The rewards of platform unity: moving to one repository at Universidad de La Salle delivers benefits

To better support the mission that drives Colombia’s Universidad de La Salle — to generate knowledge that will transform Colombian society by contributing to equity, the defense of life and human development — the university recognized the need to combine three separate digital platforms into a single unifying online presence while simultaneously addressing a long list of technical challenges. After considering several options, it identified Digital Commons as the perfect fit for its needs.

This case study charts the university’s decision-making process, the rewards it has subsequently reaped and eight tips for other institutions embarking on a digital repository journey.
Introduction

Founded in 1964, Universidad de La Salle is a private Catholic institution with around 14,000 students and 700 postgraduates enrolled in a wide array of courses and degree programs. It is rated a “High Quality University” by Colombia’s National Accreditation Council (CNA). Back in 2018, the institution’s five journals were stored on Public Knowledge Project’s Open Journal Systems (OJS) platform. Initially, OJS ticked many boxes for the journals team, as Editorial Head Alfredo Morales recalls: “We were able to consolidate all our titles, standardize publishing criteria and increase visibility inside and outside the university.”

But the team also encountered issues that impacted their productivity and content discoverability. At the same time, the library was supporting two unconnected DSpace repositories: one hosting La Salle’s electronic theses and dissertations and the other its digital educative resources. So, a cross-department task force set out to find a single solution that would provide them with key items on their wish list:

- One entry point to the university’s intellectual output
- Support for the full journal-publishing cycle (including peer review)
- Robust customer support
- Effective SEO and indexing of journal articles in Google Scholar
- Standardization of metadata
- Cloud storage (to combat local server size limitations and downtime issues)
- Ability to store pictures, videos and audio
After exploring the available options, Alfredo and his colleagues, including Journal Coordinator Rosa González and Technical and Bibliometrical Manager Leonardo Jiménez, chose Digital Commons.

Alfredo explains: “We liked Digital Commons a lot — not only did it allow us to unify our content, it was also the only solution that met our budget, workflow and administration requirements. And we were attracted to the multiplatform aspect. For example, if a user is looking for a scientific article, it functions like an online publication; but for people consulting an undergraduate thesis, it works like a repository.”

He adds: “To be part of Digital Commons, where it is possible to find so many publications from American, Middle Eastern and Australian universities, also seemed crucial to us.”

Once the decision was made, the first step for the team was to migrate all the content of 10 journals (representing more than 2,700 full-text records) to the new Digital Commons repository, **Ciencia Unisalle**. With the end of their OJS contract looming, it proved to be a race against time, but they worked with their Digital Commons Consulting Services representative, Elie Katzenson, to complete the process in just six weeks. Following the repository’s launch in November 2018, the team then drew on lessons learned during the journal migration process to successfully transfer more than 17,000 theses and dissertations, followed closely by its collection of digital education resources. It has since added detailed biological information associated with the La Salle natural history museum collections — including high-resolution images of preserved specimens. This biological data has proved particularly popular since the outbreak of COVID-19. To date, nearly 20,000 documents have been migrated, and the team is now looking to grow the repository even more by adding other institutional documents, open access books published by the university and content from strategic thematic areas. Alfredo comments: “We also want to offer refined search services; for example, we could have them for each United Nations Sustainable Development Goal⁵ and for gender and racial equality topics. These are services that few libraries offer.”
Reaping rewards

Since Ciencia Unisalle’s launch, departments across the university have reported very real benefits.

An important benefit — and something new for the university — is the access to robust metrics. Alfredo explains: “For the first time, we are conscious of the impact we have. We can see that we have had more than 750,000 downloads to date, with an average of more than 8,000 per day. The repository dashboard also gives us real-time information on the geographic location and institution of visitors. And the integration with the alternative metrics offered by PlumX Metrics6 really adds value. Authors of articles in Ciencia Unisalle receive regular monthly reports of the impact of their articles. They (and we) can use these metrics to identify new contacts, find new evaluators and more.”

Rosa González agrees: “Our idea is to use the dashboard data to identify potential partners and inspire collaboration — we are still working on it, but there is a lot of potential.” She and her colleagues also analyze the data to identify hot topics. “If we see a subject is trending, we might do a call for articles. And the range of metrics and the fact they are in real time means that every time someone asks us for information, we’re not fumbling around to compile a report from multiple sources.”

