

Case study: University of Johannesburg

Meeting the strategic needs of departments across campus



ELSEVIER

Advancing human progress together



Background

The University of Johannesburg (UJ) prides itself on sharing the pace and energy of cosmopolitan Johannesburg, the city whose name it carries. And as one of South Africa's leading universities, it also has a strong research pedigree. In fact, it is home to 70 research centers and institutes, one of which has been designated a Center of Excellence by the republic's Department of Science and Innovation and National Research Foundation. However, raising the visibility of its research achievements and their impact hasn't always been easy.

In 2023, the university's research office led a multi-departmental search for a research information management system (RIMS) to address this need. After a thorough search and evaluation process, UJ chose Pure and is now rolling it out on campus.

In the Q&A that follows, Mr Dale Towert, Director: Research Intelligence at UJ, explains the institution's motivations for introducing a RIMS, why UJ opted for Pure, and its implementation experiences to date.

“I am immensely proud that we have launched this incredibly innovative portal, which underscores the university’s commitment to driving impactful research and a robust research environment, enhancing global visibility.”

“Among the many benefits that Elsevier’s Pure Portal brings to UJ is the opportunity to empower our staff and students as ambassadors of the university in that they now have a ‘one-stop shop’ to which they can direct anyone who wishes to know more about our work.”

Professor Letlhokwa Mpedi

Vice-Chancellor & Principal, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

1. Creating a single source of truth to drive progress

What prompted your university to consider adopting a RIMS?

It began with a need to collate our university’s research from multiple sources so that we could effectively showcase it; specifically, UJ’s research focus, our global collaboration networks, and the impact of our research.

We looked at a number of products, but when we saw what other universities had achieved with their Pure Portals, we realized immediately that Pure met a number of core needs expressed by our stakeholders.

Most importantly of all, Pure meets the needs of our management team, which wants our university’s research to be visible; not only to the scientific community, but to the general community.

Closely linked to that, Pure enables us to deliver the content in a format that is discoverable by the ranking agencies, web crawlers, and other parties that access content via automated means.

“Within the bustling corridors of academia, scholars driven by curiosity and innovation always strive to push new frontiers of knowledge and unravel complex issues affecting humanity. However, a common challenge remains the seamless dissemination and collaboration of their research work. The new Pure Portal offers a platform for scholars to interact, share and advance their collective knowledge.”

Professor Sarah Gravett

Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research & Internationalisation, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Making research discoverable and accessible

Visibility is also a key use case for our marketing team. They want a place where people can learn more about what we do as a university, whether they are potential students or visiting professors, members of the press or government dignitaries. If we take the COVID-19 pandemic as an example, we struggled to find or showcase that information because it was stored inside three or four disparate systems. When we began looking for a RIMS, we visited other university implementations of Pure and found that if we entered the same sort of query you type into an internet search engine into their Pure, we not only saw the researchers involved in COVID-19 research, but their units, the organizational structures, the type of funding involved, and even the equipment used.

With the Pure Portal, we can showcase what we do; for example, our collaboration networks and the extent to which our research is being cited, mentioned in the press and shared on social media. And the Pure Portal is easy to navigate, graphically oriented and very user friendly. This means anyone can immediately gain in-depth insights into our latest research, and understand its impact and visibility.

Meeting goals with minimal resources

The big benefit of Pure for our IT department is that the team doesn't need to develop an internal product to do essentially the same thing. Our university's IT department is not sufficiently resourced to take on a project of this scale, and does not have some of the technical skills necessary. In addition, selecting an external system has helped us avoid the common problem of fragmentation, where every department builds an individual system to address their specific requirements.

Manage data and showcase achievements

For my team, a major goal is to create a single repository for all the university's research. This enables us to identify and submit eligible research outputs for funding in accordance with South Africa's publication-based research subsidy scheme. We are particularly excited to be working with Elsevier to develop this dedicated functionality within Pure.

The researcher profiles enable scholars to highlight their projects, publications, networks and more. And for an internal staff member who wants to see who is active in their field, it just takes a couple of clicks

“Some universities told us that their implementation of competitor products hadn’t gone as smoothly as anticipated – that’s when we began to explore Pure in more detail.”

“With Pure, we can meet everyone’s needs in one platform and the great thing is that we don’t have to manage it; Pure is hosted, so we don’t have to buy servers and include it in the disaster recovery plan and back-ups. ”

Mr Dale Towert, Director

Research Intelligence, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

2. Carrying out due diligence

How did you decide which RIMS was the right fit for your institution?

Learning from others

First, we spoke with other universities to find out what RIMS they were using and why they selected that specific product. We discovered that while South Africa has one or two local systems, they are not as sophisticated as Pure. At that time, there were no Pure implementations in our country, but when we searched the web, we stumbled across some well advertised Pure Portals.

The one belonging to KAUST (King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia) appeared in our search results repeatedly. We ended up using it as a kind of internal motivation, saying, if we can procure Pure, we could do something like this too!

“We think that [Pure] is going to be a critical tool, particularly around areas such as starting collaboration with industry and creating research impact.”

Dr Ndivhuwo Luruli

Executive Director, Research Development & Support, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

3. Preparing for a successful implementation

Who are the key Pure stakeholders on campus?

Partnering across departments

The project has enjoyed very senior management buy-in from the start – in fact, the mandate to implement the system came from our Deputy Vice Chancellor of Research and Innovation. Having that senior level buy-in has seen support trickle down to other departments. At this stage, with our focus on getting the Pure Portal up and running, the project is being driven by the research office, but we are working closely with IT, HR and the library. We believe that once Pure is live and matures, the management of the system will become a joint initiative between the research office and the library, with the latter involved in scholar liaison and actual content curation, moderation, etc.

Any tips for other institutions embarking on a Pure implementation?

Preparation is key

Based on our experience so far, I don't think you can overestimate the importance of ensuring your data is clean, complete and ready for migration. We are working with Pure on a module to support our submission for a national assessment exercise. This means the data that we are migrating into Pure from our legacy systems has to be ready to digest in two different ways – it has to be publicly ready for the Pure Portal, because that is how the public will consume it, but it also needs to be simultaneously prepared for the annual national assessment. Elsevier put a lot of effort into trying to prepare us for the work this would involve, but we thought we were basically good to go. It was only when we got started that we discovered how many gaps and issues there were.

Also, do not underestimate the complexity involved in integrating data from different sources, and the resources and time needed to actively manage Pure post implementation. While the platform is hosted (taking care of most of the “IT administration”) the data integration requires specialized skills, experience and ongoing management. The content integrated into Pure requires active curation, while various administrative functions also require proactive management. This is not a case of signing off the project and forgetting about it!

About University of Johannesburg

Proudly South African, UJ's focus is on actualizing the potential that higher education holds for the continent's development. It is home to:



4 diverse and inclusive campuses



7 faculties and colleges offering recognized academic programs in diverse disciplines



50,000+ students



3,000+ international students from 80+ countries



310 researchers rated by the National Research Foundation of South Africa



Pure

Centralize your research management by using Pure to showcase your impact, ensuring compliance and making data-driven decisions with confidence.

For more information visit elsevier.com/solutions/pure

