5-12-2014

Osgoode Digital Commons: An Update

F. Tim Knight
Osgoode Hall Law School of York University, tknight@osgoode.yorku.ca

Louis Mirando
Osgoode Hall Law School of York University, lmirando@osgoode.yorku.ca

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/librarians

Part of the Scholarly Communication Commons

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License.

Repository Citation


This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Library at Osgoode Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Librarian Publications & Presentations by an authorized administrator of Osgoode Digital Commons.
Good morning everyone. Thank you for this opportunity to provide an update on the implementation of your Digital Commons. I’m going to start things off with a short presentation that will provide an overview of our recent activity. Following that we’ll open the floor for questions and discuss any issues you might have.
Today’s Update

- Osgoode scholarship added to date
- Results of the “soft launch”
- SSRN and Osgoode Digital Commons
- Digital Commons and AODA compliance

I will talk about what we have managed to add to the Osgoode Digital Commons so far; how the “soft launch” has been received including a brief look at some of the benefits of using Digital Commons; then I’ll shift to the relationship between Osgoode Digital Commons and the Social Science Research Network; and finally I’ll touch on Digital Commons and compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.
Since the “soft launch” of Osgoode Digital Commons in January of this year we have added the complete collection of papers for both the Osgoode Hall Law Journal and the Journal of Law and Social Policy. Most recently we’ve also uploaded the CLPE Research Paper Series from its inception in 2005 up to 2013. We’re also in the process of adding the video recordings of our research seminar series, special lectures and some of the events that have been held at Osgoode.

In total this amounts to about 2,000 resources that have been added to date.

The results of this activity have been remarkable. It has been a classic case of ...
... build it ...
... and they will come.
When you visit Osgoode Digital Commons at digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca you will find a running total of the full-text downloads displayed at the bottom of the front page (seen here at the blue arrow at the bottom of this slide).

Since our “soft launch” our site has received ...
... over 69,000 full-text downloads. Which as I mentioned is rather remarkable considering that this represents only 4 months of exposure and we have not yet announce our “official launch.”
The breakdown of download figures for each of our text collections for the past 4 months looks like this. About 90% (58,303) have gone to OHLJ, 9% (5,825) to JLSP and 1% (287) to CLPE.
One of the reasons for these results, aside from the highly regarded reputation of Osgoode’s scholarship, is that in addition to metadata like title, author, abstract, etc. the full-text of our scholarly resources available in Digital Commons are indexed for searching on the web. Digital Commons is optimized to be immediately visible to the major search engines which maximizes discovery and makes the content of Osgoode Digital Commons easy for researchers and the public to find.
Digital Commons: Benefits

Law Commons
• 228 institutions
• 117 disciplines
• 205,179 scholarly works
• 48,841,286 full-text downloads

Another beneficial aspect of Digital Commons is the additional exposure gained by being a part of the Digital Commons Network. This network helps to reveal relationships and connections that exist between the scholarly output of all of the institutions that have contributed to Digital Commons.

The Law Commons currently has 228 participating institutions in 117 law related disciplines. That represents over 200,000 scholarly works that have received over 48 and a half million full-text downloads.

And based on download results for April, Osgoode scholarship has already begun to appear among the top 10 institutions in some of these Commons.
For example, the results show that we were ranked 5th in the Indian and Aboriginal Law Commons ...
... and we were 9th in the Transnational Law Commons.
We were also ranked 8th in the Political Theory Commons giving us additional exposure in a discipline that falls outside of Law in the Digital Commons.

All of these results demonstrates an excellent start to the reception of our institutional repository in Digital Commons.
There are a number of other benefits some of which I’ve listed here on this slide.

But what I’d like to turn to now is the interrelationship between Ogoode Digital Commons and SSRN.
From the start I want to make it clear that these two platforms are complimentary to each other. They both offer fantastic value for the dissemination of scholarship. So please, let’s not think of this in terms of SSRN versus Osgoode Digital Commons.

Having said that, I know that some of you are concerned with how the introduction of the Osgoode Digital Commons might impact readership for the papers that have been, and will be, uploaded to the Legal Scholarship Network on SSRN.
Let’s start with a little background information.

