

What is an Institutional Repository (IR)?

An institutional repository (IR) is a long-term digital archive containing scholarly or artistic work of enduring value produced by the members of a particular institution. IRs function to collect and maintain intellectual products such as published journal articles, gray literature, lectures, data sets, reports, learning objects, and other scholarly endeavors and to offer open access to scholarly research to anyone in the world.

Institutional Repositories may be linked together or aggregated with one searchable interface based on subject interest, type of material, region, or other common factor. For example, the Networked Digital Library of Theses & Dissertations collections include graduate work from around the world.

[Learn about the University of Utah Institutional Repository.](#)

Scholarly Communication Crisis

The need for institutional repositories arose out of a growing crisis in scholarly communication. Over the last twenty years, subscription prices to scholarly publications have increased at a rate so significant that many libraries have been forced to reduce their subscription and book holdings. Since 1986, the average North American research library has cut journal acquisitions by more than 6% and book acquisitions by 26%.¹ At the same time, the funding for libraries has stayed stagnant. What has resulted is an unsustainable model.

Publisher mergers and the now common practice of offering libraries restrictive bundled journal packages has also inhibited the ability for universities to choose the journals that best support their faculty. With only six major journal publishers, competition does not have a significant affect on the market.

In addition, with the advent of electronic publishing, libraries have been offered license agreements instead of physical copies with their electronic subscriptions. This has had a negative affect when some publishers have gone out of business and access to the purchased material is no longer available. The need and desire for preservation has traditionally been a task of the library and largely publishers are unconcerned.

Faculty have traditionally signed away their copyright to journal publishers upon publication. The impact of this has been tremendous, as commercial entities control most of the rights to scholarly works and research. The publisher may even have exclusive rights to reuse the material, which may prevent that faculty member from reusing their own material.

Lastly, the conundrum of paying for research through tax payer and institutional dollars and then using those same resources to fund access to the published research that resulted is also a motivating factor to form new models for scholarly communication.

What's Happening Now

As a result of the scholarly communication crisis, academics, researchers, and librarians have adopted new solutions and new forms of scholarly communication are emerging.

- In 2001, an international group of scholars, researchers, librarians, and others met to help encourage open access with free internet availability to research articles and created the [Budapest Open Access Initiative](#). It encourages self-archiving (which you can do through the IR) and submitting to open access journals, in order to achieve the goal of open access to peer-reviewed journal literature.
- Libraries and organizations are creating Institutional Repositories and Eprint archives to retain, preserve, and share access to their scholars' materials.
- The number of open access journals is increasing, and they are becoming stronger in their fields. (See the [Directory of Open Access Journals](#).)
- The [Public Library of Science](#) offers many high impact open access journals in the fields of science and medicine. Evidence is showing that open access articles are cited more often than non open access articles.
- Organizations like [BioOne](#) help small academic society publishers create a viable model to exist in the electronic publishing world.
- Congressional legislation has been proposed to require archiving in an open access repository of federally funded research (from federal organizations that give out \$100,000 or more in grants). [NIH funded research](#) currently is urged to be deposited in an open access repository. Much of this is held in [PubMed Central](#).
- Faculty senates all over the country are passing [resolutions](#) in favor of open access publishing for their works.

¹"Scholars Under Siege: the Scholarly Communication Crisis," Create Change, <http://www.createchange.org/faculty/issues/quick.html>.