Pennsylvania State University

Elsevier’s Pure Helps Track Research Output

Founded in 1855 as Pennsylvania’s sole land-grant institution, Pennsylvania State University serves over 100,000 undergraduate, graduate, professional, and continuing education students across 24 campuses and offers over 275 baccalaureate degree programs. With more than $900 million in annual research expenditures, Penn State ranks among the top 25 U.S. research universities and is one of only two institutions in the nation accorded land-grant, sea-grant, sun-grant, and space-grant status. Fifteen Penn State disciplines rank nationally in the top 10 for research expenditures. Penn State was also ranked #18 in Top Public Schools in the nation by *U.S. News and World Report* for 2020.
INITIAL CHALLENGES

In January 2015, Penn State identified a need for an analytics tool that could better track and benchmark its research output across all departments. At that time, the university used Profiles Research Networking Software, a free open-source tool designed to import public information into a searchable library of electronic curriculum vitaes (CVs). Penn State was looking for a solution that could provide data source transparency and data integrity.

To lead this initiative Penn State hired Michelle Hutnik as a Science Writer, who, worked with a small team to evaluate several products. Instead of issuing an RFP, the research team chose to pilot Elsevier SciVal, and a year later, the institution received funding to purchase Elsevier’s Pure, a research information management system.

Hutnik’s team was drawn to the transparency Elsevier products offer by visibly linking to data sources. Today Penn State is using Elsevier’s Pure Core Module, Pure Portal, and Scopus, an online abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature, and the university is one of the largest Pure deployments in the United States.

IMPLEMENTATION

Penn State’s Pure implementation was challenging because the institution did not have a central location where its hierarchy was listed, nor did it have a central source that included faculty members’ complete professional titles and affiliations. Hutnik’s team developed the hierarchy and affiliations by contacting each college to request faculty information and to verify corresponding rankings and endowments. Another
In the Penn State College of Medicine, three staff members (for all three, just a small time percentage of their overall job responsibilities) contribute to managing Pure. For the rest of Penn State, Pure was initially managed by three staff members (only one of which was dedicated full time to Pure). Finding and keeping a project manager devoted full-time to Pure has been difficult because, as Hutnik explains, the position requires a unique skillset that combines an IT background with experience in the structure and dynamics of a university. Penn State has had three different people in the project manager role, but the position is currently empty.

LESSONS LEARNED

After three years, Penn State reconfigured its Pure portfolio. PSU staff did not find the Reporting Module to be intuitive, and the CV Module required more manual work than staff had anticipated. Penn State has now removed the CV and Reporting modules and has added a subscription to Elsevier’s Scopus online abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature. Penn State has also purchased Elsevier’s Profile Refinement Service, which includes automatic name disambiguation and a manual review of researchers’ publication lists before they are imported from Scopus into Pure. At Penn State, users can add information to their Scopus profiles themselves or by request to Penn State staff.

Penn State continues to add centers and institutes to its hierarchy as the institution

challenging aspect of Penn State’s Pure implementation was the institution elected to deploy Pure across the entire university at once rather than for a few schools at a time.

After gathering faculty information, the team imported a master-list spreadsheet with close to 5,000 faculty and their affiliations into Pure. After this nine-month process, Penn State opened up the database to its faculty for three months and allowed them to review and edit their profiles and to opt out. After over a year of preparation, in February 2018, Penn State went live with the Pure Core Module, Pure Portal, the CV Module, and the Reporting Module.

Elsevier has consistently provided Penn State with a direct customer-support contact throughout their implementation and afterward. Penn State staff hold biweekly meetings with their Elsevier contact to discuss product enhancements, updates, and best practices. Penn State has also found the Pure North American user group to be a valuable resource.
evolves, and ongoing manual data input on researcher roles is part of the upkeep of Pure. For example, Penn State staff pull human resources data for information about newly joined researchers, and they keep track of information on promotions and who has left the school through Penn State’s News. According to Hutnik, it can also be difficult to define who has left the institution if a research project continues after a participating faculty member is no longer employed by Penn State.

SOLUTION BENEFITS AND STRENGTHS

Having a publicly available, searchable database is the primary benefit of Pure, as both internal and external users can now find who is doing what research at Penn State. Pure is directly benefiting staff in the Offices of Foundation Relations and Industry Partnerships, who can now more easily identify potential partnerships that researchers may want to take part in.

At Penn State, information such as who is actually a member of each institute or center was originally siloed in each particular institute or college. Another key benefit since deploying Pure is the centralized access to faculty research information that Pure now provides. There are 5,499 available researcher profile spots to cover Penn State’s 24 campuses. Only actively publishing researchers are in Pure, which keeps the institution just under its user profile limit. Faculty can petition to be in Pure, and all researchers outside of Penn State College of Medicine can edit their own profiles. Penn State College of Medicine has different rules requiring faculty members to go through the administrative group to edit their profile details. The College of Medicine’s centralized management is to ensure researcher profiles remain in compliance with guidelines for NCI-Designated Cancer Centers.

Pure is powered by the Elsevier Fingerprint Engine, which creates a fingerprint of keywords related to each particular researcher’s body of work. The Fingerprint Engine has been valuable for Penn State in working across such a large set of researchers, because it provides a consistent vocabulary set for searching and finding researchers in specific areas. Researchers also have the option to change their terms if they do not want to use the automatically populated Fingerprint terms. Two Penn State websites leverage Pure’s API to pull in the Fingerprint terms and other researcher information.

REFERENCES

As part of this research, Tambellini briefed with Michelle Hutnik, Director of Research Analytics and Communications at Penn State University, and those briefings helped inform this case study. Tambellini also gathered information from www.psu.edu/.

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thetambellinigroup.com
800-414-3405
P.O. Box 685, Irvington, VA 22480

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