Free US ETDs (FUSE)

Promoting Open Access to American graduate research

More proposals for an OA Portal to US ETD's

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Following the initial proposal for an Open Access Portal for US ETD's on the ETD-L list (as described in the Subversive Proposal 2.0 posted earlier to this blog), OA ETD advocates across the country offered other alternate models for achieving the vision.

For example, librarian Thomas Dowling, a long-time OA ETD champion and past recipient of the NDLTD ETD Leadership Award, raised concerns about the efficacy and reliability of OCLC in harvesting ETD records to the NDLTD. His model instead relies on individual institutions, or consortia of universities, to make sure that their ETD's are harvestable by NDLTD via the OAI protocol, and that the metadata descriptions associated with each ETD are complete and accurate enough to serve the needs of discovery and retrieval.

Additionally, yours truly re-introduced a model that was proposed last year on the ETD-L list, but largely ignored or dismissed, possibly because it conjured up a historical precedent from the mid-1900's that has been long forgotten. In this model, the portal would be provided by a long-time publisher of American dissertations as a societally-beneficial service. It would greatly differ in scope and purpose from the company's existing profit-seeking, commercial venture selling full-text copies of graduate works to individuals and to other commercial corporations such as TurnItIn.

A summary and analysis of all three OA portal proposals, as laid out on ETD-L this Fall, are reprinted here. It is hoped that they will inform the discussion and advancing the cause of a single, freely available, point of discovery for American graduate research.

=============== x Summary of Proposals on the Table, to date x =========

(1) Subversive proposal 2.0

Submission method

Each university sends its own metadata to the worldwide OCLC union catalog, who passes it on to NDLTD as the primary interface

How comprehensive?

As long as libraries catalog their theses and dissertations and push those cataloging records to OCLC, this solution is quite comprehensive. It also ensures that the portal captures not only current ETD's, but current non-electronic TD's for schools that haven't gone 'E' only yet. Also it captures past works that may or may not be digitally available. And it captures ALL theses and dissertations output by our institutions, not just those that go to ProQuest.

Original proponent

G. Clement

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(2) Dowling's Harvesting-based proposal

Submission method

Each university posts its own TD's and metadata to its own repository, exposes the metadata to Web harvesting, and the harvester pulls the metadata from each university and ferries it to the NDLTD catalog.

How comprehensive?

This is a more "lossy" approach because not all universities have gone to electronic TD's yet, so the print ones would be missing from the repository. Legacy TD's would also be missing, if the institution has not digitized them. For institutions that rely on PQDT as their 'outsourced repository' of ETD's, their data would likely remain behind the PQ paywall unless PQ was willing to expose the metadata for harvesting.

Original proponent

T. Dowling

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(3) Return to Iowa City: go back to the original model of ARL and its agreement with UMI circa 1952

Submission method

Each university sends whatever it feels is best to ProQuest/UMI as a third party aggregator of dissertations working in cooperative fashion with universities, the former respecting the

latter as the actual owner, manager, and steward of their graduate student's research. Submission charge is based on extent of services provided by ProQuest. For a small fee ($2.00 back in the fifties, so maybe $10-$12 now), institutions with their own IR's could send metadata and a link to the copy of record in the IR, without sending full text. Institutions who want to send metadata and full text to ProQuest are welcome to do so, at a different (presumably higher) price point. ProQuest makes access to the citation database free and Open Access but can continue to monetize the full text as suits their business model.

A slight variation in this model would be that ProQuest could actually do the harvesting with their powerful Summon search service that is being adopted by many libraries now as a one-stop search portal. A dedicated instance of Summon as the American ETD portal, with Open access to metadata-only, could be a nice solution.

How comprehensive?

This method is also "lossy" because many institutions do not and have never sent master's theses to ProQuest. This practice reflects an ARL decision made back in the fifties. And some institutions never sent even their dissertations to ProQuest (NoQuest). Yet other research institutions who **used to** submit to Proquest but have dropped that requirement in favor of publishing in their own IR's (ProQuest Optional). But perhaps if the pricing and business model at ProQuest were more flexible, the NoQuest or ProQuest optional institutions might be willing to reconsider, for the sake of the greater good: a comprehensive portal to all US theses and dissertations.

Original proponent

G. Clement

IMPORTANT POSTSCRIPT on this model

Subsequent to this discussion on the ETD-L list, a posting on the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) List from an ETD professional at Georgia Tech indicated that ProQuest is now charging $65. each for TD submitted with just an abstract, in contradiction to the agreement they struck with ARL members oh so many years ago. So much for societally-benefical anything. *. Now that's nuts!*

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