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To cite this article:

Gibney, M. (2024). Co-designing an Institutional Repository in Kosovo: Soliciting Student Feedback in a Repository Launch. *International Journal of Librarianship*, 8(4), 4-16. <https://doi.org/10.23974/ijol.2024.vol8.4.338>

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Co-designing an Institutional Repository in Kosovo: Soliciting Student Feedback in a Repository Launch

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ABSTRACT

An institutional repository (IR) launched at the University for Business and Technology in Pristina, Kosovo in 2019. Students from 2018 and 2019 enrolled in an Information Systems course at the University provided ideas and feedback on the repository development. Their suggestions are captured here by focus group sessions held in mid-2019 in Kosovo and subsequently shared with University Administration and the IR platform company. This case study from the field advocates for continuous feedback from stakeholder groups and an expansion of the underlying data collection methods at other institutions.

Keywords: Co-creation, Institutional repositories, Higher education, and College students

INTRODUCTION

In order to gauge the importance and implementation of an institutional repository (IR) in a developing nation, the principal investigator (PI) on this study interviewed students who completed a course on Information Systems at the University for Business and Technology (UBT) in Pristina, Kosovo in 2018 and 2019. The course, taught by an international cohort of faculty from Sweden, the United States, and Kosovo, was titled, “Analysis, Design and Modeling in Information Systems”, and had a focus on Peter Checkland’s Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) (Checkland, 1981). During the course, the primary project was to identify and develop plans for an institutional repository, the UBT Knowledge Center (<https://knowledgecenter.ubt-uni.net/>) (Somerville et al., 2020; Gibney, 2019; Gibney et al., 2018). Student feedback from the 2018 course was taken into account during the implementation process in early 2019 when the IR was launched. Feedback from both the 2018 and 2019 students has been shared with administrative staff at UBT, including the President, as well as with the hosted platform developers, Elsevier’s bepress. It is hoped that the gathered student feedback will be considered by both parties in future development of the IR and the platform software, Digital Commons.

The research also contributes to an understanding of co-design activities between university administration/staff and students to create optimized research and learning tools within the academic sphere (Somerville et al., 2020; Gibney, 2019; Gibney et al., 2018). Currently the process of developing, managing and leveraging an institutional repository is generally accomplished from a top-down approach (administration determines the need and implements via assistance from staff). Continued study and reflection on student contributions and feedback will

further develop the co-designed aspect. Hopefully this will can factor in to taking a new approach and provide an option for others looking to pursue a similar path in repository development.

METHODS

To gauge the effectiveness of the IR's implementation at UBT, the PI invited 25 students from the course "Analysis, Design and Modeling in Information Systems" held in May 2018 and April 2019 to join her for focus groups on the Pristina campus of UBT in June 2019 (see Appendix A, "Email request"). Twenty students ended up meeting with the PI, 5 from the May 2018 course and 15 from the April 2019 course. The students ranged in age from 18-25 consisting of undergraduate Computer Science students and graduate students in the Information Sciences department. There were a total of 15 males and 5 females in the population group. Students met with the PI in groups of 2-5, see Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of participants

| Group Course (YYYY) | Number of undergraduates | | Number of graduate students | | Total number in group |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Number of male students | Number of female students | Number of male students | Number of female students | |
| Group 1 (2018) | 5 | | | | 5 |
| Group 2 (2019) | | 1 | | 1 | 2 |
| Group 3 (2019) | 1 | 1 | 2 | | 4 |
| Group 4 (2019) | | | 3 | | 3 |
| Group 5 (2019) | 1 | | 2 | | 3 |
| Group 6 (2019) | | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Total | 7 | 2 | 8 | 3 | 20 |

The focus group design was chosen to account for previously demarcated lines drawn in the classes as each group worked on a systems design and modeling project together during the one-week course. It was expected that meeting with them in their course-work groups would allow for easy discussion and a feeling of familiarity with comrades. It was also meant to circumvent language problems as the PI spoke neither Albanian nor Serbian and not every student in the courses were fluent in English. Select students were able to translate for one another and for the PI very easily. However, for the most part, this was not needed as English fluency is typical in the

academic setting in Kosovo – particularly at UBT which bills itself as an American European education and has many visiting faculty from outside Kosovo.

