

Going beyond faculty showcasing to illuminate student research

JOHN C. PACE LIBRARY

The University of West Florida Libraries use the Exploro™ research portal and profiles solution to demonstrate the importance of both student and faculty research on campus.

About the University of West Florida

The University of West Florida (UWF) opened in 1967 and has grown into a “Best Regional Universities South” designated by U.S. News & World Report. Among their courses are one of the few marine biology programs available in the US and a top-ranked online nursing program¹

UWF is a major driver of economic growth and development in northwest Florida.

Innovative programs like the Ph.D. in Intelligent Systems and Robotics and degrees in cybersecurity align with the strengths of the university and the region.

Using Exploro
to illuminate
student work.

¹ according to The Princeton Review, 2022

Showcasing both student and faculty research within an efficient, centralized portal.

The UWF Office of Undergraduate Research facilitates opportunities for students to engage in academic research with faculty and hosts an annual Student Scholar Symposium and Faculty Research Showcase celebrating the scholarly and creative works of students and faculty.

The University Libraries managed UWF's institutional repository (IR) since 2014 to host and share faculty research, but it lacked the functionality that Esploro provides by being part of a truly integrated ILS. The system was capable of being expanded, but the time to develop and implement those integrations was beyond the capacity of the 2-person library team.

When the opportunity arose to look at newer systems that could function not only as an IR, but also as a research portal that provided faculty access to their own profiles, Reference Librarian Cindy Gruwell and Argo Scholar Commons Manager Andii Johnson seized the chance.

Aside from functioning as an IR and research portal, Gruwell and Johnson also wanted a system with strong analytics capabilities, strong vendor support, and the potential for growth.

Johnson knew that to improve workflows, accommodate a variety of research outputs from students and faculty, and integrate vibrant faculty profiles, they needed a centralized solution.

Evaluating different solutions, Johnson noted, "Efficiency was the key word."

More than an institutional repository

"When we looked at Esploro, we saw that we could highlight, focus on and showcase faculty work and research, as well as have the institutional repository site. And showcasing more than faculty; it could be students; it could be certain types of events that happened on campus and are recorded," described Gruwell.

UWF ultimately selected Esploro to implement the new university research portal and institutional repository they call Argo Scholar Commons (ASC).

The Esploro research portal and profiles improves efficiency by automatically capturing many faculty publications and providing workflows for batch uploads via csv or citations. It also empowers researchers to take ownership of their profiles, and connects all this information into one portrait of your institution. It improves accuracy and efficiency by reducing manual entry and

breaking down data silos, linking comprehensive scholarly information from the most trusted sources across all academic disciplines.

Esploro makes it easy to showcase faculty work and research initiatives using multi-dimensional profiles. Complete profiles allow UWF to highlight subject matter experts, advance collaborations, attract talented researchers and students interested in research, and boost your institution's reputation.



Reducing administrative burden using AI to help keep researcher scholarship up-to-date

UWF implemented Esploro in August 2021. “When it comes to working in the system, I need things centralized... affect big changes by doing a few things,” Johnson remarked. “Smart harvesting eliminates a lot of manual searching for faculty works, and that’s really helped a lot,” she continued.

Building and maintaining faculty profiles required manually searching for articles and updating a faculty member’s scholarship in the old system. Esploro’s Smart Harvesting AI promotes the visibility and reach of research by automating the capture of a wide variety of works from multiple sources, enhancing their discoverability and delivering a comprehensive representation of the university’s accomplishments. UWF’s new faculty profiles come together quickly with the help of artificial intelligence, and provide a wealth of information about the work our researchers do.

Automation reduces the burden of maintaining existing profiles too. Gruwell receives alerts about new faculty publications, and sends outreach emails to researchers to encourage them to share pre-prints and/or authorize us to activate their profile. She notes, “I’m seeing [articles] being captured by the harvesting and [the articles are] already in there by the time I see them...which is awesome... that’s one of the things we want faculty to be able to see...it can pull in articles without them having to do something.”

Showcasing student contributions to the research community

The Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR) hosts the annual Student Scholar Symposium and Faculty Research Showcase to celebrate scholarly successes. Soon after the transition to Esploro, it was a priority to highlight the research faculty and students do together, and Esploro offers many ways to do that.

In the new ASC, the Symposium works were organized into collections and featured on the ASC homepage, as well as now being available in the library’s catalog and the State of Florida’s Open Academic Library (FOAL) through the ease of sharing data OAI Undergraduate nursing students participate in a Scholarly Poster Showcase and students often include their projects with job applications. Before Esploro, Professors made do with free, third-party platforms. Now the collections’ display is much more impressive to share with potential employers, the work is captured as part of the university’s record, and faculty researchers can really showcase the work they do with students. “It’s a win-win situation,” said Gruwell. Johnson added, “I think it makes the students feel more a part of the university.”

Increasing discoverability for UWF student and faculty research

Esploro improved the discoverability of faculty and student works. Esploro Analytics allows Johnson to track views and file downloads and that data is displayed in the ASC Research Portal. After the student research projects were added to ASC, the team was pleasantly surprised to see how popular they were. “The statistics are right up there with some of the faculty work,” says Gruwell. “We weren't expecting the undergraduate research to get that much use.”

Presentation alone is not responsible for the success of the student research projects. Esploro has a robust, flexible, and centralized analytics interface that helps view all the data available in the system. The analytics reports on ASC indicate that improved discoverability is having a positive effect on usage. Awareness of the ASC and student collections has led to faculty asking the library about including other collections of student research works - demonstrating that powerful analytics can provide actionable insights.

Gruwell and Johnson are also looking at Esploro's analytics to provide university administrators with relevant data supporting the university's mission, and also provide detailed data to Deans and Chairs about the research their faculty are engaged in.

"It all comes back to promotion and letting people know."

The next step for this team is setting up reports for administrators and continuing to promote the ASC to faculty. New faculty readily set up profiles in ASC. For those who need extra encouragement, Gruwell sends emails to faculty members and works with department chairs to create department-level collections.

The library's marketing and outreach committee plan is to continue promoting the ASC with advertisements and social media to further evangelize its value with students and faculty. Gruwell recognizes with satisfaction, "...when we explain what we can do for them, they get excited, and we get excited all over again."



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