
The Undergraduate Research Commons
A primer by Jean-Gabriel Bankier, President and CEO, bepress

What is the origin of the Undergraduate Research Commons?

Credit goes to forward-thinking scholarly communications librarians who proactively engaged their colleagues from the office of undergraduate research, honors programs, and colleges and departments. Campus support for undergraduates looking to publish their research has grown tremendously in the last few years. Not so long ago, the idea of including student work in institutional repositories was almost taboo. Today, 80% of Digital Commons colleges' and universities' sites feature undergraduate work.

Publishing undergraduate research is an idea that has a lot of momentum behind it right now. Undergraduate journals, as one of the popular types of publication workflows and structures we support, serve as a nice illustration of this momentum. There are now 162 student-only journals using the bepress Digital Commons publishing platform. Not so long ago undergraduate research journals were a rarity. Robert Leekley (2007), publication adviser and chair of the Illinois-Wesleyan Economics Department, is quoted as saying: "It's very rare to have an entire publication generated solely with the work of undergraduates. We've actually used it when we recruit faculty. It's very impressive."*

What kinds of student works are being published?

The Undergraduate Research Commons includes award-winning research, conferences, posters and presentations, fieldwork and class projects, honors theses and capstone projects, creative works, and research papers. There's an [infographic](#) on the homepage to show how this breaks down by subject area and publication type.

What are the benefits of publishing student research for students?

Publishing student work increases transparency and thus raises the bar for students and their faculty advisory. The publication process changes the nature of the work itself: when student authors know their work will be available for the world to see, they work harder, learn more, and produce better research. Publishing undergraduate work [enhances student learning outcomes](#) and can build confidence, even encouraging student authors to pursue a career in research in their field of study. Of course, getting published also helps students in their job searches and when they apply to graduate schools.

What are the benefits of publishing student research for the University?

For the institution as a whole, publishing student research is a clear and obvious student-recruiting tool. The Dean of Library Services at California Polytechnic University found that the president “understood that he could point prospects and their parents to examples of what their students can accomplish at Cal Poly”. *

The library benefits from publishing undergraduate research, too. Scholarly communications librarians are teaching information literacy and publishing skills to undergraduate students and in many cases to their faculty advisory as well. It’s an important role for the library to play.

What are the benefits of making student research freely available online for readers?

The fact that student works have been downloaded more than sixteen million times speaks to the importance of making this research available. [The Digital Commons Network](#) has made it possible for independent scholars to access and browse research in one portal; we’re looking forward to seeing how researchers use the Undergraduate Research Commons, not just in the undergraduate-research community, but in a broader context, too.

Why Create a Portal?

We wanted to show the volume and variety of high-quality undergraduate research that students are producing, and to shine a spotlight on this important and growing movement. We also wanted to recognize the incredible success that our community is having on their campuses. Finally, we aspire to have the portal serve as an index of undergraduate publishing outlets—a place where undergraduates from any institution can go to find journals to which they can submit their work for consideration. There simply aren’t enough outlets for young scholars to publish their first works.

What is bepress’ role in supporting the rise of undergraduate research publishing?

We find that many Digital Commons subscribers are using our hosted publishing platform to identify and meet a variety of publishing needs on campus. From our perspective, undergraduate research is just one of the many constituents on campus whose publishing needs we can help the library to meet. Publishing can be a daunting project under the best circumstances; with undergraduate journals, editors shift frequently—often annually—as students graduate. Since Digital Commons is a hosted service, we’re able to provide ongoing support and training for new editors as they come on board, which makes undergraduate publishing more sustainable and scalable than it could be otherwise. Stephanie Davis-Kahl, Scholarly Communications Librarian, and Professor of Economics Michael C. Seeborg, both from

Illinois Wesleyan University, partnered with [Undergraduate Economic Review](#) student and Editor-in-Chief Sijia Song to talk more about the success they've had with this model in a webinar called [Building an Outstanding Student Research Journal in the IR](#).

What works gets included in the Undergraduate Research Commons?

The Undergraduate Research Commons comprises undergraduate works from universities and colleges that subscribe to Digital Commons—for now. Although the URC includes faculty-mentored work, it doesn't include work with faculty coauthors. It also excludes conferences, journals, or other publications that include authors or coauthors at the graduate-school, faculty, or high-school level; we wanted to create a portal bringing together exclusively undergraduate work.

We're very proud of the undergraduate research in the URC, all of which has been published through its respective home institutions. In most cases, these works are either faculty-advised or peer-reviewed as well. We automatically include new undergraduate research that appears in Digital Commons repositories after verifying it was solely produced by undergraduate students. We accept full-text, open-access scholarship, as well as publications that include some metadata-only or access-controlled records.

This portal of undergraduate research is specific to the 375 members of the Digital Commons community and their content. We are considering inclusion of content from other platforms in the future. Please write to info@bepress.com to learn more about Digital Commons or undergraduate publications in the portal.

* http://works.bepress.com/courtney_a_smith/7/

**Quoted in a speech by Michael Miller, Dean of Library Services, Cal Poly, Closing Remarks, *Putting Knowledge to Work: Building an Institutional Repository on Your Campus*, October 19th, 2008