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Content and Collaboration II: Opportunities to Host, Possibilities to Publish

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Content and Collaboration

II: Opportunities to Host, Possibilities to Publish

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The integration of the Utah State University Press and USU Libraries enhanced access to scholarly materials in a variety of ways. The press utilizes USU's institutional repository, the Digital Commons, to facilitate the open access distribution of its works subsequent to a 12-month embargo. Additionally, the collaborative environment created by shared space within the library fosters innovation. The library benefits from the extensive knowledge of the press and applies it to its nascent library-based publishing efforts. The press has also adopted some of the open access ethos prevalent in library philosophy and practices and applied it to high-quality peer-reviewed and immediately open access online scholarly works. More information on the development of this collaborative relationship may be



found in “Content and Collaboration I: A Case Study of Bringing an Institutional Repository and a University Press Together” on page 171.

Launched in October 2008, Utah State University’s institutional repository (<http://digitalcommons.usu.edu>), an instance of Digital Commons by bepress, is thriving. With the aim of capturing the intellectual output of the university and making it openly available to the world, the repository currently houses more than 36,000 records. Where full-text is available, those records have been downloaded nearly 1.6 million times, with 900,000 of those downloads occurring within the past 12 months. Nearly 20% of Utah State’s faculty have submitted at least some of their work for deposit in the Digital Commons.

The repository provides the infrastructure to *host* scholarly articles when permissible, but also to *publish* unique scholarly materials created at USU. These include all graduate theses and dissertations completed at USU after 2008, conference proceedings, posters, lectures, seven open access journals, grey literature, and now new types of born-digital open access monographs. This distinction between hosting and publishing is important, yet still developing.

We consider hosted materials to be those that have been published via traditional avenues, and then made openly available in some form through the repository. However, the repository also “publishes” in the sense that it provides a platform to make materials that may be intellectually important but unavailable or inappropriate for publication via traditional venues available and openly accessible to the public. Providing this type of access should not be conflated with the service of disseminating materials that traditional presses provide. The latter is more an active pushing out of scholarship through advertising, marketing, and other sales techniques. Without reliable sources of revenue, the repository cannot actively push out materials. Instead, it facilitates public accessibility. So, while both presses and libraries “publish,” this activity differs per community of practice.

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At Utah State, the relationship between the press and the repository allows for the open access hosting of the backlist of the press, while providing the collaborative space and varying perspectives to facilitate public access to current and future unique publications. More information on the hosting of the press’s backlist and the negligible impact on sales may be found in “Content and Collaboration I: A Case Study of Bringing an Institutional Repository and a University Press Together” on page 171.

Publishing Efforts

The hosting of USU Press monographs, in addition to the repository's other hosted materials, has been tremendously successful. However, we are also beginning to use our repository as a platform to publish fully open access scholarly materials. Due to budgetary and labor considerations, the repository cannot publish works with the full suite of value-added services that the press does. However, this limitation may also be seen as an opportunity for the repository. Our lack of reliance on reliable sources of revenue allows us to fill an important role: the publication of niche materials that may be of scholarly importance but out of scope for traditional journal or monograph publishers.

To date, we have published three unique monographs, all three of which are diverse in both scope and structure, thus providing a range of models for future publications. The unifying strand between these examples, though, is that they were developed to be traditional linear monographs. At the initial stages of their development, no thought was given to their full potential as born-digital open access works. Our hope is that by establishing a range of potential modes of publication for existing texts through the IR we can encourage our faculty to experiment with these possibilities at the early stages of monograph production. These examples, then, represent a step in the transition from traditional monographs to born-digital post-monographic texts.

Our first publication, *An Introduction to Editing Manuscripts for Medievalists* (http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/lib_mono/1/), is both highly specialized and relatively short. This makes it economically unattractive to traditional publishers and university presses. By publishing through the IR, though, we can provide a specialized textbook by a recognized authority to the hundreds of graduate students worldwide who will use this text as part of an advanced course in medieval manuscripts. Indeed, in less than a year since publication the work has been downloaded 183 times.

