

Unlocking Liberal Arts Research Potential With PURE



Research Intelligence

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Make confident program decisions, streamline funding analysis and forge new partnerships with complete, correct, current and connected information around research activities.





Do different fields of knowledge require different research strategies? When managing research information in the fields of arts, business and social science, are there better ways to unlock an institution's research potential?

These are questions liberal arts universities like Lingnan University in Hong Kong often ask themselves. Like any field of study, arts, business and social science have a distinct body of knowledge. While natural science focuses on the physical world, Lingnan's research deals mainly with the interactions of humans and society and in fulfilling the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) for a better future for all. Hence, the value – and impact – of its research is measured not just in terms of citation but also in its societal impact. It should strengthen societies' self-understanding, motivations and relations with others, amongst others.

The research mission of Lingnan University is exactly that – driving research excellence and knowledge transfer and foster collaboration with a wider community across all disciplines. Defined as one of the key strategic areas and initiatives in its strategic plan for 2019-2025, it believes that the University's reputation in research rests mainly on the quality and quantity of its published outputs, which is built on innovation and collaboration. Equally importantly, the University has also identified that timely response to social needs has to be central to its research and knowledge transfer work. As encapsulated in the

University's research tagline "IMPACT with CARE" and its mission as a liberal arts institution, knowledge and humanity should be interwoven in its endeavors for the betterment of society.

Driving Research Excellence for The Liberal Arts

Ranked third in "Quality Education" globally by the THE University Impact Rankings 2021 and named as one of the "Top 10 Liberal Arts Colleges in Asia" by Forbes, Lingnan University comprises 16 academic departments under three faculties, namely Arts, Business and Social Sciences, Science Unit, School of Graduate Studies, Institute of Policy Studies, and a number of research centres.

With 243 researchers consisting mainly of academic and research staff, it has produced over 12,000 research outputs and over 200 active research projects as of July 2021. Over 42% of its published works between 2015 and 2020 are in the arts and humanities and social sciences journals, with its topics of prominence largely related to the social science field. About 21% of these works are published in Elsevier publications. Of the 3,171 publications being indexed in Scopus as of July 2021, they were cited 52,619 times. Citation per paper jumps by 176 places since 2017. The income from professional projects including consultancies has recorded an 83% growth.

Data Source: Scopus, up to 31 March 2021

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Challenges In Research Information Management

As the research environment got increasingly competitive and the regulatory framework imposed by funding agencies or governing bodies more rigorous, there was mounting pressure from the Lingnan University management to have access to timely and accurate data to help formulate sensible research strategies.

Before 2019, Lingnan did not have a single platform to provide the necessary research-related information. Data was scattered across multiple legacy systems or sources and administered by different departments. This resulted in poor data quality issues, such as multiple entries for the same article, fragmented sources,

and inaccurate, incomplete or missing data. It was also an honest system that did not allow for validation. All these issues made it impossible to obtain quality, timely and accurate information for making data-informed decisions on research development. And as the existing platform was a closed system, information was not accessible to external parties, thus reducing research output visibility and exposure.



“Lingnan University is keen to enhance our research capacity with a more vibrant research culture. We need “good data” to help us understand our research landscape and to formulate sensible research strategies. Yet, fragmented data had adversely limited our capability to derive timely insights to respond to the increasingly competitive research environment.... Bringing in an integrated RIM solution was a strategic move to rectify the long-existing data problem. Research-related data needs to be aggregated and structured with better quality, accuracy and scalability that allow us to review our research landscape with multiple perspectives anytime when needed.”

— Prof. Joshua MOK Ka Ho,
Vice-President, Lam Man Tsan Chair Professor of Comparative Policy,
Lingnan University

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“I found the adoption of PURE as one of the key initiatives to bring digital transformation to the University. The team members were not just taking references from other local and overseas institutions that shared similar IT infrastructure with Lingnan, they were sharing their pains with each other and learning the most effective strategy to address them. The team was impressed with the full functionalities of PURE as a RIMS and acknowledged the limitations of our legacy systems. The implementation process let us bring order to the messy data to reflect the research excellence of our academics, remove and revamp many old systems, and gradually transform the mindset and culture of colleagues. It is also one of the catalysts for the University to automate other systems. Looking back, it is the right move for the University to adopt PURE as our first RIMS, which offers an effective tool to assist us to tackle the existing challenges in data management.”

— Dr Louisa Lam,
Chief Information Officer and University Librarian,
Lingnan University



To this end, Lingnan’s research data management had multiple challenges to overcome. It had become crucial for the institution to find a better way for:

- Data Capture
They needed to capture all research-related information, including research outputs, grants, projects, awards and the impact of research activities in a single platform.
- Data Discovery
They required a single portal where departments, faculties and researchers from within and outside of the University could discover and access available research data internally and externally.
- Data Storage
They needed a centralized data storage system to keep all research data, including research outputs and make them accessible for the long term. This meant a record management system that could handle the complexity of the different types and formats of files involved in many studies.

Additionally, it should also offer the opportunity for the University to increase its visibility and influence for greater societal impact, thus fulfilling its mission and creating possibilities for more international research collaborations.

