SLIDE 1 - Thanks so much for joining me today. I am excited to share with you how our library used our repository to virtually walk around our beautiful campus and enjoy some poetry at the same time.

SLIDE 2 - First, a little bit about Holy Cross. The College of the Holy Cross is a four-year, Jesuit liberal arts institution. We are strictly undergraduate, with 3100 students. It is located in Worcester, Massachusetts on a 174-acre campus. Our institutional repository is called CrossWorks and uses the Digital Commons platform. It was established in 2013 and has just over 5000 items.

SLIDE 3 - In January 2020, the Holy Cross Libraries’ Outreach and Engagement Team began preparing a poetry walk to commemorate National Poetry Month in April. It was intended to be a collaborative event, involving partners from on and off campus.

SLIDE 4 - In March 2020, Holy Cross shut down for the semester.

SLIDE 5 - Throughout the shutdown, the Outreach and Engagement Team continued to offer virtual programming. The poetry walk was reconfigured to a social media event curated by the Holy Cross Libraries.

SLIDE 6 - In January 2021, the College anticipated the return of many students, limited staff, and some faculty to campus. There was a need for the community (especially students) to have recreational opportunities that were safe, socially distanced and preferably outside. The Outreach and Engagement Team prepared a second attempt at a poetry walk because it seemed to fit the bill perfectly.

SLIDE 7 - The title of the project is a play on words because the walk was recreating a previous attempt at a poetry walk, it was intended as a recreational activity, we were asking participants to create something that would also provide recreation (both in the act of creating and the finished product of a poetry walk) and we were hoping the whole thing would help people reconnect to each other (by doing the walk together in socially distance groups, by reconnecting to the campus environment they had been away from, and possibly reconnecting with people they hadn’t seen or talked to if they serendipitously bumped into them during the walk. We also
hoped people would reconnect to their creative side after a stressful year, and that creative expression would serve as an outlet for stress.
Slide 8 - We presented the idea to partners outside the library. It was well-received and they collaborated with us. As you can see, we worked with many departments.

SLIDE 9 - We solicited participation from students and asked the English Department and some student organizations for their assistance with promotion. Rather than jurying it, we decided to take the first 20 poems we received, provided they met some basic criteria.

SLIDE 10 - Meanwhile, we designed the route itself. First we selected from walking routes already published by our Wellness Coordinator, and picked the most accessible path (which is very difficult on a campus as hilly as ours). We chose locations for the poems and numbered them. I requested a campus map from our Facilities Department and edited it to use in the brochure. Another colleague also created a map using Google Earth.

SLIDE 11 - The brochure included a description of the project and listed the poem's number, title, author and location on campus. The maps were labeled with location numbers.

SLIDE 12 - We created a template for the poems with the design tool Canva, which was used to create signs of each poem. We ordered double-sided, color, corrugated plastic yard signs. We were mindful that not all students, faculty and staff were back on campus. The College was using a hybrid model with virtual programming, online meetings, and video presentations. We knew it was important to follow suit and share the poetry walk with those not on campus and that it was only fair to make this a virtual event if possible.

SLIDE 13 - We already knew that social media was not the most effective platform for the poetry walk and decided our IR would be the perfect solution. This served two purposes - It preserved the students' works (as is the point of our IR) but it also allowed those not yet back to campus an opportunity to access the beauty and creativity of the project and help them feel more connected to campus life.

SLIDE 14 - The poetry walk itself was created as a “book gallery” because it has a nice visual aesthetic. The poems would display as attractive thumbnails in the order of the walk. Scrolling would hopefully mimic the flow of a physical walk. The very first submission in the list is the brochure and map. A link to this document is also included in the introductory text.
SLIDE 15 - Each poem was posted in the IR as a 2-page PDF. The first page was a cover page with the heading “Holy Cross Poetry Walk”, the numbered location of the poem, a photo of the location on campus where the sign was installed, a recommended citation and a link to the main page of the poetry walk. This ensured that no matter what poem was landed on, the user could always get back to the entire walk. The second page was the poem as formatted for the signs. We opted not to use the system-generated cover page so that it more closely resembled the actual walk in appearance. The system-generated cover page also has many additional links, whereas our cover page limited links to only the one which brings the user back to the whole project.

SLIDE16 - The Poetry Walk debuted in April to a warm and welcome reception. An article in the student newspaper included many positive quotes and endorsements from students and faculty. The Provost mentioned it during her monthly Open Meetings. People were especially glad to have an online version available.

SLIDE 17 - Our campus walk has been traveled by more than just members of the Holy Cross community. The day after it was posted, there were downloads in Australia. It has had far reaching effects in other ways as well. The poetry walk brought attention to CW, and faculty inquired about submitting work. Several class projects, such as a volume of poetry and a book about the geographical history of the college were submitted. The IR also saw an increase in submissions from students’ and faculty’s own work.

As the manager of the IR, I feel this is the REAL success of the poetry walk.

SLIDE 18 - I have provided links to CrossWorks, the Poetry Walk and an article about the walk which was published in our student newspaper.

SLIDE 20 - I would love to discuss any questions or comments you have in greater detail, or help you create your own poetry walk. Here is my contact information. Please don’t hesitate to reach out.