This work shares many characteristics with a traditional monograph in e-book form. We published it and continue to host it as a single PDF that is intended to be read linearly. Again, the repository does not have the resources available to provide copyediting or (at this stage) formal peer-reviewing services. As such, we rely on authors to submit a complete edited manuscript that we will publish as is. Our in-house graphic designer does add a decorative cover page to the works, but the scalability of this option remains to be seen.

We also publish texts that were conceptualized in a traditional linear sense but can be transformed into highly dynamic and socially responsive works by tailoring them to suit our IR. USU is quite happy with bepress's Digital Commons. The system is reliable and highly attractive to Google and other search engine crawlers, and bepress handles all of the technological support for the repository. However, the outsourcing of tech support does entail a bit of rigidity in the system. In the following examples, we have worked within the rigid structure to break a traditionally conceived monograph into logical segments. This enhances the overall discoverability within the structure of the bepress repository.

The Foundations of Wave Phenomena (http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/foundation_wave/), for example, was conceived in a traditional sense (i.e., as a monograph to be read linearly), but publication through the repository has allowed us to reconceptualize it to draw on the strengths of the vehicle of publication. To this end, we structured the work such that each module (traditional chapter) stands independently, yet is deeply connected with the other modules. Rather than a linear work to be read from start to finish, this transformed text exists as an interrelated web of concepts, where users can enter and exit at points of their choosing, as well as easily trace linked prerequisite concepts, supplemental materials, and practice problem sets.

In essence, the aim of a text is to transmit a complex concept from the author to the reader by way of a set of interrelated sub concepts. When confined to a traditional structure—i.e., a physical book—these sub-concepts progress linearly. Here, though, we are able to present these sub-concepts as a web—one in which the reader may enter and exit at points of his or her choosing, investigate supplemental materials where necessary or ignore them when they are not. This approach has the added benefit of attracting Google and other search engine crawlers to the concepts outlined in each module to a much greater degree than if those chapters remained part of a traditional book. So, rather than attracting users to the text as a whole, crawlers identify and make findable each of the sub-concepts contained within that work.

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To accomplish this within the bepress system, we must first obtain an edited but unpublished monograph from an author. We then work with the author to divide the work into logical segments or modules. We will then determine which modules are prerequisite for understanding other modules within the work, which allows us to conceptualize the interrelated linking of modules. We will also work with the author to identify relevant appendices, additional materials, problem sets, or external resources that enhance understanding of each module.

After working with the author to develop a thorough conceptualization of the work, we upload it into the repository. Given the structure of the Digital Commons, each “book” actually exists as a “book gallery.” So, in the above example, we create a “book gallery” for the *Foundations of Wave Phenomena*, then upload each module as a “book.” Once all modules have been uploaded, we add “additional files” (such as those mentioned above). Here, we will also make a prerequisite module downloadable. If multiple prerequisites are necessary, we can add additional links to them in the Comments field.