The focus group questions consisted of 8 pre-scripted with room for clarifying questions and general discussion within the one hour allotted interview times (see Appendix B, “Focus Group Questions”). The questions were based on website feedback and website implementation efforts, targeting student experience with the IR being live on the Internet. They were open-ended in the hopes of engendering more discussion amongst the group and creating a safe space for dialogue.

All interviews were held on the Pristina campus of UBT on the administration floor in a pre-reserved conference room. During the meetings, the PI used a phone app to record the session and also took paper and pencil notes (Jacob and Ferguson, 2012; Turner, 2010; Baxter and Jack, 2008).

The aim was to gather and analyze data utilizing qualitative methods (Elliott, 2018). All collected answers and commentary were parsed out using identified commonalities and reviewed for actionable items that could be passed on to UBT stakeholders for implementation.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The planned research underwent, and was approved for, exempt review from the PI’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Students were all given a Consent form in advance, approved by IRB process, outlining their rights, who to approach with questions, and granting permission to be recorded (see Appendix C, “Consent Form”). All collected data is being kept in digital form on the PI’s password protected laptop during the study period and publication of results. Data will be destroyed after three years, per IRB requirements.

RESULTS

From the qualitative data coded and evaluated, there emerged two main categories for improvement in the areas of Marketing and Platform Design.

Before getting into the two main areas for improvement, there were neutral and positive feedback from the focus groups on four of the other focus questions. Regarding question one on whether they had visited the UBT Knowledge Center website yet, it is important to note that this question was primarily for the 2018 students. In 2018, during the course, the IR did not exist and, as it turned out, none of these students who had provided reports and presentations on making it a reality, knew that it was live. The 2019 students had been exposed to a presentation directly on the live IR with an explanation of its purpose, digital collections and navigation features during their course. Overall response to question two on the visual layout of the homepage – particularly the Discipline Wheel and Download Map – was universally positive. Neutral responses to the question on grasping the purpose were also predominant. Responders all agreed it was obvious. And finally, the last question on future use and potential future visits to the IR by the students was very

interesting. The responses had a sharp divide between the undergraduate and graduate students. Undergraduates were sure they would use it in the future – all the 2019 undergraduate students were freshmen; the 2018 students were either juniors or seniors at the time of the focus group. Graduate students didn't think it would be particularly useful for them in the future. They saw it being more beneficial for faculty and the undergraduates. It was unclear if any of the graduate students were planning to continue in academia or understood the benefits of their graduate theses being published online and use of that for statistics relevant to acquiring an academic job, publishing, or promotion and tenure processes in the future.

Marketing Feedback Improvements

Coding of the qualitative data collected, concluded that the primary identified problem with the IR implementation was that while the IR might be a beneficial resource, not many on campus were aware it existed and probably no one beyond campus was aware (within the nation, let alone globally). Suggested focus for administration, according to students surveyed, was to invest in marketing campaigns to increase awareness of the IR on campus and beyond. This needed to go beyond one stream of marketing and instead pursue an integrated marketing communication (IMC) program (Batra and Keller, 2016) with empathetic, personal touches (Girton, Smeraldi and Starkey, 2019; Hale and Thakur, 2006).

Digital

The first category can be condensed under a theme of digital marketing. In this sphere, students made suggestions of materials that could be created and shared via the learning management system (LMS), social media, the IR itself, etc. A benefit to some of these is the ease with which they can be created and embedded in pre-existing online resources.

- Group 2 suggested, “Use Moodle as a tool.” UBT uses Moodle for their LMS and creating a side bar banner or widget for the IR within the resources section would be simple and effective as all students are required to use Moodle for their courses and therefore would see the advertised resource.
- Group 6 opined to “Include a video on how to navigate and introduction to the UBT Knowledge Center website. It makes it easier. Video is a new thing and I know it could be very useful.” and “We declare that we like videos and maybe tutorials and not reading.” Creating and sharing a video introduction to the repository which can be displayed on both the institutional website as well as the IR homepage would be advantageous at promoting the resource. It could also be used more widely by administrators to share with other institutions and colleagues in the region. In addition, it could be shared with the Kosovo Ministry of Education, with whom Kosovan higher educational institutions work with closely. It should be recorded in the Albanian language with English subtitles or vice versa, as long as it is intelligible to the widest audience sector within the country.
- Group 2 suggested using social media to promote the IR: “Facebook, social media posts are new, problem with print posters is they are old, and no one even looks at them anymore.” Contacting the students and other university affiliates on the social apps where they spend more of their downtime might actually get their attention better.

