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The Exchange of Academic Dissertations

The use of academic dissertations for exchange by American libraries has greatly diminished since University Microfilms expanded its program for the publication of American dissertations in the early 1950s. Practices in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union indicate that European dissertation distribution has been erratic. As a result, access to American dissertations abroad and to foreign dissertations in the United States poses many problems. A program appears to be needed which would enable libraries once again to use dissertations for exchange and thus insure access to them.

THE EXCHANGE OF dissertations within the United States has been hampered in recent years by the rigid control of a private enterprise, whereas the exchange of theses in Europe and across the Atlantic has been stultified by lack of any significant organization.

The problems confronting libraries concerning doctoral theses include bibliographic access, physical access, and acquisition cost. The following pages will discuss the latter two problems in regard to theses written throughout the world.

In the United States all universities with the exception of Harvard, Chicago, and M.I.T. participate in the dissertation program of University Microfilms, Inc.¹ Founded in 1938, this is a private enterprise, located in Ann Arbor, Michigan, which has recently been acquired by the Xerox Corporation. The first issue of its first publication, *Microfilm Abstracts*,² listed seventeen dissertations

from five universities. Beginning in 1912, and until 1938, the Library of Congress had published a *List of American Doctoral Dissertations*³ which listed theses. From 1938 to 1953 theses were not usually published in the United States since this was no longer a university requirement, and University Microfilms was insufficiently subscribed to to be an effective center for exchange. Most of the reasons offered for the suspension of the publication requirement were financial.⁴

In 1951 the Association for Research Libraries appointed a committee to study the availability of dissertations. The group faced several problems. Many universities which had formerly published abstracts of their dissertations had ceased doing so, and they had become nearly nonexistent. Interlibrary loan of typed theses was expensive, since they had to be mailed "First Class." No central bibliographic guide was available. Two years later, the committee recommended that, since University Microfilms already had the knowledge and equipment to handle the dissertations, they should become

¹ Jack Plotkin, "Dissertations and Interlibrary Loan," *Reference Quarterly*, IV (January 1965), 8.

² *Microfilm Abstracts, A Collection of Abstracts of Doctoral Dissertations Which Are Available in Complete Form on Microfilm* (Vols. 1-11; [Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1938-1951]).

³ *List of American Doctoral Dissertations Printed in 1912-38* (Vols. 1-26 [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913-1940]).

⁴ "Doctoral Dissertation Program Explained," *UM Microcosm*, VII (Winter 1961-1962), 6.

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accepted as the central source for them and should expand to include all American universities as members.⁵ *Microfilm Abstracts* changed its title with Volume XI and became *Dissertation Abstracts*.⁶

The University Microfilms scheme for the publication of doctoral dissertations is as follows: When a candidate submits his dissertation for acceptance, he pays a fee (now \$20) to his university. This is accompanied by a six-hundred-word abstract. The university forwards these with the typescript dissertation to University Microfilms, which then returns the typed copy after microfilming it. The thesis may then be copyrighted at the author's request, but University Microfilms has the sole right to publish this thesis either by microform or xerography.⁷

When University Microfilms became the central agency in 1953, librarians were optimistic. Vernon D. Tate aroused great interest with his article "Defrosting a Frozen Asset: The Publication of Doctoral Dissertations."⁸ He applauded the University Microfilms system and implied that all problems would soon be solved. A wave of similar articles soon followed.

The wave quickly receded. Since the early 1950s little has been written concerning the problems with University Microfilms, and the field of dissertation exchange has suffered a period of academic dormancy. Bibliographic access has improved along with physical access in the United States, but access abroad remains a problem.

Distribution of dissertations in Europe is lamentable. Each country, of course, is a special case. France required pub-

⁵ Plotkin, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁶ *Dissertation Abstracts* (Vol. 1 to date [Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1938 to date]. Vols. 1-11, 1938-1951, issued with the title *Microfilm Abstracts*).

