress acquisition was fervent. In October of 2017, Penn Libraries announced their intention to migrate their repository from the Digital Commons platform ("Operation beprexit").⁴ Repository administrators discussed potential exit strategies and infrastructural barriers on backchannels such as Twitter and listservs. However, subsequent action to break away from Elsevier has been less well-publicized. The features that originally made Digital Commons the best choice for many institutions—including hosting, integrated support for journal publishing, and robust customer service—have made it difficult for repository managers to adopt new platforms.

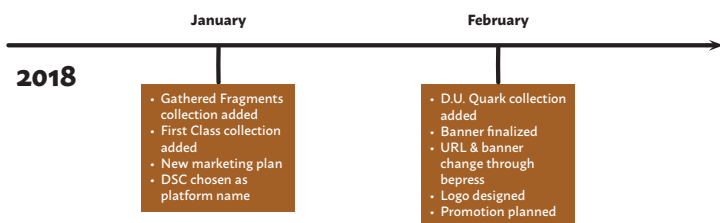


For an institution without the means to migrate their platform at present, the bepress acquisition is a call to action to examine structures and branding which are needlessly tied to for-profit platforms. This poster describes the efforts undertaken at Duquesne University to rebrand our repository in an effort to enable future flexibility agnostic of the repository platform in use.

The Approach

In response to the acquisition, librarians at Duquesne began to consider other options. Like many other institutions, the turnkey system of Digital Commons enabled a great deal of functionality to be managed by a small staff. Open source alternatives required more labor in terms of setup and maintenance, and other supported platforms tended to have costly setup or maintenance fees. No one platform offered a clear and immediate exit solution.

However, it became clear that our approach to the platform had not been future-focused. Our repository name, Duquesne Digital Commons, would not transfer well to a new platform. As our public promotion under this name had been limited, we decided to defer the full rollout of the repository in order to take the time to rename. We would then be able to make a renewed outreach effort with a new name and branding.



Next Steps and Lessons Learned

Although we have now more intentionally taken ownership of DSC, the difficult work of explaining the function and benefits of the platform to our users remains to be done. We intend to create our own digital graphics for use in various communications platforms (and to make them easy to edit and adapt) to raise awareness of the existence of the platform. In terms of targeting faculty, we plan to use a more viral and education-focused strategy through small flyers, infographic posters, and bookmarks. These materials will be more specific, focusing on how the repository can assist with open access scholarship and increased visibility for publications, faculty testimonials, and descriptive diagrams of the workflow for submitting to the platform. We will employ the promotion and branding decisions that we made in response to the platform acquisition to market DSC as an idea and a service apart from its underlying infrastructure.

How We Did It

Renaming the platform required a concerted effort to convince stakeholders of the importance of distancing the idea of the repository from the current software in use. This process is charted on the accompanying timeline. The Outreach & Communications, Digital Scholarship, and Systems librarians began to discuss next steps immediately following the acquisition, and planned meetings with other stakeholders (the University Librarian, DCIT, bepress, and University Marketing) beginning in September 2017. The process of getting buy-in on the idea, coming up with options for and voting on a new name, and coordinating the changing of the visual design and URL within the platform took until late February 2018.

We created an initial marketing and communications plan in late October 2017, and revisited it in January 2018 as we began to implement changes to the repository. Although there is a great deal of student work hosted in DSC, faculty members are our target audience. Promotion and outreach will therefore focus mainly on open access education, promoting the ease of use of the platform, and emphasizing the connections to existing library services (such as research impact consultations).

In our branding, we wanted to create a style guide that fits with the conservative style expectation of the campus community while also drawing attention to helpful information in a pleasant way. We began with the red and blue university colors, but used different hues in order to distinguish our materials from other University branding (and also to avoid conflicts with their style guide). We chose to create a logo that included both the acronym "DSC" (used in our URL, dsc.duq.edu) and the full title "Duquesne Scholarship Collection."



We've learned to be more adaptive, proactive in arguing for ideas and resources, and future-focused as a result of this process, and now advocate that other institutions re-evaluate vendor-owned systems to ensure that they are branded and conceptualized as essential library services regardless of the platform in use.

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