**Dissertations, Discovery, and Open Access Distribution**

During the September 2011 dissertation deposit period as a new Chief Librarian of the City University of New York Graduate Center Library, an public institution supporting about 4000 PhD and Master’s degree students, my email inbox was visited by humanities faculty burdened with anxiety about the university’s long-standing requirement that graduating PhDs upload a PDF copy of their dissertation to the ProQuest Electronic Thesis Depository (ETD).

I traced anxieties to warnings clanging around academic listservs. One set of messages was spawned by English professor and academic career advisor [Kathryn Hume’s August 2011 blog](http://theprofessorisin.com/2011/08/24/the-perils-of-publishing-your-dissertation-online/) where she baldly warns: **“You could ruin your chances of getting tenure if your thesis is freely available.” Hume’s blog summons** [Leonard Cassuto’s support](http://chronicle.com/article/From-Dissertation-to-Book/127677/%3A)**, quoting his advice proffered in the CHE not long before hers** “Don’t make your dissertation available online. Book editors seem unanimous on that point for obvious reasons. Many university libraries routinely add dissertations to their electronic holdings. If yours does, then opt out. If your thesis is already online, then have it taken down. Information may want to be free, as the earliest hacker generation first avowed, but if it’s free, then you can’t expect a publisher to pay for it, even in a later version.”

Hume and Cassuto, both expert in higher education student advising articulate sensibilities born of substantial experience with academic trajectories and review processes. They echo and amplify conservative sensibilities voiced by academic publishers fearful of the consequences of open access publishing. Graduate student authors face two formidable points of review en route to publication of their graduate work: scholarly publishers and academic reviewers. Both sets of reviewers display uncertainty about and resistance to open access publishing. Online and open access distribution, and increased discoverability of graduate work is now under intense negotiation, particularly in the United States where academic presses are dominated by commercial concerns.

I propose to present the concerns and argument I encountered as the manager of the university’s dissertation deposit and online distribution in the wake of the 2011 “academic spring” that increased awareness about open access distribution of scholarly work, and particularly, of graduate work. Academics project their most intensely held beliefs in the process of advising their students. This sincere and well-intentioned advice, however, may stand in the way of graduates’ success in a changing publishing landscape.

This presentation will outline institutional responses correlated with data reflecting student publication choices to illustrate the changes in approach to online publishing and discovery of graduate student work. With ample and amusing anecdotal evidence, I will trace CUNY’s dissertation deposit patterns 2011-2013 as they responded to local and global conversations about open access publishing and search engine discovery. I will examine differences and similarities in dissertation deposit patterns in the sciences, social sciences, and humanities disciplines that might support or undermine assumptions that some disciplines are more resistant to open access publishing than others.

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