State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry

Using Relationships and Data to Re-Center the Library On-Campus

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Environmental Science and Forestry

At the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Esploro solved for a clear need: an automated way to track and share research activities. In the bigger picture, it gave the library a model for taking a central role in research efforts.

ExLibris
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About State University of New York

The largest comprehensive university system in the United States, the State University of New York (SUNY) consists of 64 institutions. At one, the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, faculty conduct research at the forefront in solving many of the world's environmental problems, making contributions in fields such as aquatic ecosystems, bioenergy, biotechnology, biodiversity, ecology, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, remote sensing, wildlife disease prevention, and many others.

Keeping Up with Scholarly Output

Thanks to digital technologies, the rate of scholarly publishing and production of related assets has increased dramatically. Unfortunately, methods for capturing the research output in institutional repositories and making it available for broader dissemination and discovery haven't kept pace. They have relied on intensive labor burdens for libraries and created unnecessary hurdles for faculty.

"I'd been hearing about those problems for years," states Matt Smith, Director of College Libraries at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. "What was needed was an organized, coordinated institutional response to address them. We needed a way to alleviate some of the administrative burdens, since support staff roles have disappeared."

A Ready Solution with Esploro

Since the SUNY libraries are already users of Ex Libris Alma and Primo across their 64 campuses, Smith was well aware that Esploro offered a ready solution that could fit the need. "We are a small library — four librarians including myself, one other professional, and clerical staff," he explains. "We needed a tool like Esploro that we could put into the hands of researchers and faculty to make their work easier and manage the research lifecycle. Esploro automation tools harvest research assets and deposit them directly into the research repository. It eases a lot of burdens, for us and for other libraries facing the challenge of wider scope with reduced staffing."

Because the need was obvious, Smith found that securing buy-in from the broader institution was not difficult. "I was engaging with the provost, the Office of Research Programs, academic governance. It wasn't hard to get support," he recalls. In fact, "It was easy to get folks excited because they understood where we stood as an institution. There are only so many hours in the day, only so many dollars to spend, and only a certain level of results possible without making an investment. Everybody recognized the issues. It wasn't a profound revelation, or a secret to surface them. People were excited to see that there was a direct effort to address the needs and get around the obstacles."

For the First Time, Broad Scholarship Visibility

"It had always been a struggle to capture our true scholarly footprint," states Smith. "We could do it, but only with a lot of manual work. Esploro has impressed me with how easy it is to pull up the scholarship. We frequently get asked, 'Can you get us a list of publications for this group of people?' With Esploro, it's just there. We don't need to chase that information down. For the first time ever, we're going to be able to measure and see our scholarly footprint."

Complete, Accurate Researcher Profiles

"Clean data matters quite a bit, and that is something that we struggled with. But that's the reality many institutions face," shares Smith. The important thing is that, with Esploro, "We're putting the data into the hands of individuals so they can make sure their data is good. We train faculty and researchers to fully engage with the system to make sure all their identifiers are there and all of their research terms are associated with their profiles, so the authority is there and the system can find all of their scholarship.

"Aspects of this will be embedded into our various communication marketing efforts because now we'll have that data readily available," Smith continues. "We will have accurate, complete profiles that the faculty have easy control over. We can push those into other directory services, or into custom packages when we reach out to funders. We can compile a list of graduate students with links out to their programs and all their scholarly profiles. This is the kind of data that I am excited about, since I think is where the library needs to be playing."

Building, Investing and Opening Doors

"When libraries have a reputation for being a best-kept secret at their institutions;" Smith proclaims "that is the worst thing you could have in a competitive environment for funding, admissions, and recruiting. Through the Esploro implementation process, we've made great contacts with our Office of Communications and Marketing and had some wonderful conversations. Freeing up the time to make those connections and engage with people

is extremely important. I want my time and my librarians' time for meaningful interactions with people because those are the most important activities that the library can pursue. The library is opening the door to new opportunities, building institutional capacity, investing in infrastructure. The library is more than just the place to house stuff."

Re-Centering the Library on the Campus

"Tools and services are the future," declares Smith. "I think that's where libraries are headed, and that's where my investment is. Libraries are well-positioned to move their organizations forward, because of the connections to all of the aspects of an institution that a library has. Libraries can leverage expertise and relationships to enable the whole institution in ways that are not just tied to collections or a physical facility. That's where I hope we live in the future, to be truly part of the entire lifecycle of scholarship at the institution. The awareness of our research assets and scholarship will allow us to connect more deeply with the work we're already doing across the institution. That will allow the work to go further.

"I'm excited to say I think Esploro will be used in ways I cannot anticipate right now, because it opens up new ways for people to move forward. We want to enable people. I like to phrase it as re-centering the library on the campus. That's not just as a physical space. The library's expertise is building the important relationships. We are a hub between academic departments, research centers, offices of research, communications, and marketing. Now we're at the center of all of those things with a toolset and data that everybody needs. That's the next evolution of the library, and I think we're headed in the right direction."