⁷ "Doctoral Dissertation Program Explained," *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁸ Vernon D. Tate, "Defrosting a Frozen Asset: The Publication of Doctoral Dissertations," *College & Research Libraries*, XIV (January 1953), 35-38, 45.

lication of all dissertations before World War II. One copy was given to the University of Paris, one to the Bibliothèque Nationale, one to each French university library, and many were saved for foreign exchange.⁹ Since 1948, however, universal publication was found to be too expensive. The government now prints only the most outstanding theses. Fortunately for American libraries, the university at which the thesis is presented usually processes a few copies, available on request. In 1951 French thesis exchange to all but a few American libraries was curtailed "because of the marked imbalance between French theses issued and foreign theses received."¹⁰ France was gaining few American theses in return for her own, because of the inability of American universities to copy their own dissertations under the University Microfilms agreement. Since 1952 only the Center for Research Libraries, Johns Hopkins University, Harvard, Yale, and Columbia have been receiving French dissertations.¹¹ University Microfilms itself remains uninvolved with foreign dissertations. American scholars, then, have limited access to these. Interlibrary loan and copying on a limited scale are possible, but are convenient only in the northeastern United States. On the other hand, there may be no copy of a requested American thesis anywhere in France, and the French librarian is forced to acquire it on microfilm from Michigan and wait from three to six weeks for it.

The history of dissertation distribution in Germany is similar. The requirement to print dissertations was suspended in 1941. In 1951 it was decided that each candidate would be required to distribute five typed, reproduced, or printed copies among certain German libraries: one to the Deutsche Bibliothek at Frank-

⁹ David Bishop, "Science Thesis Control in Europe and America," *American Documentation*, X (January 1959), 52.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

furt-am-Main as the West German center; one to the Deutsche Bücherei at Leipzig as the center for all German dissertations; one to the University Library at Berlin (East), as the historical collecting point for dissertations; and two to the candidate's university library, one for deposit and one for interlibrary loan.¹²

Unlike France, Germany reproduces dissertations in considerable quantity. Usually 150 or more copies are given the university library by the candidate. They are distributed to each German university library and to many libraries abroad, regardless of whether or not theses are received in return.¹³ Access therefore to the German theses in American libraries is easier than to the French. Access to American dissertations is no better in Germany, however, than in France.

Britain is in a worse position to exchange theses with the United States than either France or Germany. Only one copy of each British thesis is made and deposited at the author's own university.¹⁴ Copies can be acquired on request, but no dissemination program has been organized. The Committee of the University and Research Section of the Library Association has studied

the ways and means of publishing detailed information about the contents of theses accepted in British universities and increasing their availability.¹⁵

A scheme by which availability would be increased has not yet been developed. Much study was given to the University Microfilms arrangement in the United States, but the problems involved could not be solved. The main objection was the copyright question.

¹² Walter Bauhuis, "German Dissertations: The Present Situation," *College & Research Libraries*, XVIII (May 1957), 205.

¹³ R. Stromeyer, "Treatment of Dissertations in German Universities and Libraries," *UNESCO Bulletin for Libraries*, XIV (July 1960), 166.

¹⁴ Bishop, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

¹⁵ "Availability of Theses," *Library Association Record*, LX (January 1958), 13.

The author, it was felt, should have copyright privileges, but under the University Microfilms plan a commercial firm has it. In addition, it was feared that sometimes classified information might be contained in a thesis and should not be released publicly. Some universities also felt it unfair to publish information which would be subject to pirating.¹⁶ As a result of these objections, the two major English-speaking countries of the world have no large-scale dissertation exchange program.

Practices of dissertation dissemination in the Soviet Union take yet another form. Although higher education was reorganized in 1934 in Russia, it was not until 1955 that a regular current registration of dissertations was begun and 1957 that publication became required.¹⁷ As in the Scandinavian countries, there is a trend toward thesis publication in journals. This is an excellent way to bring attention to a dissertation, since journals are more widely read than separately published theses. The drawback is that publication in journals is usually only in partial form. The complete dissertation in typed form may only be available in two places, the national library and the institution where the thesis was presented.¹⁸ There is no indication in the literature that any exchanges are carried on. Access to Soviet dissertations in the United States, then, is primarily through journals, and American dissertations are apparently difficult to obtain in the Soviet Union.

