The American University in Cairo: Seeking a way to increase exposure and impact of its research output

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Abstract
The mission of the American University in Cairo (AUC) is to become Egypt's global university. To achieve this, the university sought a solution to offer global access to the wealth of its research, without straining its technological services. AUC turned to Digital Commons — Elsevier's state-of-the-art publishing and institutional repository platform to help increase exposure and impact of AUC's research output.

Introduction
Founded in 1919, AUC is an Egyptian-American institution with a global vision, offering a liberal arts education to 5,500 students across an internationally diverse faculty of 1,500. Ranked second in Africa on the QS World Rankings, AUC aspires to increase its international enrollments and its research visibility as part of its aim to become Egypt's international university.

Driven to find a simple and secure way to maximize global visibility
At AUC, research was stored across three different systems — eRepertoire, dSpace and UJR. None of these systems was integrated, and all required a high-level of technical support, which wasn't readily available within the Library nor IT support.

AUC was keen to find a more effective way to aggregate, store and search for its research, and in turn wanted to help raise global visibility of its research with an international audience.

Digital Commons: a single source for digital collections
Under the leadership of then-Vice Provost, and now Provost, Ehab Abdel-Rahman, the Library engaged with Elsevier's Digital Commons to understand how it could help address their core needs:

- Single point of managing and providing access to AUC research
- Support diverse content formats including images, text and audiovisual recordings
- Global accessibility, both in terms of open access and effective SEO
- Standardized taxonomy regardless of content format
- Minimal technical support
- Metrics to demonstrate access and reach

Just as the migration was set to commence, there were a series of organizational restructuring and personnel changes, including the re-engineering of the IT department and the departure of the Digital Services librarian. Consequently, AUC's implementation was spearheaded by Mark Muehlhaeusler, librarian for AUC's Center for Excellence for ME and Arab Cultures, and Stephen Urgola, the University Archivist and Director of AUC Records Management, with support from Digital Commons Consultant Anne Luca. Mark and Steve credit Anne's diligence and patience as keys to a successful migration and rollout. The Library also engaged part-time research associates, who were brought in specifically to support the technical aspects of Digital Commons.

Working with data in separate and siloed repositories was a time-consuming and challenging exercise, but essential to the new repository's success. Extracting the journal data was the easiest part because the data was so clean. Conversely, the dSpace export, providing access to student theses and dissertations, was the hardest part because the data did not have editorial control, and they were working against a hard deadline; data was exported to a spreadsheet, and run through the R programming tool, which addressed some pockets of data, especially that associated with audiovisual materials, but it failed in working with faculty publications, which required more manual efforts. Working with eRepertoire, which managed faculty papers in citation and, as available, full-text formats, was a little easier, but, again, the data wasn't as structured as it could have been and there were some issues, such as no control with names or ability to denote visiting professors. Data work is ongoing, supplemented by using the links to the full-text articles and data provided through a Scopus API to fill in some of the missing or conflated data.

Faculty input was the key to success
While the Digital Commons implementation was endorsed, funded and sponsored by the university's leadership, faculty input was key to its overall success. Mark and Steve engaged deans and department leaders to understand their workflow and needs with Digital Commons; some department leaders even made suggestions to improve and tailor the workflow. However, the Library has not yet released editorial control to maintain copyright.
A single point of entry for all university research

The investments of planning, effort and time paid off—the new Digital Commons repository, promoted as the AUC Knowledge Fountain, offers a clean and modern layout and design. Offering a single point of entry to all university research, users report that the Fountain is much more intuitive to use than its predecessors. Downloads, to date, are more than 30,000, and, of note, the most downloaded record to date was a student’s research paper on the violence in Twitter posts.

University leadership is pleased that usage metrics help to identify the research areas of the greatest interest and where visitors are coming from, meeting the goals of raising AUC research visibility; indeed, the university is already seeing an increase in international enrollment, which it attributes, in part to raising its profile via Digital Commons.

Digital Commons was endorsed by the university leadership, and Library marketing included “road shows” with departments, targeted email communications to faculty and students, and digital promotion through the Library’s Internet site. The initial release was a smooth transition, with only a couple students who either experienced an outdated link or limited information.

What’s next?

Focusing on the arts department in particular, Digital Commons offers an interesting opportunity to showcase not only journal-based, but also more creative university outputs — such as recordings and videos of performing arts performances.

The Library is also exploring ways to integrate Digital Commons with faculty annual reporting as well as considering making it mandatory for researchers to submit faculty papers to Digital Commons and apply more auto-harvesting of faculty research metadata from Scopus.

Dean of the AUC Libraries and Learning Technologies, Daniel Ortiz Zapata, who joined the Library just as the rollout was starting says “We aspire to promote Digital Commons as a peer-review repository, and are currently working with faculty at a research level to use Digital Commons towards that work and sharing of research. Previously I worked at the University of Massachusetts in Boston and there we provided Digital Commons to faculties as a repository to publishing all outputs.”

While the data export presented a number of challenges, the overall Digital Commons implementation was greatly successful, facilitated by the strong support of Anne Luca, the Digital Commons Consultant. Digital Commons has addressed the immediate needs for providing a sole source, with an attractive and easy-to-use interface for accessing the diverse array of AUC research, including the undergrad research journal, theses and dissertations and faculty papers, without straining or stressing technical support services, and helping to raise the university’s research profile.

Related Links:
AUC Knowledge Fountain (Fount)
fount.aucegypt.edu
URJE Journal —The Undergraduate Research Journal
fount.aucegypt.edu/urje/
About Digital Commons

Digital Commons is Elsevier’s best-in-class turnkey solution for institutions to openly publish, manage and promote the full spectrum of their work. Built for discovery, our cloud-hosted digital repository software includes a professional-grade publishing platform for faculty and student scholarship, open access journals and books, conference proceedings, open educational resources and more. Over 600 institutions — and growing — use Digital Commons to preserve and promote their intellectual output and expertise.

For more information, visit elsevier.com/solutions/digital-commons

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