Rosa has also seen an improvement in the university’s interactivity with authors. “In the beginning, they were questioning the veracity of the metrics, but we reassured them that they are system-generated and are trustworthy. In this sense, it has validated our scientific journals even more. And I know that the authors find the metrics reports they receive very helpful. We encourage them to openly share the information to raise visibility for their articles and the journals.”

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According to Rosa, the bid to raise the journals’ visibility is working, with publishers enjoying an influx of more varied articles and from different locations. “Some deal with topics that the publishers have never considered before, even though the topics are connected with, for example, the field of study covered by a particular journal.

“And thanks to the metrics dashboards, we know that articles are being read in US universities and laboratories. We also have visitors from well-known local businesses, such as Ecopetrol (Colombian oil company). Perhaps this was the case before, but now we know, which puts us in a much more informed position.” Alfredo adds: “We can see that we are being consulted for topics related to optometry in Australia, while in Brazil we are being heavily consulted on veterinary science. We are seeing that we have more impact on the community than we previously imagined. It is essential for us to have the data to inform decisions that will help us improve as an institution.”

The university journal guidelines and processes have also benefitted from the new repository, as Rosa explains: “The move made us look at which efforts were worth pursuing and consolidate our standards for authors, ethical guidelines and more … all the things that are important for us to be promoted and indexed.”

One aspect that Alfredo particularly values is the technical support and backup. “We get 24-hour service, we get quick answers, and the Digital Commons team has a real interest in understanding the needs of our institution and the region.” The fact that the repository is in the cloud also means that he and his colleagues enjoy unlimited storage capacity and no longer worry about server crashes (a previous issue) or the cost of hiring technical engineering support to maintain or upgrade the servers.
8 tips to think about when choosing and setting up a repository

1. Determine the project scope and objectives.
Alfredo explains: “The institution must be aligned on what it wants an institutional repository for, what the purpose of the information is, how to build academic networks and provide services to researchers using the repository, etc.”

2. Decide on the content and how to deliver it.
According to Leonardo Jiménez: “It’s important to be clear about the types of publications involved and the metadata, field management and view types required. The quality and standardization of fields is fundamental for visibility. Once these items are clear, everything else becomes easier. And if you aren’t clear about what needs to be done, it will impact the questions you ask and the information you provide to your solution provider.” He adds: “I think the real challenge for us was to define the structure of the collections because of the diversity and quantity of academic programs handled by the university; but in the end, we got a superb result.”

3. Build the right team.
When choosing who will work on the project internally, think about quantity and quality. As Leonardo recalls: “In our case there were just two people working on the migration and this made it easier to get agreement.” And according to Alfredo, it’s also important to work as a team with your solution provider, in this case Digital Commons: “We did, and it benefited Ciencia Unisalle a lot.” Leonardo adds: “Our consultant helped us to see that Ciencia Unisalle is not just simply a repository, it’s a service.”

4. Consider any national requirements.
Alfredo again: “In Latin America, the open access and open science movements have strong support. As a result, there are directives being developed for institutional repositories, similar to the European Open Aire directives. For a repository to be widely understood and valued as an open access platform, it is necessary to have interoperability and the possibility that content can be legitimately harvested by other systems.”

5. Establish deadlines and stick to them.
It’s important to consider the time required for each phase of work and to be diligent in working toward timely completion of each phase. With a fixed deadline looming due to an expiring contract with their previous solution, dedication to achieving each phase of the migration was crucial for the La Salle team.

6. Work closely with other departments to promote the repository.
Leonardo says: “We got great support from the library team who spread the word in the training sessions they hold for professors, students and the rest of the university community. They have also helped share news about our performance metrics, such as the number of downloads.”

7. Focus on building a repository brand.
According to Alfredo: “It is crucial to give your system a name, rather than just saying ‘this is our institutional repository’. Ciencia Unisalle has helped our student community and professors see it as our new service. It’s also important to ensure there’s a correlation between the repository name and the URL.”

8. Consider how you can build out the content.
Alfredo again: “We have constant meetings with the people in charge of the academic and administrative units. We are regularly talking to all those departments that generate information we can store and share to see if they are willing to cooperate with us.”
About Universidad de La Salle

This Catholic and Lasallian university was founded by the Brothers of the Christian Schools in 1964 in Bogotá, Colombia. It is rated a “High Quality University” by the country’s National Accreditation Council (NAC). Offering 23 academic degree programs, 16 specialization programs and five master’s degrees, it conducts research with relevance and social impact. Among its key aims are a desire to promote the dignity and integral development of the person, the transformation of society, the promotion of culture and the search for the meaning of truth.
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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