The use of academic dissertations for exchange by American libraries has greatly diminished since University Microfilms extended its program in 1953. Occasionally, a scholar will have his thesis privately printed and distributed, but copies produced in this way are now the only source for dissertation exchange except for those few universities which

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13-14.

¹⁷ Eleanor Buist, "Soviet Dissertation Lists Since 1934," *Library Quarterly*, XXXIII (April 1963), 192.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 194-95.

have refused to participate in the University Microfilms program.

University Microfilms has developed several activities which have improved the access and availability of American dissertations. *Dissertation Abstracts* has been so successful that it was forced to print its abstracts of theses from over 190 institutions monthly in two different sections: *Section A, the Humanities*; and *Section B, The Sciences*.¹⁹ The *Index to American Doctoral Dissertations*²⁰ was begun in 1957 and includes not only all theses available on microfilm, but most others written in the United States as well. *Masters Abstracts*,²¹ begun in 1962, publishes short abstracts of selected theses available from University Microfilms.

A large step towards increased service following the acquisition of University Microfilms by Xerox in July 1967 when DATRIX (Direct Access to Reference Information: A Xerox Service) was begun. University Microfilms now performs on demand a computerized search of all of its doctoral dissertations. A researcher formulates his own inquiry using one of three keyword lists in Chemistry and the Life Sciences, Engineering and the Physical Sciences, or Humanities and the Social Sciences. He fills out an order form, sends it to University Microfilms, and within a few days receives a bibliography of dissertations relevant to his research. This is done at the rate of \$5 for the first ten references and ten cents for each additional reference.²² The requester may then order from University Microfilms the references he would like to pur-

chase. At present, he can buy positive 35mm microcopies of theses at one and one quarter cents per page or a minimum of \$3 per thesis. He may also obtain Xerox copies for four and one half cents or six and one half cents per page, depending on size, at a \$3 minimum. Prices are listed in the University Microfilms abstracting services.²³

In September 1956 the International Association of Technical University Libraries (IATUL) section of the International Federation of Library Associations discussed thesis exchange between the United States and Europe and recommended: (1) that each member European library continue sending its theses to selected American libraries; (2) that each European library receive in exchange a complete set of American dissertations on microfilm; (3) that the United States send one copy of *Dissertation Abstracts* to each member European library; and (4) that arrangements for these exchanges be made through national library associations.²⁴ The recommendations were apparently disregarded, as no mention of their implementation is recorded in later literature.

Cooperative efforts are being made in the United States to handle European dissertations. The Center for Research Libraries receives a large number of theses and makes them available through interlibrary loan or copying. Other smaller cooperative organizations, such as the Medical Library Center of New York, are attempting similar practices. Perhaps an international plan for the handling of dissertations could follow along the same lines: (1) each European library could continue sending theses to selected American libraries designated as "dissertation centers"; (2) a few selected "dissertation center" li-

¹⁹ *Dissertation Abstracts* (May 1968), iii.

²⁰ *Index to American Doctoral Dissertations* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1957 to date). Issued as *Dissertation Abstracts*, vol. 16, no. 13 and continued.

²¹ *Masters Abstracts: Abstracts of Selected Masters Theses on Microfilm* (vol. 1 to date; Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1962 to date).

²² "126,000 Dissertations Searched by Computer-Based System," *UM Microcosm*, XII (June 1967), 1, 6.

²³ *Dissertation Abstracts* (May 1968), iii.

²⁴ Bishop, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

braries in European countries would receive complete sets of American dissertations from University Microfilms, financed by the American dissertation centers; (3) University Microfilms might have a lower rate for reproduction in the European centers for other European libraries; and (4) a copy of *Dissertation Abstracts* would be sent with each set of dissertations.

As American dissertations are seldom used for exchange since University Mi-

crofilms expanded its program on the recommendation of the ARL in the early 1950s, access to these theses abroad had greatly diminished. Something should be done to increase their availability. Little is likely to be done, however, until American librarians recognize the situation and develop a plan of their own for assuring greater accessibility to their universities' dissertations elsewhere in the world.

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