

Proposal for an Electronic Theses and Dissertations Pilot Project at the University of Pittsburgh

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Background and Purpose

Publishing the dissertation is the capstone experience of a doctoral degree program. In many master's degree programs, the submission of a thesis marks the successful completion of the degree.

A number of universities have now begun to accept electronic submission of theses and dissertations and to then post these documents on library Web servers. Institutions accepting digital dissertations and theses include Virginia Tech, Penn State University, West Virginia University, University of Georgia, University of Texas at Austin, University of Florida, and others.¹ This pilot proposal is based on lessons learned at other institutions for submission and publication of electronic theses and dissertations.

Even those dissertations submitted for publication in hard-copy format to Bell & Howell's University Microfilms Inc. (UMI) are now scanned by UMI and converted to an electronic format and made available online.²

Electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs) are a positive development in graduate education on several counts: graduate student research achieves broader exposure, new opportunities for creative scholarship open up, students receive some experience in the technological skills required of many scholars today, and the institution and student reduce the costs involved in publishing and storing dissertations and theses.

Concerns expressed in connection with ETDs include archiving and future publication issues. These concerns are addressed in the Archiving and Restrictions/Copyright sections of this proposal.

The ETD Working Group,³ an ad hoc committee of the University Council on Graduate Study, proposes a one-year voluntary pilot study to assess the procedural feasibility and scholarly advantages of accepting theses and dissertations in electronic rather than paper-based format at the University of Pittsburgh.

Participation

University of Pittsburgh schools with graduate programs will be invited to participate in the pilot project. Only those master's and doctoral students from participating schools will be able to submit electronic theses or dissertations (ETDs) during the 12 months (to include the graduation periods of December 2001 through December 2002) of the pilot project. Schools that wish to participate must agree to do so for the full year in which the pilot runs.

Students in those schools who wish to submit an electronic dissertation or thesis can do so with their advisor's consent. For planning purposes during the pilot, schools will be asked to identify students who intend to participate in the pilot in order to arrange for training and support needs of staff, students, and their faculty. Students' intent to participate should not be construed as commitment.

Support and Training

Support and technical training will be available to students, staff, and faculty. Brown-bag lunches may be held to review advantages and opportunities and to address issues of concern or interest to those who wish to participate. Workshops and training will be conducted within a school if so requested.

The anticipated technical training emphasis during the pilot will be on how to create documents as PDF (Portable Document Format) files; this training will be available to faculty, staff, and graduate students.

Training will be available for staff who will be accepting the electronic submissions for schools and for their supervisors. This support will include discussion of procedures involved in accepting ETDs rather than paper manuscripts as well as some technical training in how to identify problems in a PDF document.

Support and training will be coordinated through the [ETD Working Group](#) and offered through the services of [CSSD](#) (Computing Services and Systems Development) and the [University Library System](#) (ULS).

The approved pilot proposal will be posted online. A Web site will be established through the [Office of the Provost](#) to communicate answers to [frequently asked questions](#); this site will be linked from the main [graduate studies](#) page. The central ETD site will link to any unit-specific sites that are also established to answer specific questions regarding ETD submission.

Format

The pilot will focus on dissertations and theses to be prepared for submission as text-based Adobe PDF (Portable Document Format) files. The ETD may include external or internal links to non-text/multi-media files. The ETD document itself may include multimedia elements as long as those elements are in formats on the approved list of accessible file types.⁴

There is no limit to the file size of the ETD during the pilot.

Participating students will not be required to submit a hard-copy version of the thesis or the dissertation to the University in addition to the electronic thesis/dissertation; the accepted submission of the electronic manuscript will fulfill the University's requirement for submission of a dissertation (or, in selected programs, thesis). Furthermore, the University makes a commitment to convert any ETD submitted during participation in the pilot to the currently accepted hard-copy format (print, bind, or move to an audio/video format) if after the pilot project the University decides not to require ETDs.

While the University copy of the final thesis or dissertation does not need to be submitted in paper form if it is submitted electronically during the pilot, a graduate program may continue to require paper copies from pilot participants for review by thesis or dissertation committees and for the school or department libraries. If the school/department requires a paper copy, the school/department must accept a printout of the ETD and may not require a differently formatted paper version.

