CASE STUDY: DIGITAL ARCHIVING AND ACCESS PROGRAM (DAAP)

University of Ottawa, Canada

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The debate for preservation of scholarly works continues to be a hot topic as institutions around the world look for solutions to provide perpetual access to decades, if not centuries, of their institution's research output. While the current debate explores articles, datasets and other scholarly outputs, ProQuest® has provided institutions with a robust archive solution for preserving their dissertations and theses since 1938. At that time, microfilm was the new technology and today, ProQuest offers digital preservation for dissertations and theses too through its Digital Archiving and Access Program (DAAP).

The premise is straightforward. Each paper-based dissertation and thesis submitted by an institution is digitized and two copies are produced in microfilm and a further digital copy produced in PDF format. The institution receives a copy of both the microfilm and PDF files in order to provide access to their own works in perpetuity. The microform negatives are then stored separately in ProQuest's climate control vaults for preservation while the digital copy is stored as a TIFF and PDF in the online electronic vaults. The PDF copy is also included in ProQuest's Dissertations and Theses database for discovery by students and scholars around the world.

In 2005, University of Ottawa embarked on a DAAP initiative to digitize approximately 100 years worth of scholarship. Beginning with digitization of paper copies of theses that ProQuest already held in its archive, the project quickly grew to include theses that were filed in the institution's library. As Tony Horava, Associate University Librarian (Collections) and professor at the School of Information Studies at the University of Ottawa, explained, "There have been a number of phases to our project. Starting with the digitization of dissertations ProQuest already had access to meant we didn't need to worry about shipping and collating supplementary data, and in the first phase alone approximately 4,700 files from 1957-1996 in microform were digitized."

Once this phase was complete, the university moved forward with digitizing its entire output of dissertations and theses that were archived in the library. This was no easy task as the work involved going through each dissertation, verification in our catalogue, pulling together all the information required and then shipping the files to ProQuest. "It took a lot of co-ordination and staff effort," said Tony, "but by the end of the project close to 10,000 dissertations and theses were digitized spanning the period 1910-2010." In 2011, the institution switched to using ProQuest's electronic theses and dissertation (ETD) administrator tool so now all of its dissertations and theses are available electronically.

If the institution had decided to embark on such a project today, they would have been able to choose between a number of different options that support digitization of dissertations and theses. But in 2005, ProQuest offered the most reliable, cost effective solution—a fact that is arguably true today. "We chose to partner with ProQuest because they had the technology and in those days there were not that many alternative options out there," commented Tony. "But as well as the technology, another driving factor was that our institution subscribed to the ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database (PQDT), a resource which is used extensively by our students." Completion of the project meant that not only did University of Ottawa gain perpetual access to digital copies of its theses and dissertations, but inclusion of these files in the wider PQDT database meant discovery by students and researchers from around the globe, raising the profile of the university.

"Discoverability of our research and recognition for what we do is important to the institution, but it was also important for us to gain access to our own works in electronic format. Through this project, we've been able to achieve both these things."

Of course, embarking on a project of this size was not without challenges, and those encountered included issues around privacy—which were overcome in the later phase of the project by removing the title page that held the student's personal details and signature—as well as logistical challenges in accounting for theses that were being returned following the digitization process. "There were some issues, and some going back and forth to locate files, but we worked with ProQuest to resolve these." At the end of the project, the university asked ProQuest to provide them with a DVD of the digitized files so they could populate their repository. ProQuest obliged, and as a result nearly 10,000 dissertations and theses are accessible from the repository. "Being able to load the files on our institutional repository to showcase our students' scholarship in an openly accessible manner was very important to us," said Tony.

Overall, the project has been a positive experience for the university and without doubt, the key advantage was ProQuest's technological capacity and long-standing experience of large-scale digitization projects. "If we had undertaken this project ourselves, it would have been too prohibitive and too time-consuming," agreed Tony. Another advantage was inclusion of all digital dissertations and theses (except for those where students didn't give permission or where embargoes were in effect) published by the institution in ProQuest's database. "It has been very beneficial in that respect," commented Tony. "Our subscription to PQDT continues to be used heavily, and I'm pleased with the very high usage statistics. PQDT remains a key tool to help our students find out if their topic has been covered before or to find out what else has been done that's related in their area. It's also good for our professors to see what their students, or those from other universities, have done in their subject areas."

Going forward, Tony feels that more could be done to integrate metadata of dissertations and theses with the main discovery services including Primo, OCLC, and the Summon® Service to facilitate greater discoverability. "University of Ottawa uses the Primo index from Ex Libris and most schools use one of the main discovery services on their home page. This is typically where the students type in their search terms, so if metadata from dissertations is not indexed in these tools, then discoverability is seriously affected." ProQuest has signed an agreement with ExLibris which will expose dissertation metadata to enhance discovery; and plans are underway to enhance visibility of dissertations content.

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