

Interlibrary Loan Dissertation Requests: Best Practices and the Need for OA

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INTRODUCTION

Borrowing requests for dissertations are a common occurrence in the world of interlibrary loan. Dissertations are attractive to student researchers because they often deal with narrowly-defined topics, and they turn up easily in the search results of many popular academic databases. However, since dissertations can exist in several formats, are usually only held by the institution for which they were created, and may or may not be freely available online, it can be difficult and time consuming to make certain all borrowing possibilities have been covered.

METHODS

Devising a set of best practices for finding dissertations came about at Gettysburg College through a process of trial and error. When a new potential source for dissertations was discovered, it was compared to the sources already being used to determine its place in the search process. The search process is designed to work from the broadest search tool down to the narrowest. There is some redundancy built into the process as some search tools cover the same sources.

GETTYSBURG'S PROCESS FOR FINDING DISSERTATIONS



Start with Google. This is usually not a popular solution with librarians, but if a dissertation is freely available online from a reputable source, there is a high chance it will turn up in a Google search.



Search OATD.org. An open access site that indexes dissertations from over 1,100 institutions with open access policies.

PQDT OPEN

Search PQDT Open. An open access dissertation repository from ProQuest



Search WorldCat. Most dissertations indexed in an academic database have a WorldCat entry. The WorldCat entry will include the school for which the dissertation was produced. Search that school's site. The other sources listed above don't always catch every dissertation that is freely available through an institution's web site.

ILL

Try requesting a physical copy. Many institutions won't loan a dissertation if they only have a physical copy, but enough are willing to loan a physical copy to make the request worthwhile.

OPEN ACCESS DISSERTATIONS

It is easier than ever for institutions to make the scholarship being produced through their graduate programs freely available, but some dissertations are still locked behind paywalls or limited to institutional access. Because they often house dissertations, deal with copyright issues, and understand student and faculty research needs, libraries are in a unique position to advocate for open access dissertation policies at their own institutions. Here are a few things to remember:

- Dissertation scholarship is built into the academic process. Making it freely available is not interfering with an institution's revenue.
- Open access can work in conjunction with embargo periods.
- Increasing the amount of open access scholarship available does not make library services less necessary.

REFERENCES

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