A Solution That’s First Amongst The Liberals

Finding the right research information management solution was therefore imperative to drive Lingnan’s research excellence and unlock its potential. But where should one begin, and what references could one get for a system that could fulfill all the university’s needs?

Named Lingnan Scholars (<https://scholars.ln.edu.hk/>), the system was successfully launched in early 2019. Lingnan thus became the first liberal arts University in Asia to have adopted Pure as their research information management system.

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Breaking Silos & Fostering Collaborations

With Lingnan Scholars, Lingnan finally has a portal that fulfills all its requirements and overcomes the existing challenges. Firstly, for data capture and data storage, it can now input, keep and inter-link all research-related information, including outputs, grants, projects, prize and awards, as well as the impact of scholarly activities undertaken by Lingnan's academics in a single platform. Data administration rights are given to various departments, such as the library, research office and public relations, while profile administration rights are awarded to researchers. Gone are the days when data were scattered across different data silos. A single source of truth now exists in Lingnan Scholars.

Since information is now made available internally and externally, it has opened up a new channel to foster more collaboration both within the campus and other local and international institutions. With Lingnan researcher profiles and other research data made searchable, external researchers are now able to identify institutional expertise within the University or potential partnerships.

Data discovery is also made a lot easier with all information consolidated on a single platform. Reporting across all data types can be performed quickly, and running of advanced evaluation is also possible, enabling greater insights into trends, grants, outputs and impact. It also allows streamlining of the reporting process to funding agencies, mandatory bodies and national assessment.

“Implementing an integrated RIMS provided an opportunity for our colleagues to break silos. Lingnan Scholars allows all research-related information to be captured in a single platform for all to use. Several working groups from library, IT office, research office, public relations and finance offices recognized the need of working together as all data are interlinked, and with concerted efforts, Lingnan Scholars now serves as the gateway to support the University's mission to promote excellent research, foster greater collaborations and enhance data governance.”

– Dr Louisa Lam



This single source of truth was a huge step forward to better data management and smoothing out various data-centric tasks and procedures. For example, during the preparation for the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2020 submission conducted by the Hong Kong University Grants Committee (UGC), validated outputs in Lingnan Scholars were adopted as the authorized source of data to support the rigorous review and selection process and facilitate the data exchange. The data captured and other reporting functions enabled the University to better understand the scholarly outputs published by its researchers and select appropriate ones for RAE2020.

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Witnessing Lingnan Scholars Success

Conventionally, some of the ways of measuring the success of a university's research endeavors include citation counts, university ranking, new research collaborations, visibility and greater exposure of ideas and societal consequences. Are there any improvements to these metrics for Lingnan since the implementation of Lingnan Scholars?

A search in Scopus indicates that Lingnan's field-weighted citation impact (FWCI) for 2015 to 2020 is 1.39 as of 31 March 2021. Compared with the Hong Kong FWCI of 1.90 and China FWCI of 1.05, it is certainly making good headway.

The RAE2020 submission to the UGC has also brought in excellent results. The UGC has rated more than half of Lingnan's submitted research outputs either a 4-star (world-leading) or a 3-star (internationally excellent). With regard to the percentage of 4-star research, Lingnan is number one in Sociology & Anthropology and second in Accountancy, Philosophy, and Social Work & Social Policy among the public universities in Hong Kong. Lingnan also received the highest percentage in 4-star plus 3-star research in Social Work & Social Policy and second best in Accountancy. In terms of "Research Impact" and "Research Environment", two equally important parameters in RAE, 56% of Lingnan's Impact Cases were rated 4-star (Outstanding Impact) or 3-star (Considerable Impact). In "Research Environment", Lingnan received 4-star in Area Studies, Cultural Studies and Other Arts/Humanities, and 3-star for Chinese Language & Literature, English Language & Literature, Philosophy and Accountancy.

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In terms of the level of national and international collaborations, Lingnan is doing very well too. According to Scopus, its scholarly output between 2015 and 2020 is completed with 51.5% international collaboration and 13.6% national collaboration, signalling very high number of international partnerships. Listed among the top countries of international collaborations are the US, UK, Australia and Taiwan. Lingnan scholars also collaborated with over 600 institutions in more than 80 countries worldwide.

Most significantly, Lingnan's print media exposure since the launch of Lingnan Scholars soared to an unprecedented height. According to a search in LexisNexis Metabase, the number of mentions in the media received by Lingnan University leapfrogged from less than 20 in 2018 to 279 in 2019. Amongst them, 212 are internationally recognised media outlets, which notably improved Lingnan's international reputation as a research-intensive University. With increased visibility, knowledge transfer and insightful discourses of its policy-oriented and societal impact are now possible.

“We, at Lingnan, are fully aware of the impact of research on shaping of our future society. Societal impact can only take place when people notice our researches. Lingnan Scholars is now the gateway, demonstrating to the world our strength and achievements in research. With better visibility of our research endeavours, we believe it could spearhead more knowledge exchange and collaboration from around the world.”

– Prof. Joshua MOK Ka Ho

Ultimately, with its high FWCI, increased collaborations and marked improvement in visibility, the University has made huge leaps towards achieving its research mission of driving research excellence and knowledge transfer as well as foster collaborations with a wider community across all disciplines.



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