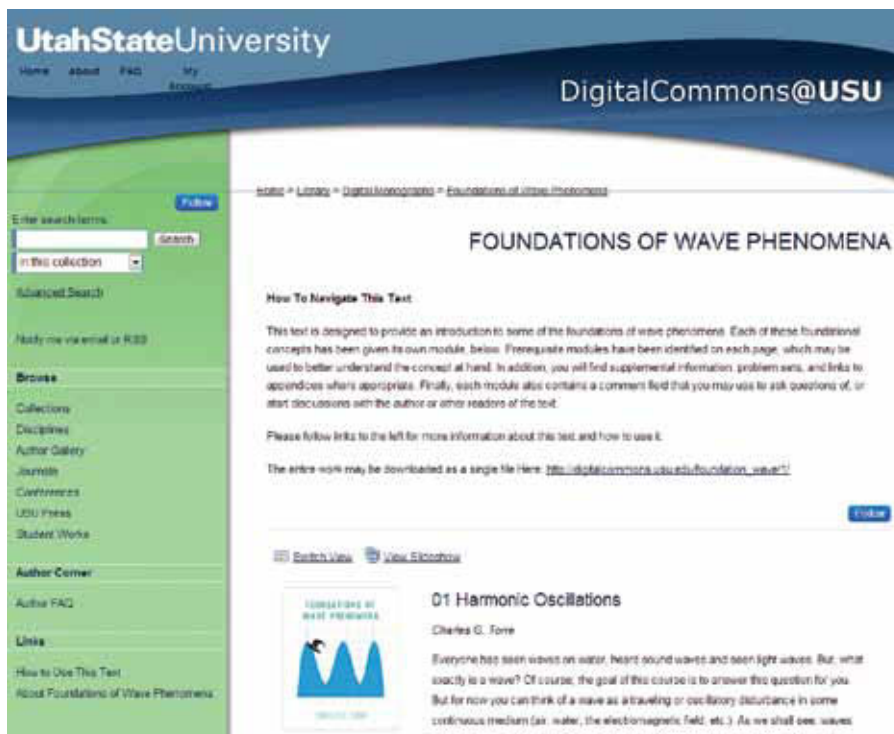


Figure 1 illustrates our use of the book gallery structure to introduce the text and explain the navigation of modules.

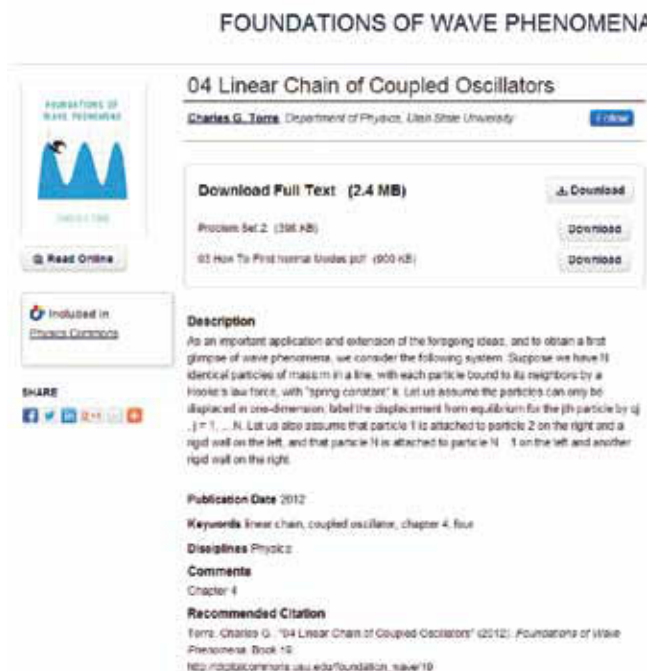


Figure 2 illustrates one module of the work, which has actually been uploaded to the digital commons as a “book.” Note the additional problem set and link back to the prerequisite module, “How to Find Normal Modes.”

Publishing through the repository has the added benefit of allowing us to integrate multimedia components that would be impossible in a traditional work. Our recently published project, *Latino Voices in Cache Valley*, offers a wonderful example of a work that might not be publishable by a traditional press due to its limited marketability, but which offers a wealth of added scholarship through its multimedia components. This challenge for the press is an opportunity for the repository to make this scholarship available to the world. In addition, digital publication allows us to incorporate audio and video oral histories and presentations given by the authors.

These texts lay a foundation for a promising future. It is important to remember that these two previous examples were not conceived to be non-linear digital texts, but were modified at a later stage of development. Looking forward, though, we can imagine connecting with authors at an early stage in the production of their work. We can then imagine creating truly non-linear texts that incorporate video lectures or labs, or perhaps captured and archived conversations between readers and authors that clarify content, or perhaps link to other relevant content, thus crowdsourcing the deep integration of the text into the broader scholarly dialogue.

Our initial publications, along with the collaborative space shared with the press, offer exciting opportunities moving forward. Without a reliable revenue stream generated by book sales, we cannot provide the value-added services as the press. However, we can potentially leverage the skills of both librarians and the press to locate and manage external peer reviewers and build bridges between authors who desire added value—print on demand comes to mind—and independent contractors that can provide these services. Indeed, bringing our university press and institutional repository together provides us with a collaborative pathway forward to both facilitate accessibility to scholarship and create new modes of openly accessible scholarship.

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