

Free US ETDs (FUSE)

Promoting Open Access to American graduate research

The dissertations that get away (& where they end up, and why)

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A natural benefit of the Internet publishing revolution is its empowerment of individuals and organizations to reclaim control of their works of authorship from commercial publishers who no longer have a significant dissemination advantage. In the case of theses and dissertations, the Internet now provides a variety of appealing options for graduate students to distribute their research globally and openly online. Increasing numbers of open access American dissertations are available freely on the Web... in increasingly diverse places. While many OA ETD's go to the digital repositories of their sponsoring universities, a smaller portion go to ProQuest's Open database, and quite a few go to individual websites, disciplinary repositories and independent cloud-based services such as FigShare.

The freeing of US ETD's means that the work of our graduate students is more discoverable, more accessible and ultimately more impactful — the very reason that American graduate schools have long required the public distribution, in some fashion, of their graduate research. But it also means that increasing numbers of theses and dissertations are eluding the traditional methods used for finding and retrieving these works. This blogger's continuing appeal for a national OA portal of American ETD's recognizes that any successful solution must encompass **all** American graduate works, regardless of where they reside.

Research in the Scholarly Communication office at Texas A&M is now underway to study new patterns of OA ETD dissemination over the open Web in order to devise a method for ensuring **all** graduate works are discoverable and accessible through the national portal. A fundamental aspect of this research is exploring the choices graduate students are making as they seek to set their research free. A particularly interesting transaction with a **recent doctoral student** about his choice to publish his dissertation in FigShare provides some interesting insights useful to the development of our national portal. With his permission, an

excerpt from the email conversation with this young scientist is reprinted below.

As the debate around the scope, shape and service profile of a US OA ETD portal continues, all ideas and inputs are very welcome — particularly from the graduate students and the graduate schools who produce ETD's — an essential element in the national research corpus. Please feel free to post your comments here, send your comments to the ETD-L list, or write to this blogger directly!

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Howdy Carl,

I am writing to ask you about your choice to disseminate your doctoral dissertation via open access on FigShare. Having seen your work there (and not in ProQuest Digital Dissertations database) I was wondering if you had problems with UC Davis Graduate School in making this choice to avoid commercial publishing with a third party corporation in favor of setting your research free. Also, can you provide any data on how your work is being reused thanks to your choice to disseminate via OA?

Dear Gail,

Thank you for your message.

With some hesitation at the cost of \$95, I did pay the "Open Access Publishing PLUS" fee upon filing my dissertation, so it comes as something of a surprise to learn that my dissertation does not appear in the ProQuest database. I have emailed our administrator to follow up. Perhaps that in itself is enough reason to motivate my decisions to disseminate my work on FigShare. In addition to the high cost I had to pay to (attempt to) make my dissertation open access through the UC system, I found the UC submission system antiquated, clumsy in comparison to the FigShare system, and so opaque that I have not yet even attempted to find where it is actually displayed. Compare to FigShare, where I immediately see not only where the document is displayed, but can share a link to it through social media with one click and see how many times it has been viewed.

Using the Figshare API, I was then able to programmatic-ally upload my lab notebooks with two years of research entries as a kind of supplement, along with both the slides from my departmental exit seminar and link to a video of my exit talk at my annual Fellowship conference as well. This provides a more complete package than simply submitting the PDF.

On FigShare, I feel my dissertation is more discoverable. It is instantly assigned a DOI and has a permanent link backed by CLOCKSS archiving, an international network of 12 geopolitically distributed libraries that will provide the content should Figshare ever go out of business. FigShare is indexed by Google and Google Scholar, and is itself becoming a

starting point for academic searches; something that will only expand further through its rapidly developing API. Figshare has a strong commitment to open access indicated by its pricing model: public data and documents can be shared with no cost.

Figshare does a nice job of displaying my dissertation on it's own page with an interactive preview window, essential metadata, and comment box; and has shown interest in integration with hypothes.is when it is released, which could provide a better platform for comment exchange. Figshare is also clear about what copyright license covers the work, while I am not entirely clear what terms apply under the ProQuest model. As I'm sure you know, the CC-by license is an essential tool in Open Access publishing, which cannot reach it's potential under more restrictive licenses often but forward by publishers under the same phrase, as eloquently expressed in a recent Nature editorial by Dr. Neylon (and elsewhere).

I have often benefited from reading PhD dissertations, though I have never accessed them through ProQuest. Google search and the author's website are usually my first stop, which integrates nicely to the Figshare model. The link on my homepage vita is to the copy on Figshare.

As you know, assessing reuse is difficult, and to disambiguate use enabled by Open Access to other use is more difficult still. I posted my dissertation on Figshare without making any mention of having done so to anyone. Within the hour, one of my colleagues had tweeted it, along with the link, which then bounced around G+ and twitter a bit and soon I started getting messages from colleagues to say they had seen or downloaded it, including one of my former advisers from my undergraduate who hadn't realized I had graduated.



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