

The UPJournals platform goes live!

By Austin Pinkerton, Department of Political Sciences

On Tuesday, 20 April 2021, the University of Pretoria launched the UPJournals (<https://upjournals.up.ac.za>) platform. This project, administered jointly by the Department of Library Services and the Faculty of Humanities, provides UP students and staff with an open access and centralised platform for publishing journals and book-length manuscripts. UPJournals is a multi-journal platform that uses Open Journal Systems (OJS) to aid with the promotion, curation, and standardisation of journals and research data. Moreover, this platform embraces the open access agenda by providing: access to free, peer-reviewed data; a system for authors to trace both the scholarly and societal impact of their research; and, an overarching editorial management system for publishing articles online.

The launch ceremony was opened by the Director of the Department of Library Services (DLS), Ms Lindiwe Soyizwapi, who stated that the UPJournals system ‘makes[s] research that matters available to the South African society and to the greater audience of scholars internationally’. She mentioned that this initiative is one of the ways in which UP affirms its commitment to the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities – UP became a signatory in 2011 – by providing ‘unrestricted online access to peer-reviewed papers’ and ‘allowing for the productive re-use’ of such data. In her concluding remarks, she mentioned how the UPJournals system is an important avenue for postgraduate and emerging researchers to publish their research with the potential of reaching larger audiences and challenging unequal access to information.

Prof Tawana Kupe, UP Vice-Chancellor and Principal, mentioned that the catalyst of removing paywalls to accessing knowledge is open science (also known as open access and open source), which has gained momentum during the internet age. He added that while open science has become a prominent aspect of the global, African and South African research lexicon over the past decade, ‘it is a path on which the University of Pretoria has already been travelling for some 20 years’. Through UP’s efforts of creating open and accessible research within the higher education system, Prof Kupe suggests that ‘by promoting the discoverability, findability and accessibility of journals published under the auspices of the UP Library, UPJournals will take us and our research closer to scholars, policymakers and the public, in South Africa, regionally and internationally’. The UPJournals platform offers a profound opportunity for increased collaboration across the global academe, with increased visibility of research and increased public engagement having the ‘potential to be a game-changer in the quest to achieve a better world for all’. In Prof Kupe’s closing remarks, he suggested that through this project, UP is ‘not at all an inward-looking institution but one that seeks to make the maximum positive impact on the society of which we are part. The steps we have already taken, and are preparing to take today, are intended to amplify the UP’s ability to do research that matters, changing the world around us’.

According to Prof Anton Ströh, Vice-Principal: Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Education, open access through UPJournals brings together two core aspects of research: it helps establish the societal impact of the research output and it develops the scholarly impact of the published research and where that research has been used. He noted: ‘it is proved that if you publish your research through open access or open journal systems, it is likely to generate twice the number of citations that you would get for a [publication with a paywall]’. Building on this, Prof Ströh stated that UPJournals, as an open access platform, allows scholars to have their research published and disseminated much faster and that through open access metrics, they have access not only to information on the number of times the research has been cited, but also data on how many times the paper has been downloaded, shared, and viewed. This allows scholars to trace the broader societal impact of the research.

Prof Vasu Reddy, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, emphasised the Faculty’s collaborative drive and how the UPJournals platform brings together the Library’s Digital Scholarship Unit, the Faculty’s Emerging Scholars Initiative (<https://esipress.up.ac.za>) and the Unit for Academic Literacy. Moreover, it draws from the Publishing Studies programme in the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology (EBIT). According to Prof Reddy, in conjunction with the Faculty’s Emerging Scholars Initiative, ‘the partnership between the faculty and the library allows [the faculty] to provide academics with a suite of services from essential technical to publication-related support, such as copyediting, proofreading, design, and layout’. These services are offered at reduced rates, given that graduates are employed directly from the Faculty. Reddy elaborated on this important student-driven approach, stating: ‘we are able to mentor students from UP’s various academic programmes...this is part of an effort to give our students essential work experience while they complete their studies’.

In Prof Kupe’s words, ‘through UPJournals, we are taking yet another huge step forward in reimagining our role as a university and taking our knowledge to the world. The University of Pretoria, through the creation of an open access system, is indeed creating a new path in digital scholarship—one that makes research that matters accessible to all that live in South Africa and across the globe’.

For more information on the UPJournals platform and the suit of services offered through the Emerging Scholars Initiative (ESI Press) please watch the video that is available [here](#) or view our Subject guide [here](#)

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