Socializing and Disseminating the Academic and Intellectual Creation: Experiences from La Plata National University.

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Abstract.

During the year 2008 La Plata National University (UNLP) has stressed up in its Strategic Plan that all Intellectual Creation from professors, students and researchers must be visible and accessible from outside the scope of this college: the University has a considerable scientific and academic production, and the world might see it if it was somewhere easily available. In this direction, projects such as SeDiCI UNLP have been strongly strengthen, and new projects have been created: The Portal of Journals and The Portal of Congresses.

The Portal of Journals, launched in October 2008, aims to provide UNLP's groups —laboratories, researchers, dependences, teachers and students— that have or wish to have an on-line publication with a platform that facilitates the hard work that this kind of task demands; this portal is supported on PKP's OJS software. In the same way, the Portal of Congresses, brought out in April 2009, provides services for everyone in the University that needs help in the accomplishing of any kind of scientific-academic meeting (e.g. congresses, symposiums, workshops); OCS is the platform that is behind this portal.

Both brand-new projects have presented many challenges, since most people in UNLP have never had a service as such and they need to learn a new way of carrying out theirs Journals and/or Conferences (including internal organization by division of roles and tasks, communication, revision and publication) and a new software platform as well. In order to smooth out these difficulties, the group in charge of the projects (PrEBi UNLP) have put into practice many measures including workshops, modifications to the platform by users requests, help via email, scheduled meetings with people of one single journal or conference, on-line examples and a collaborative wiki. Besides the advantages that these portals contemplates, both projects articulate theirs efforts with the Diffusion Service of UNLP (SeDiCI), which boosts the dissemination of academic-scientific production. Along this article these measures will be explained in detail, together with the experiences and results obtained from each one which have enable us to identify best practices, detect future problems and achieve great results.

Introduction

La Plata National University (UNLP, [1]) is one of the most important universities of Argentina and Latin America both in number of students and in amount of academic —intellectual production as well. The university counts on 17 Schools with more than 90,000 students, about 10,000 employees (teachers and administration), 93 research centers and nearly 2,200 researchers. These numbers are the main reason that explain the quantity of books, journals and journal articles, theses and PhD theses, conferences, symposiums and meetings organized by local researchers and teachers, and other different sorts of productions.

In year 2003, UNLP launched the Intellectual Creation Dissemination Service (SeDiCi , Servicio de Difusión de la Creación Intelectual)[2][3], with the purpose of providing a mean for authors of all these productions to publish their works and aiming to return to the society all the efforts invested in the public university.

Since 2007, the UNLP has set up a Strategic Plan[1] in which it has been remarked the importance of the dissemination of the academic and intellectual creation. SeDiCI project was in tune with this idea, but it became necessary to add new services for Organizers of Journals and Conferences that needed to put on-line the new contents, and for the University to track and be able to disseminate all these creations that escaped from SeDiCI scope. Besides all that, organizers and publishers could use some help in their work, meeting and sharing experiences with other organizers, having a place to host and publish their journals and conferences, and making organized and a bit easier the hard work that both journals publishing and conferences organization involve.

New projects have arisen.

The workaround of those issues were faced by the introduction of two new projects: The Portal of Journals of UNLP [4] and The Portal of Congresses of UNLP [5].

The first project, launched in October 2008, is intended for groups within the University or related to a group of UNLP that already carry out any kind of journals (e.g. scientific, academic, discussion, etc) and wish to have it hosted in the official website of the university; it is also possible (and desirable) to upload old issues of the Journals, so all articles ever are on-line. But the purpose of this initiative goes further, with the idea of helping groups that wish to start a new journal and do not know how or where to start from. The Portal of Journals is supported by PKP's Open Journal Systems, sponsored by Science and Technique Secretary of UNLP, and executed by UNLP PrEBi team [6], which is in charge of system maintenance, users assistance, workshops for users, and so on.

The second project has the purpose of helping groups that organize any kind of meeting with all tasks that this organization demands. In order to do that, the university has launched the Portal of Congresses, which provides both a software tool to host and manage congresses, and a team which helps people behind those congresses. Again, the software behind the scenes is PKP's Open Conference Systems, and the support group is PrEBi UNLP, with UNLP as main sponsor of the project.

Given that the same team is the technical responsible for both projects, support activities are all centered in that team which means that they can take advantage of the experiences learned from one project and use them in the other project, and that they can combine efforts to make them profitable for Journals and Congresses users. In the rest of this article, we will explain what all these efforts

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1   The first experience in this matter was in 2004, which resulted in the publication of the Management Strategic Plan 2004-2007 where top priority projects, strategies and academic initiatives were reflected.

are all about and remark on the advantages, possibilities, disadvantages and problems we have seen since the beginning of both initiatives.

Argentinian translations

One of the first modifications made to both systems were the Spanish translations; users complained that some phrases were difficult to understand, or that they had no sense in Argentinian Spanish, so many terms and phrases they were adapted to a more common one of users of UNLP. Besides, many Spanish translations in the core system and in system's plugins were missing or incomplete, and it was necessary to finish them. Lastly, OCS help in Spanish language did not exist and was written from scratch, so users can now enjoy the context help offered by the system in their own native language.

