Implementing an *EPrints* repository system at a small South African university

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The *Rhodes eResearch Repository* was implemented early in 2005 and designed to hold the academic and research output of the Rhodes University community. This project builds on an ETD program started in 1998 and involves staff from Rhodes University Library and the IT Division, with the approval of the Dean of Research. Rhodes is the smallest university in South Africa, with approximately 6200 students, and views its small size as a distinct advantage. The University has a strong research and teaching profile and IT infrastructure. The Rhodes Library could plan the implementation without major bureaucratic obstacles, with the support of Management and working in an IT environment with a strong culture of using open source software. However, we had to do it with very limited budgetary support and severe staff constraints.

The Rhodes Library started to investigate open access institutional repositories in 2004 and was encouraged by various open access initiatives to proceed with installing a system without further delay. National initiatives were organised by SASLI (South African Site Licensing Initiative): the *Open Access Scholarly Communication Conference* was held in Pretoria in 2004 and this was followed up with an IR Workshop in 2005.

We considered several software options, including our library system's media management module, but thought that open access could not be satisfactorily promoted by using proprietary software and that additional software would be necessary for the metadata to be harvestable. The choice was clearly between the two most widely used IR systems, *GNU EPrints* and *DSpace,* which both met our criteria. *EPrints* was the system which could be best supported on campus at no extra cost. The test phase was completed at the end of 2004 and the new server installed early in 2005. Configuration and customization proceeded without major obstacles and the frequent upgrades could be installed without affecting the changes we made to the system. Fears of lack of support for open source software were unfounded, as solutions can often be found in the extensive documentation, by consulting the technical listserv archive or in the *EPrints* community wiki. Configuring the OAI interface is one of the remaining obstacles and policies (for submission, use of metadata harvested and for use of data held in the repository) are not yet finalised.

The poster presentation focuses on initial experiences with implementing and customizing the *GNU EPrints* software and using the existing ETD collection as building blocks to fill the repository. We started filling the repository with all the open access ETD's from the existing collection, followed by the new, as yet unprocessed, electronic theses from 2004 and 2005. The next phase of the project is to showcase a good sample collection of research papers, in addition to the theses collection, before launching the repository. The *South African Journal of Science* dedicated a special centenary issue to Rhodes University in 2004. These research papers by Rhodes scientists will form the basis of the journal article collection. We have obtained permission from the publishers and are negotiating with the authors.

We found that the technical part of starting an IR program is relatively easy and can be done with very limited resources within a short space of time. Future enhancements in other IR systems, like *DSpace*, need to be monitored and compared closely. The challenge will undoubtedly be to promote the repository amongst prospective authors. The impact of making their research output available to a global audience may be difficult to measure and will take time. We hope to encourage institutions with very limited resources to start similar IR programs.