- Group 2 also suggested including information in a digital newsletter to students, with a target of the incoming students during their initial enrollment, “All new students get a welcome packet by email; it should be included there too.” Group 6 also suggested sending emails to students based on discipline with a “paper of the month and kudos to this and kudos to that to get more traction.”

Print

While digital marketing is the flashier cousin, the stolid and persevering print marketing strategies still work for a reason. They may be more traditional and ‘old school,’ but they can assist in reaching faculty, students and others at particular places and times in an organic way that assists in the total integrated marketing strategy. Students in the focus groups suggested the basic ideas one would expect as typical print marketing strategies. Interestingly, in the context of UBT, they did have only negative things to say about print posters around the campuses. Group 1, similar to Group 2 mentioned above, cautioned against the use of posters as a marketing tactic as they are, “Bombed with information daily, need better advertising,” and “Sometimes they’re outdated, you don’t know if it’s something from this year because it could be from a past year.” Group 2, after the quote cited above advocating for social media posts, went on to talk about the many posters on the walls in academic buildings within the University and how their eyes glaze over them without even noticing or reading them anymore. Instead of posters, the groups suggested pursuing alternate print materials, including: brochures, bookmarks, and stickers.

Person-to-Person

It takes the right person to do the right job at the right moment and targeting the right audience, but a personal touch can make all the difference in selling a product – and what is an IR distilled down to its base essence but a product from the university to campus, community and global stakeholders? Creating ambassadors for the product on campus and off can help spread impact and create real, sustainable use of the service.

- Groups 1 and 6 both independently recommended having a student ambassador (or more than one). Group 1 specifically suggested: “Maybe creating a mini community within students and then we choose who will present this project to other students [at other universities] so that can have a unified plan with them. It’s really nice to work with other universities to create this powerful repository, because if we only work alone, what’s the point?” A related suggestion in Group 6 was to give students on international study exchanges brochures to pass out at the exchange school, “Share it with our partners throughout the world. Look what we’re doing. We’re doing science over here, hello! Read our papers. And about the student ambassadors, because UBT does exchange a lot of students already throughout Europe, so why not just to give them some brochures and let them know when they represent ourselves and our country, the Knowledge Center as well?”
- Group 1 advocated having a student created design/logo contest to increase use, awareness and ownership – “The picture [at the top of the website] is totally misleading, because this is a knowledge center, a repository, we should not have a building there but perhaps a better designed logo by students, because we have artists and graphic designers at UBT that could be showcased.”

- Group 4 suggested that convincing faculty to mention it as a resource in class would have a positive impact on student's ability to find reliable information. Speaking specifically in relation to their faculty's academic research work and being able to access it without fail, one member of Group 4 said, "There are a lot of sources that are unreviewed. So, a lot of people without having specific access can post. You maybe sometimes can get the wrong information, and that is a problem. Having Knowledge Center, I think, you have the right place to find what you need."
- Group 5 thought that extending partnerships with other academic institutions in Kosovo would also help the project to succeed, exponentially, "People just generally in Kosovo, there is no other knowledge center that I know of, personally. We want to be that place they go to, to submit."

Platform Design Improvements

A second key identified problem that became clear in the qualitative coding process concerned suggestions for software platform improvements. The UBT Knowledge Center IR subscribed to the bepress Digital Commons software and hosting platform owned by Elsevier. The students – who are from computer science and information systems backgrounds – had many technological, aesthetic, and functionality-related feedback for the website, many of which arose from cultural differences between Kosovo and the platform developers (United States) (Vidrio-Baron, Luse and Townsend, 2009).