Restrictions and Copyright Issues

Writers who plan to submit a revised version of the thesis/dissertation (or a part of the thesis/dissertation) for publication should consult with likely publishers in advance about the availability of their work online. It is the responsibility of students to ascertain the degree to which online availability of the dissertation affects publishing policies pertinent to their field or to the journals to which they may submit their work. The [ETD Working Group's](#) research indicates that online

availability of ETDs is rarely a problem for publishers. Please refer to the [FAQ](#) section of this proposal for more information on copyright issues.

Because there may be concern in a few fields regarding publishers' perception of this as a prior publication, students participating in the pilot will be able to restrict the ETD archived on the [University Library System's](#) server to access by University of Pittsburgh IP addresses only, for a maximum period of three years. After three years, the ETD on the ULS server will automatically become fully accessible.

Submission of theses and dissertations that include copyrighted materials must include a letter from the copyright owner authorizing use of the materials. This policy remains firm for both paper and electronic theses and dissertations.

Copyright privileges reside with the author (the student writing the dissertation) immediately upon creation of the work. Students may include a copyright notice in their work; students may also register their copyright, if they so desire. Students can register copyright directly by applying to the U.S. Copyright Office or, for dissertations, asking UMI to register the copyright for a fee.

Students who have already published sections of their thesis or dissertation should determine whether they assigned copyrights to that publisher at that time or retained copyright. If the publication agreement assigned copyright to the publisher, then the student is responsible for obtaining a letter from the publisher granting permission to use that copyrighted work in the dissertation or thesis.

Archiving and Availability

Bell & Howell/UMI will continue its existing practice of archiving all dissertations in microfilm and electronic format. The microfilm copy will continue to be the official archival record of the dissertation. UMI has established regular format updates for all of its electronic archives.

In addition, the [University Library System](#) (ULS) will archive the University of Pittsburgh theses and dissertations submitted electronically during this pilot project. ULS is committed to regular updating of archived electronic documents to ensure they continue to be accessible to future technologies and uses an open architecture for file types and structures so that they can be more easily migrated to future file types. ETDs submitted during the pilot will be mounted on the ULS server and cataloged in the same manner as other established ULS collections.

Costs

The [ETD Working Group](#) does not anticipate significant additional costs (i.e., costs beyond what can be accommodated through the current budget) associated with the pilot project. The pilot evaluation will include determination of anticipated cost of universal participation; given the experience of other institutions, however, the ETD Working Group does not anticipate that additional costs would be significant.

Pilot Evaluation

The following areas (and others to be identified) will be evaluated by survey or data collection: faculty/student satisfaction; procedures; training and support; reasons for participating or not participating in pilot; costs; accessibility/visibility figures.

During the spring term of 2003 (03-2), the vice provost for graduate studies and the ETD Working Group will evaluate the results of the pilot; prepare a report, including recommendations for next steps; and submit the results, report, and recommendation to the University Council of Graduate Study for review.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

A set of frequently asked questions about electronic theses and dissertations and about this pilot project has been attached as an appendix to this proposal.

Conclusion

Electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs) are a positive development in graduate education, allowing broader exposure of graduate student research and opportunities for new forms of creative scholarship. Several universities now accept ETDs as part of graduate students' degree requirements. The ETD Working Group urges the approval of this voluntary pilot study, following the guidelines outlined in this proposal.

¹See www.ndltd.org for complete list of institutions participating in the Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations.

²The publishing agreement signed by graduating doctoral students gives UMI the "non-exclusive right to reproduce and distribute [the] dissertation in and from an electronic format."

³ Members of the ETD Working Group include Marguerite Brown (graduate student, Department of History/FAS), Joseph Grabowski (faculty member, Department of Chemistry/FAS), Steve Hughes (graduate student, Department of Telecommunications/Information Sciences), Steve Husted (associate dean of graduate studies and research, FAS), Cynthia Miller (director, University of Pittsburgh Press), Rush Miller (director, University Library System), Janie Ondo (training coordinator, Computing Services and Systems Development), Steve Phillips (associate dean of graduate studies, School of Medicine), Deane Root (faculty member, Department of Music/FAS). The working group is chaired by Elizabeth Baranger, vice provost for graduate studies, and staffed by Kit Ayars, assistant to the provost.

⁴ The pilot will permit file types already approved and supported by Bell & Howell's UMI division for electronic dissertations: image files as .gif, .jpeg, or .tif; video files as .mov, .mpg, or .avi; and audio files as .aif, .midi, .snd, .wav, or as CD-DA, CD-ROM/XA, or MPEG-2.