Just few changes

The first change introduced into both websites was the adoption of the UNLP styles: logos, fonts, colors, headers and backgrounds. Users using these OCS and OJS need to feel that they are inside a UNLP website, so both portals are now very similar to each other, and to the main UNLP website, but keeping some characteristics that make them unique.

Most users of the system required the limitation words in abstracts to a predefined number. Since neither OCS nor OJS provides this feature, we have decided to implement it by ourselves and introduce it to both software tools. Given that the length of abstracts could vary from track to track in a conference, or from section to section in journals, our policy has been to add the new parameter to conference tracks and journal sections, and allow Managers to set this value in the Track/Section configuration page.

The verification of this parameter takes place in both client side (via Javascript) and server side (after the form submission), which ensures the fulfillment of this requirement even if the Javascript engine is disabled in the browser. This feature will soon be committed to svn repositories in order to be considered for inclusion in OCS and OJS.

Another small change implemented in OCS was the introduction of a LaTex renderer plugin. Even though there already existed a LaTex plugin for OJS [7] (which, by the way works perfectly), this plugin was not available for OCS hence we have adapted the OJS plugin to make it fit in OCS internal structure. This plugins has already been uploaded to PKP forums for all users that wish to add this feature to OCS.

Workshops for users and potential users

Both software tools are really complete, full of features and extremely configurable. This is very good once users have learned how to use all this, but new users tend to loose in the huge sea of options and functions available. To make the transition to these tools smoother for them, we have organized and given workshops specially focused on author, reviewer and director/editor scopes.

In these workshops we show users (and potential users, since people assists to these workshops to see if the tools are good for their projects) how the process of publication is carried out in OCS and OJS. The idea is that users play the role of an author first, then a director or editor and finally reviewer, so they can experiment by themselves what every user does, how the software guides and helps them to complete a whole process and how publications are put on-line and seen by visitors. They even have an article or paper for their own, so there is no overlapping among the workshop participants. Since many participants of workshops like to continue playing around with everything

they have learned, we leave on-line a testing OCS and OJS website, with a fake Congress and a fake Journal so they can review everything or even go on researching and learning new features not covered in the workshop.

In our experience, users tend at first to loose a bit when they switch from one role to the other, but once they have understood the dynamic of the workshop they follow it with no problems and most times they even get on with it.

Manager is a key but a bit complicated role in both OCS and OJS, therefore it is not included in these workshops. Nevertheless, it is mentioned many times along workshops since people need to understand where some features come from and who has defined them. In all workshops we also emphasize repeatedly that everything can be configured, so the portals can adjust to journals and conferences parameters, and not the other way around; this flexibility reassures participants since they do not have to change the way they already worked.

Anyway, we are also planning workshops for these roles and just for these roles, so users can have the whole picture focusing on how to configure their journal or congress, add information to it, define processes, policies, etc. We presume that this kind of workshop will be a little harder, so we are collecting as much information as we can to make it the most complete possible.

Using the software to learn the software

With every workshop a new version of the documents used for users comes up (flowcharts, presentations, general documents); besides, we created some documents to help and guide users to configure very specific aspects such as headers, footers and style sheets. We needed to put all this documents available for everyone, and we wanted users to use both portals, so we decided to use OJS and OCS to publish documentation about OJS and OCS respectively. This way, newcomers and users in general can see how a document is published on-line, how visitors can read it, what reading-tools really are, how indexes are constructed and how different formats are displayed. Users have shown big interest in this, and have experimented a lot in our fake portal, so it seems that this was a wise move.

Collaborative cooperation

Most questions and doubts are common to almost all users, and the fast growth in users, journals and conferences have considerably increased the number of repeated questions and global doubts. We wanted to find a more efficient way to answer all these questions faster, and to let users share their experience with other users, so they can help each other and depend a bit less of the support team behind both portals.

We needed a faster way to share information, advices, tips and solutions in general to basic and advanced topics, and we thought that a collaborative wiki-like site [8] was a good idea. We started this site in April 2009, and we are continuously writing articles and guides in which different topics are explained, paying special attention to repeated enquiries made by many users.

Users can also write new articles or improve existing ones, adding some information or correcting wrong data. Either way, any changes are reviewed by the support team, in order to ensure a minimum quality level in the wiki.

Conclusions

All measures taken for both projects are intended to people to make the most of the softwares and

services, after having a close look to all the available possibilities of the platforms behind the portals. The more users take advantage of that, the more people are encouraged to take part of the projects.

So far, many efforts have been put to help everyone and results are already showing up. The Portal of Journals has five journals, two of which are brand new, created by people who saw a great opportunity in this project. In fact, one of these journals [9] belongs to an international group with many Latin American Universities in it [10]. Regarding to the Portal of Congresses, there are already four congresses, all of them very different, and two of them having held for the first time.

Finally, since both portals are very close to SeDiCI —the project in charge of the dissemination of everything produced inside UNLP and whose people are experts in on-line publication and diffusion area [11, 12, 13]—, the potential boost and visibility of Journals and Congresses projects have is really great, including the harvesting by and diffusion via OAI PMH of publications, the inclusion of this documents in SeDiCI repositories so they could appear in search results, and the dissemination in library websites via standard protocols such as Z39.50, SRU, SRW or even customized web-service.

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