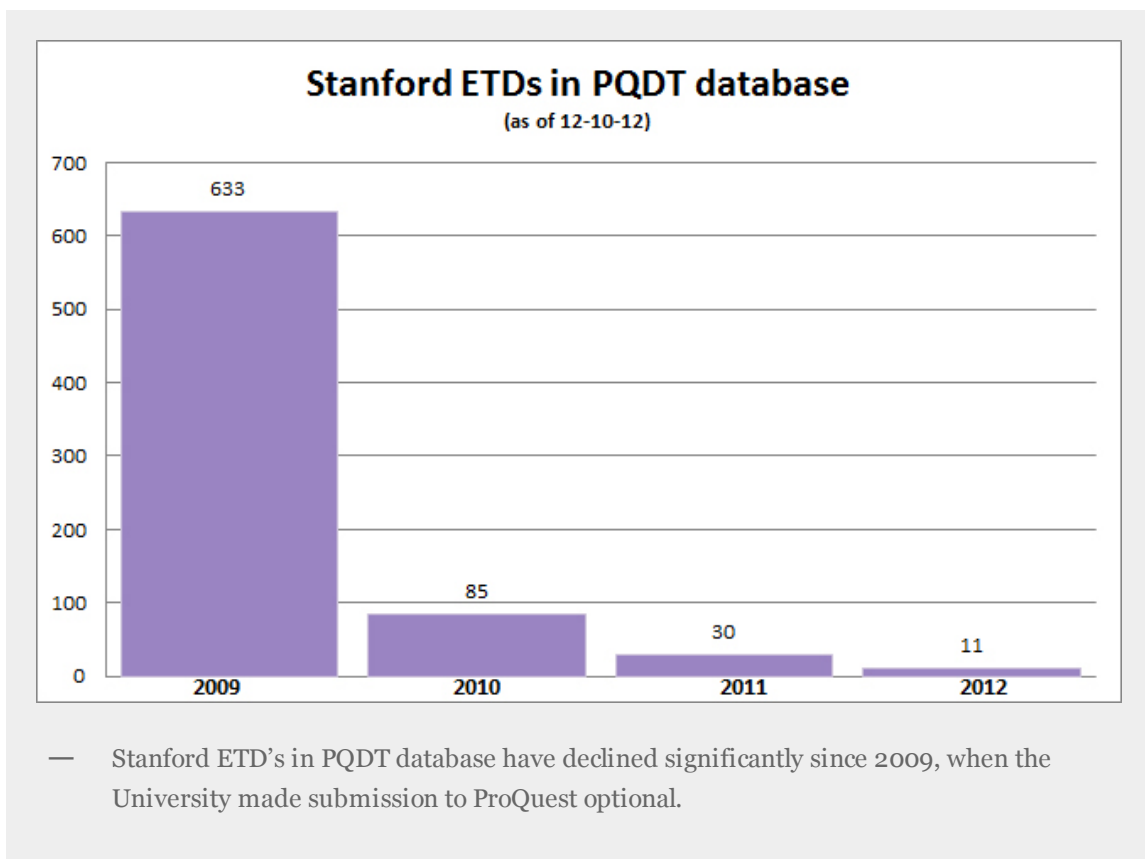# Free US ETDs (FUSE)

Promoting Open Access to American graduate research

An early glimpse at Stanford ETD publishing since going ProQuest optional

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— Stanford ETD's in PQDT database have declined significantly since 2009, when the University made submission to ProQuest optional.

Introduction

In Fall 2009, Stanford University attracted considerable attention when it announced that its graduate school would no longer require doctoral students to submit dissertations to ProQuest, a commercial re-distributor who sells graduate theses and dissertations to libraries, individual readers, and to other businesses such as TurnItIn.com. Stanford was not the first graduate school to eliminate the ProQuest submission requirement (Herther, 2010), but its decision to do so holds particular symbolic significance because the University was among the earliest adopters of the dissertation microfilm distribution scheme set up by ProQuest's progenitor, University Microfilms (UMI), back in the mid-20th Century.