Navigation

- Make the search box more prominent
- Add search facets to "Top 10 Downloads" to sort with more granularity
- Contact information is difficult to find
- Instructions on the Advanced Search page or more info on search tactics or an embedded tutorial video to watch
- Options to search by different languages
- Include some of the intro text in Albanian as well as English for inclusivity or have a way to translate at least the homepage with options at top (not Google Translate, a customizable way within bepress)

Accessibility

- Discipline wheel and issues with color-blindness
- Save cookies to personalize the site for different groups (colors, fonts, etc.)

User Interaction

- Add a comments field to the records
- Add a way to "Rank" works with star ratings and allow to search/sort by this to assist researchers in finding the most useful works

- Bot chat included in interface to help with search questions in multiple languages
- Ability to follow a Discipline (not just a person, series or site)

Miscellaneous

- IP addressing on the download map to have accurate maps (Serbian flag for a download in Kosovo is unacceptable)
- Mobile version could be customized better by removing the picture banner and the search box should be at the top, not bottom

DISCUSSION & PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The process of co-designing an IR with students as part of a course taught by an international cohort is unique. Harnessing the ideas of students from the outset contributes an interesting alternative mindset to the typical librarian/university administration ideas and goals. If the purpose of the IR is to support, collect, disseminate and archive student work, inviting their input from the beginning enhances the experience and investment of the target user/audience.

In this case, the students' feedback on the marketing aspect was invaluable. Their own knowledge of marketing directed at them, created boundaries and generated insights that might not have occurred to the course professors and the university administration. Their suggestions were, for the most part, easily implemented and have been taken into consideration by university administration.

Regarding the platform improvements, the in-situ response of undergraduate and graduate students following a computer science/information technology study track in a developing nation with English as a second language could be of interest. The platform used in this case was developed in Berkeley, California, United States and has many design decisions rooted in an English-speaking, developed world, and Western mindset. For the most part, the platform improvement recommendations were not design or developer focused and could be accomplished by the IR administrator directly. However, for those that do require additional development, hearing the design feedback from multiple points of views and experiences should be considered in future iterations of the software – particularly if the hosted IR solution wants to expand international sales.

CONCLUSIONS

The PI on this study has worked with IRs since 2012, but predominantly with IRs based in the United States and Canada. Launching an IR in Kosovo was definitely new ground and spending three months in country on the project was highly beneficial in understanding cultural, academic, and sociological differences between the needs and wants of users.

Each new IR launched, no matter where it is, will face similar problems of reaching stakeholders and being of benefit to them. Advertising and marketing an IR may be slightly different at each institution, but the need will always be there. Similarly for usability, each instance will have particular needs to meet for prospective audiences, and customization in these cases will be preeminent. Co-designing both the IR, the marketing approach, and a usability study with one of the primary stakeholder groups – students – allowed for new discussions and connections to be formed.

As the UBT Knowledge Center matures, checking in with stakeholder groups should be encouraged by the administration. This is extensible to others as well – stakeholder feedback should be incorporated into IR management at institutions globally.

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About the author

Michele Gibney is the Head of Publishing and Scholarship Support at the University of the Pacific. Her primary role is in managing the institutional repository, Scholarly Commons, and working directly with faculty and students on their scholarly communication efforts. In addition, she oversees the summer OER Stipend program for faculty and processes theses and dissertations for graduate students. Her experiences in Kosovo were supported by funding from University of the Pacific in the United States, Linnaeus University in Sweden, and the United States Fulbright Specialist program. She volunteered for three months at the University for Business and Technology during 2018 and 2019 on three separate trips.

Appendix A – “Email Request”

Dear <NAME>,

Greetings from the United States! I will soon return to Kosovo and would like to meet with you as a follow up to the course "Analiza e SI, Dizajnimi dhe Modelimi SI MA 18/19" taught by Prof Anita Mirijamdotter and Prof Patrik Elm. I am writing to request your presence at a focus group meeting to discuss the UBT Knowledge Center project.

This meeting is not required for the course, but I would appreciate your assistance in gathering final data surrounding the UBT Knowledge Center and your impressions of the course in general.

Is your group available to meet on <DATE 1> or <DATE 2>? The meeting will last 60 minutes (or less) and be on the Pristina campus. If you are willing to attend, please let me know 2 or 3 available times you are able to meet on either day.