SSRN was founded about 20 years ago, and it has become a popular place for individual legal academics to share their research. They encourage early distribution of research to authors and their readers to facilitate communication, support open access and provide most of the research papers free of charge.

The success of their efforts currently lists SSRN as 2nd in the world by the Ranking Web of Repositories.
The Legal Scholarship Network is under the direction of three notable legal scholars: Bernard S. Black, a leading American scholar of corporate law and finance who recently moved from Stanford to University of Texas; Ronald J. Gilson is an experienced practitioner who also teaches corporate finance and acquisitions at both Stanford and Columbia, and has written on comparative corporate governance; and A. Mitchell Polinsky also at Stanford who’s research focuses on the economic analysis of a wide variety of legal topics.
Digital Commons is an open access institutional repository. They provide a suite of tools to collect, preserve, and make visible all of an institution’s intellectual output.

I think it’s important to note the focus here on the “institution’s intellectual output.” This is slightly different to SSRN’s approach which tends toward supporting the research of the individual scholar.
SSRN and Digital Commons

Digital Commons was developed under the BePress umbrella which was founded in 1999 by University of California, Berkeley professors Robert D. Cooter (a pioneer in the field of law and economics), Aaron S. Edlin (an authority on antitrust, contract remedies, and law and economics), and Benjamin E. Hermalin (who is a scholar in the areas of economics, corporate governance and finance).

BePress was built by scholars for scholars and they initially set out to improve scholarly publishing. They have since become a valued partner in the scholarly communication process providing a leading hosted institutional repository solution.
So how do these two services work together?

Carol Watson and James Donovan considered this question and wrote about the interrelation of SSRN and Digital Commons in 2012. After examining the situation at the University of Georgia School of Law they arrived at this conclusion:

“Faculty members should not view the proposed IR [institutional repository] as a drain on their SSRN rankings. While SSRN excels at delivering their work to the cadre of legal specialists, IRs typically do a better job of presenting it to a broader readership. This expanded exposure should be judged a positive benefit of participation in the IR ... Anyone interested in giving their ideas the widest possible hearing should deposit their intellectual work in as many venues as possible. For law professors, this means they should have both SSRN and the IR working for them.”


Their point here that the SSRN audience is largely made up of “legal specialists” and that an institutional repository tends to reach a broader audience is a good one to keep in mind.
In a recent webinar delivered by these same authors they describe the typical pattern of download behaviour that is experienced on these two platforms. I’ve crudely tried to illustrate that on this slide here.

SSRN produces what they call a quick “burst” of activity which is then followed by a tendency to drop off and plateau. So generally speaking it is the new uploads that generate traffic on SSRN. Likely due in part to the distribution of email alerts that are sent around to SSRN subscribers.

Downloads in Digital Commons, on the other hand increase as new and historical scholarship is discovered on the web over time. Traffic here is generated by a public hungry for information and discovering the growing body of Osgoode scholarship now maximized for discovery via search engines. On Digital Commons, it’s the full repository, not just the new additions that generates traffic to the site.

But the fact that these behaviour patterns are so different is a good thing. These patterns exemplify the complimentary nature of these two platform. As the downloads in SSRN start to drop off, downloads in the Digital Commons gradually rise over time and take up the slack.
This gradually rising pattern can be seen in our Osgoode Digital Commons. There has been a steady stream of full-text downloads received for the papers available in the Osgoode Hall Law Journal collection.
In an article he wrote for the Law Library Journal last year, Simon Canick, Associate Dean for Information Resources and Associate Professor of Law, also reflects on the relationship between SSRN and the institutional repository at the William Mitchell College of Law.

“Our law school’s experience with using both SSRN and our repository, Mitchell Open Access, supports Donovan and Watson’s key conclusion; namely that redundant posting dramatically increases net downloads. In William Mitchell’s case, SSRN downloads have declined marginally since the debut of Mitchell Open Access, but net downloads have skyrocketed. This is the rare service with no downside; it provides broad dissemination of faculty work, predictable and enthusiastic institutional support, quantifiable and measurable success, and fixed costs.” [emphasis added]


This idea of the “net download” echoes Donovan and Watson’s recommendation that scholars should have “both SSRN and the institutional repository working for them.” And again, this demonstrates the complimentary nature of these two services.
This chart compares the download activity from Mitchell Open Access and SSRN. This is an updated version of the chart that appears in the appendix of Canick’s article and shows their download activity from September 2009 up to the end of December 2013.

