

**"Enhancing Graduate  
Education through Electronic  
Theses and Dissertations"**

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# **"Enhancing Graduate Education through Electronic Theses and Dissertations"**

- λ (ETDs) create much excitement both positive and negative among the students and faculty**
- λ These positive and negative views will be tempered through increased knowledge of the ETD process and through increased experience in creating and archiving ETDs**

# **Introduction: "Enhancing Graduate Education through Electronic Theses and Dissertations"**

**λ "When print emerged, universities failed to recognize its importance and almost managed to marginalize themselves into oblivion. With a new major transition upon us, such benign neglect simply will not do. Yet the challenges universities face in responding to an increasingly digitized and networked world are staggering. Universities need a vision allowing them to express their dearest values in new forms, rather than protect their present form at the expense of their most fundamental values."**

**λ Jean-Claude Guédon, Conseiller, Publications**

# **Introduction**

**If it is not digital,  
it does not exist**

# Changes in presentation:

- λ **ETD initiatives now under way around the world are about bringing fundamental change to the concept of what constitutes a thesis or a dissertation.**
- λ **In the U.S., this concept has not changed significantly since students first began to submit paper theses and dissertations over 120 years ago.**
- λ **Authors have powerful presentation and distribution tools that allow ETD authors to reveal to the results of their research endeavors in ways and with a level of access never before possible.**

# **Valuable Content:**

- λ The doctoral dissertation provides a one time opportunity for the student to study of an area of research or scholarship in depth and to write at length about the topic, free of the restrictions on length imposed by book and journal editors.**
- λ This tradition is correct and should be maintained in the digital thesis or dissertation**

# **Access and attitudes:**

- λ Attitudes of students and faculty toward the value of theses and dissertations vary greatly**
- λ Some students and faculty value them highly**
- λ Others, particularly some faculty, see them as requirements of graduate schools that have little value. For these persons the journal publication is considered to be the primary outcome of graduate student research**

# **Access and attitudes:**

- λ The value added of the peer review process for journal articles and for books is indisputable**
- λ Yet as long as the scholar or researcher using ETDs as information sources recognizes theses and dissertations for what they are, these documents are valuable sources of information**
- λ These information sources have been grossly underutilized because of the difficulty in obtaining widely available, free**

# **Publication and plagiarism:**

- λ Students and faculty expressed great concern that publishers would not accept derivative manuscripts or book manuscripts from ETDs**
- λ For some publishers this concern is legitimate and the ETD project has put into place a system to restrict access to ETDs until after journal articles appear. This system seems to satisfy faculty, students and publishers.**

# **Publication and plagiarism:**

- λ After concerns about publication, the risk of plagiarism is next on the list of concerns of students and faculty**
- λ More disconcerting is the belief of some researchers and scholars that by reading their students ETDs, other researchers and scholars will achieve a competitive edge in the contest for grants and contracts**

# **How Virginia Tech Implemented the ETD Requirement:**

- λ ETD discussions between the Grad School, Library, and Ed Fox began in 1991.**
- λ Adobe Acrobat® software for creating and editing Portable Document Format (PDF) files came on the market**
- λ Graduate School and the Library and in the fall of 1995 concluded that we would ask governance to make submission of ETDs Graduate School requirement**
- λ ETD proposal approved with stipulations for adoption in spring of 1997**

# Summary Comments

- λ **Implementation of new formats slower than expected**
  - still a text mentality among many faculty
  - incoming graduate students plan around ETDs
- λ **If you build it they will come**
  - access exceeded expectations
  - disappointing that 20% are inaccessible
- λ **No longer experimental**
  - surprising increase in the number and diversity of NDLTD institutions implementing ETDs
- λ **Remarkable increase in exposure to graduate**

# Conclusion:

- λ **The ETD project has provided the opportunity for fundamental change in the expression of and the access to the results and scholarship done by students in research universities around the world. These tools also can easily be extended to the expression of and access to research done by faculty. As scholars, we should not let this opportunity slip by. As Jean-Claude Guédon said "Benign neglect simply will not do"**