Overleaf

Brown University seeks insight into research collaboration

Brown University is engaged in a pilot project to investigate how its library can support scholarly communication. As part of the pilot it is using Overleaf as an authoring and submission tool, which will enable researchers to publish articles directly into the institutional repository.

Andrew Creamer is a librarian in Brown's Center for Digital Scholarship. He works in close liaison with the Computer Science department, helping faculty members to write data management and data sharing plans for sponsored research. He also promotes the use of Brown's institutional repository to the department.

Close engagement

When he first started at Brown in April 2014, the Chair of the Computer Science department was keen to use a cloud-based LaTeX editor, and Andrew saw in this an opportunity to address how the library could offer better support to the department beyond collections delivery.

Earlier in his own career, Andrew worked on a team funded by a grant from the National Library of Medicine to develop data management roles for librarians. "I wanted to broaden our relevance," he says. "If we could find out how the computer science department works as a unique community, how authors write their papers and with whom they collaborate, we could provide them with a much better collection of content to meet their needs."

Staff at Brown's library had long thought that although there was plentiful material on the web concerning conference proceedings, there was an opportunity for the library to refine the resources it provides, such as monographs, e-books and database subscriptions to provide better support for researchers.

"I could have gone through the biographies of every faculty member to find out the subjects in which they were interested," Andrew says. "But I wanted a more efficient method. I wanted to see what they were doing now, what they were writing about, and with whom they were collaborating."

Overleaf as the answer

To facilitate that quest for information, Brown decided to use Overleaf, a Digital Science portfolio company, as its authoring and submissions tool. Overleaf is a cloud-based scientific writing, editing and publishing platform, which was the platform preferred by the department – and as it is LaTeX compatible, it is particularly suited to the sort of content produced by computer science researchers. It has analytical tools, which allow Andrew the sort of insight he wanted into the subject matter produced by the department's researchers.
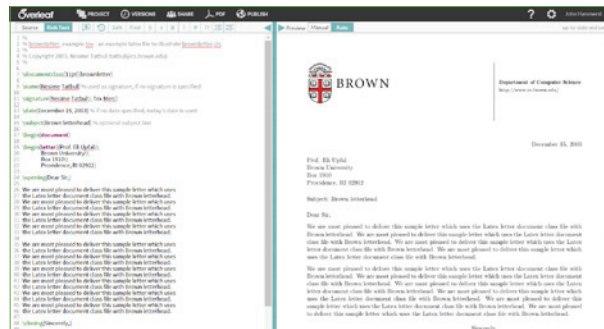
Overleaf also has workflow features that make it easy for research authors to publish directly into Brown's institutional repository, which is something Andrew advocates. "I want researchers to publish data and manuscripts to a repository as soon as papers are written," he says.

cont.

BROWN

About

- Located in historic Providence, Rhode Island and founded in 1764, Brown University is the seventh-oldest college in the United States

People

- **Andrew Creamer**
  Librarian, Brown's Centre for Digital Scholarship

Goals

- Allow the library to provide improved service to faculty and students

Approach

- Provide tools for new forms of scholarly communication that bring efficiency to the collaborative writing process
- Get analytics on content is relevant to faculty members and students

Results

- The library gets the insight and information it needs
- The students and faculty get a great tool for writing and collaborating
- The University gets an easy submission portal for its institutional repository

Examples

- See screenshots on last page

Andrew Creamer

Features of the platform that have been popular with researchers include the cloud-based editor, which has the ability to invite people to collaborate. It facilitates groups of faculty and students working among themselves, or faculty staff working with other institutions.

Overleaf also has the ability to format papers automatically for submission to particular journals, and to meet the requirements for university thesis and dissertation submission. Overleaf provides a comprehensive selection of over 1,000 templates pre-loaded in the online editor, or users can create their own, for example to use in teaching courses and for homework assignments.
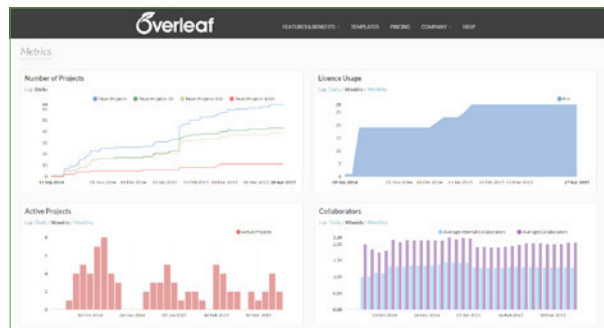
Metrics allow librarians to see which templates are popular among people writing theses and dissertations, along with details of collaborations (both internal and external), user activity, and overall project numbers.

"These metrics will allow us more insight into what researchers need and will help us to inform the collections department," Andrew says.

Overall, Overleaf has been instrumental in the pilot – providing the library with the user information needed to better support scholarly communication, researchers, students and faculty. Users of the platform have been very happy with the ease in which they can now write and collaborate on scientific documents and the ability to publish directly to the Brown repository.

"It's been a win for everyone," said Andrew "the library gets the insight and information it needs, the students and faculty get a great tool for writing and collaborating, and the University gets an easy submission portal for it's online repository. We couldn't be happier with Overleaf."