Each month SSRN tracks the total download count for the past 12 months. Download counts for Mitchell Open Access are represented here by the relatively flat blue line that runs along the bottom. This number has fluctuated between about 7,000 and 10,000 downloads over the course of the last three or four years. The download statistics for their institutional repository are represented by the green line here which had peaked at about 50,000 downloads at the end of 2013. And the red line shows the combined “net downloads” between the two.

We haven’t quite got enough data at this point to generate an accurate comparison chart for our own scholarship. But concerns have been raised recently suggesting that the introduction of the Osgoode Digital Commons may account for this recent decrease in Osgoode’s SSRN ranking.
There has been a steady decline in Osgoode SSRN downloads. This trend began in April of last year and then continued further in August where I’ve placed the blue arrow in this chart. The decline flattens out at around December 2013 leveling off about 28,000 new downloads.

It is my understanding that there was an increase in upload activity to SSRN that began in the winter of 2012 and on into the spring of 2013. This activity may have contributed to the increase in downloads that were recprded at the beginning of this period. And, as others have experienced, after that short-term increase in upload activity had passed, usage gradually dropped off to the present level indicating that these new papers generated new traffic on SSRN.

As mentioned, we began uploading our journals and the CLPE papers beginning in January 2014. This “soft launch” of the Osgoode Digital Commons took place after the Osgoode SSRN downloads had already decreased and stabilized. This suggests to me that there may be other factors at play that are impacting the rate of downloads on SSRN.
I decided to took a look at the activity of the top 10 international law schools on SSRN and found a couple of interesting things to note.

In November 2012, the University of Oxford, Faculty of Law began uploading their papers to SSRN. Their downloads are represented here by the pale blue line. In the space of only one month they went from a rank of 100 all the way up to number 2. And they continue to dance back and forth at the top with the Tilburg Law School.

The yellow line in the centre is the University of Cambridge, Faculty of Law. They have also made remarkable gains moving from 9th to 5th between November 2013 and April 2014. Osgoode is represented here by the red line in the crowded middle section of this chart. You can see here too, a very close interaction between Osgoode and the Melbourne Law School which is the black line here.
If you take a closer look at the SSRN numbers for April, you can see just how close Cambridge, Melbourne and Osgoode are in the middle of these rankings.
Another factor is the very small content overlap that exists between the papers available on SSRN and those available on Osgoode Digital Commons. Since we have up until this point only loaded Osgoode published journals and the CLPE Research Papers, there is currently very little Osgoode scholarship in Digital Commons that has been published in other non-Osgoode journals. That means that most of the papers available in SSRN stand alone when compared to what’s available in the Osgoode Digital Commons.

We will be closely monitoring things as we begin to upload the scholarship for individual Osgoode faculty members.
One thing that has been suggested, and is a relatively easy thing to do, is to add a link from the Osgoode Digital Commons that links back to the paper on SSRN. This has been done by a few other Digital Commons law schools.

We like the way University of Georgia Law has implemented this shown here. They a link that says, “Originally uploaded at SSRN,” that takes people back to SSRN.
The last thing I want to touch on very briefly is compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

As of January first of this year our website must comply with the AODA which means it must meet the World Wide Web Consortium, Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, Level A.
In the accessibility statement available on the Osgoode Digital Commons site a list of accessibility standards indicates that DC is compliant with the U.S. Federal Government Section 508 Guidelines and the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. Both U.S. Section 508 and AODA must and do comply with the W3C guidelines.
Thank you for your attention.

Selected Resources


**Picture Credits**
Premasagar. Auroville: Under Construction
file name: 125138024_ef46eb59ea_b.jpg
https://flic.kr/p/c4nb9

A Lads Club Escapette. A Morrissey Crowd is a good crowd!
Middlesbrough Town Hall, 8 July 2011
https://flic.kr/p/a1V3bz