Stanford made the decision to publish its electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs) via the Library-managed institutional repository and provide access through its SearchWorks catalog interface. Also, the University arranged with Google to provide Web searching of its theses and dissertations via the popular Google Book search engine.

Stanford's novel approach for publishing ETD's online is explained in the document *Directions for Preparing Theses for Electronic Submission, 2011-2012* :

Stanford University is committed to the preservation and dissemination of the scholarly contributions of its students. Stanford doctoral theses are collected and preserved by Stanford University Libraries and made available to researchers through the library catalog and third party distributors, such as Google. The Committee on Graduate Studies believes that this practice is of value to library patrons, to researchers, to the learned community at large, and also to the author whose work receives wide and accessible dissemination.

When asked about their approach to ETD discovery and delivery, and the concommitant choice to remove the requirement for ProQuest submission, Stanford's Assistant University Librarian & Chief of Staff, Mimi Calter, remarked "…our sense is that the wide availability and visibility of the dissertations through the Stanford catalog and Google will more than compensate for the lack of a listing in *Dissertation Abstracts*." (Stanford University Libraries, 2009).

Various commentators have noted that Stanford's preference for Google dissemination of graduate research makes sense in the Age of the Internet, ETDs and Open Access. John Wildermuth, writing for the San Franciso Chronicle (2009), observed: "To students raised in the Internet era, the idea of electronically submitting their work and then seeing it posted for all the world to see is a no-brainer."

So what happened after the policy changed?

Since implementation of its ProQuest-optional policy, the number of Stanford graduate works behind that commercial paywall has dropped precipitously. A search of the ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database on December 10, 2012 retrieved 633 Stanford records retrieved for 2009, 85 records for 2010, 30 records for 2011, and 11 records for 2012: a substantial decrease in just three years! Clearly this circumstance now compels researchers looking for Stanford theses and dissertations to search the University's own SearchWorks catalog and/or Google to find and retrieve the University's graduate research.

Is the Stanford ETD story an isolated case?

Apparently, no. In the last several years a number of American research universities have chosen to eliminate the commercial middleman from their ETD publishing process, or at least allow students to choose or decline this option individually . This growing cohort of institutions includes, in addition to Stanford University: University of Tennessee-Knoxville; University of Central Florida; Florida International University; University of Michigan; and University of Texas-Austin, to name a few. A detailed study of uptake rates for the latter school, which went ProQuest-optional in 2010, reveals that only about 10% of doctoral candidates chose to submit their dissertations to the commercial distributor (Potvin, 2011). The research investigation into uptake is being expanded at the present time.

Are the Stanford results good news or bad?

Stanford's example illustrates what can happen when Universities reclaim the management and distribution of their own institutional scholarship. By freeing ETD's, campus scholarship can find more users and uses, resulting in greater reach and impact for graduate students' work and greater knowledge dispersion around the world. But freeing graduate research from

the tight confines of a single commercial publisher also complicates the discovery of ETD's across the Internet. As described by Nancy Herther, writing in the popular journal *Searcher* (Herther, 2010), :

"Electronic access to dissertations — including data sets and other materials — is an incredible step forward for users. These materials help to pen new worlds of research, learning, and collaboration. ...Having the full text online allows for the highest possible level of granularity in discovery. But how do you find dissertations now? Today's landscape seems quite chaotic."

The trend towards institutional publishing of ETD's underscores the need for a national portal to American graduate research. Having one place to search all American open access ETD's would be a huge boon for graduate students, their institutions, and the community of teachers, learners, and interested citizens. Through the international Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations, a United States ETD portal would be readily connected to the network of other national ETD portals around the world. In this way, all universities could follow the Stanford model and reclaim their own scholarship in ways that suit their needs and fulfill their missions, ensuring worldwide dissemination and discovery of the knowledge created by our countries' newest scholars.

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