As I said, the meeting should take no more than 60 minutes and your participation is entirely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks to participating nor is there any compensation. Upon conclusion of the meeting, the data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked or otherwise secured location and will be destroyed three years after the research is completed. Anonymized data from the study will be used in publication and presentation.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project or wish to speak with an independent contact, please contact the Office of Research & Sponsored Programs, University of the Pacific at +1 (209) 946-3903 or by email at IRB@pacific.edu.

I appreciate your help in gathering this useful data that will influence future courses on this topic at UBT and the expansion of the UBT Knowledge Center in Kosovo!

All the best,
<SIGNATURE>

Appendix B – “Focus Group Questions”

Questions asked:

1. Have you visited the website for the UBT Knowledge Center yet? (give 5-10 minutes to peruse the website)
2. What is your overall impression of the homepage (images, layout, navigation)?
3. From just the homepage, do you get a sense of the purpose of the whole website? What is that?
4. Can you easily locate everything you'd want to find on the website? If not, what is missing or difficult to find?
5. Do you think you would have cause to visit the website in the future? What would you use it for?
6. What suggestions do you have for improving the website, including design, information, functionality and content?
7. Based on the Information Systems course you took having the creation of this Knowledge Center as a primary focus, do you think this website expresses the ideas and discussions we had in class? What about it is lacking still?
8. Can you briefly reflect on your experience in the course and the end result of this website?

Appendix C – “Consent Form”

Research Title: UBT Knowledge Center Feedback

Lead Researcher: XXXXXX

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION: Your consent is being requested to voluntarily participate in a research study providing feedback on the newly launched UBT Knowledge Center repository website. As students in the Information Systems course in May 2018 and April 2019 who provided input and direction for the repository development, your additional feedback on the end result will be very helpful in plans for future growth as well as sharing externally to others undergoing a similar development process. You will be asked to respond to eight primary questions during a focus group meeting with a group of others from your course. Discussion will be audio recorded which will be transcribed and then deleted. All digital transcriptions and scanned Consent Forms will be stored on my password protected laptop for three years and then destroyed. I will be writing a research article on the UBT Knowledge Center and the role played by the Information Systems course and students in its ideation and creation. There are no experimental procedures in this research and there are no alternative research procedures other than the focus group sessions so your alternative is not to participate.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation will take approximately 30-60 minutes.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: The risks associated with this study are minimal. No identifying information about you will be maintained in conjunction with your opinions. All data provided will be anonymized and aggregated before providing to University for Business and Technology administration for further development of the Knowledge Center repository website. There are no direct benefits resulting from this study, however your contributions to the success of this project will be acknowledged. Your decision on whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your grades in school or any other benefits to which you are entitled.

COMPENSATION: You will receive no reimbursement nor payment for your participation.

PARTICIPANT’S RIGHTS: If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this research project, you understand that your participation is entirely voluntary and your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All audio recordings will be transcribed and then immediately deleted following the conclusion of the focus group session. All files will be stored on my password protected laptop for 3 years and then deleted. All signed Consent Forms will be scanned and then shredded. All digital signed Consent Forms will be stored on my password protected laptop for

three years and then deleted. As the study will be conducted within a focus group setting, please maintain confidentiality of what is shared within your group. No responses should leave the group setting as confidentiality is important for participation.

COLLECTION OF INFORMATION: Information collected as part of this research will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Questions: If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact the Lead Researcher on WhatsApp or Viber at XXXXXX

Independent Contact: If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact Office of Research and Sponsored Programs to speak to someone independent of the research team at XXXXXX.

I hereby consent: (Indicate *Yes* or *No*)

- To be audio recorded during this study.
 Yes No
- For such audio records resulting from this study to be used for reference in writing a journal article by the Lead Researcher
 Yes No

The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you have been afforded the opportunity to ask, and have answered, any questions that you may have, that your participation is completely voluntary, that you understand that you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

SIGNATURE _____ **DATE** _____

Research Study Participant (Print Name): _____

Participant's Representative (Print Name): _____

Description of Representative's Authority: _____

Researcher Who Obtained Consent (Print Name): _____