Saving Time in the Long Run: A New Workflow for Thesis Submissions
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INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

In January 2014, representatives from the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences and the University Libraries at Washington University met for our quarterly meeting to discuss issues, concerns, and updates with ETDs. These are processed and approved through the Graduate School and then uploaded to our repository, Open Scholarship, which is maintained by the Libraries.

During this meeting we agreed to move the master's thesis submission process directly to Open Scholarship – dissertations are submitted through Proquest, while master's students had been using a local InfoPath form on the libraries' Sharepoint site. Students completed the form and uploaded their thesis; Graduate School reviewers could access the submission and email approvals or requests for changes. After theses were approved, I could download the form as an XML file and the PDF of the thesis and do a bath upload through Digital Commons.

However, there were a number of issues with this process – for me, downloading the files and then doing a batch upload was time consuming; students had difficulty submitting revisions through the form. The larger issue, however, was that the form was not secure; for instance, students could see the list of other submissions. This flaw reached a critical point in the fall of 2013 when a student approved his own thesis. This is what led ultimately to the decision in January.

Making the decision to move the process to Open Scholarship was easy, even within a committee. When we met in January, I presented some workflow options based on bepress's webinar, ETD Workflows: A Bird's Eye View. We agreed on the UConn model: *The graduate school uses the IR's letter templates to communicate with students about requests for revisions, acceptances, etc. These are all stored for reference within the repository. Students submit revisions through the repository; all versions are also stored for reference.*

Then we went our separate ways with responsibility for implementing this change lying with the repository staff, i.e., Me. I naively thought I'd just need to send the fields and metadata from the InfoPath form, with a few modifications, to bepress support, request a new series, and call it a day. All in time for May graduation.

Instead, it took about 6 months – not constant work, but as my primary project.

Implementation included developing a new submission form, re-evaluating the structure of the existing ETD series, creating new ETD series within the repository, developing new submission instructions for students, creating instructions for administrators, coordinating training for reviewers with bepress, and customizing email templates. This involved much communication with bepress support, as well as frequent emails among the repository staff and Graduate School representatives. In short, it involved fitting a familiar, but not necessarily efficient process, into a new, unknown one with the promise of an easier system by August. This system needed to address the needs of the Graduate School, be straightforward for students, and adhere to repository standards.

What I'll discuss now is the workflow I developed based on how I did and didn't implement our new process. This is not the order in which I did things, but, in retrospect, it is the order in which I think things should be done. This will serve, I hope, as a model for others when they make similar changes.

7 Stages: Information Gathering, Evaluation, Behind-the-Scenes, Documentation, Testing, Launch, and Troubleshooting.

1. INFORMATION GATHERING

Talk to stakeholders (Graduate School, digital staff) and gather information including: current workflow, desired changes to workflow, information about current submission form, permissions, desired changes to submission. What needs to be the same and what can change?
Examples, Googlegroups, etc.
What is the goal? What are you trying to accomplish?
How does this fit with other initiatives? (DOI, cross-collection filters, etc)
Who will be involved?
Talk to bepress – was using email a lot, but eventually had a call with my support person and Dave Seitz (who did ETD webinar), which I wish I had done earlier in the process.

2. EVALUATION

Look at submission form - What was working and what needs to be changed?
Look at series structure – continue with bucket ETD or establish College-specific series
Look at repository structure – does anything else need to be changed? How do series connect to communities?

3. IMPLEMENTATION

What I learned: Arts & Sciences and Engineering needed separate series and submission processes, even though there was some overlap. The same assistant dean was ultimately in charge but the reviewers didn't need to see the theses from the other schools, and their rules were just different enough that the assistant dean wanted the school submissions to be separate.

Both of these would be completely separate from the MFA theses, which are through a different school and have an entirely different process. In some ways, these were easier to set up because we were building from the ground up. I won't go into the details, but the same stages apply here.

We would be adding DOIs to publications within Open Scholarship by the fall of 2014, so we would want to include a DOI field for these new series.

We wanted to require Discipline to make use of the Digital Commons Network (this was not a field on the old form at all).

Working on setting up automatic filters to display faculty and student materials together by department/school. We wanted to make the school and department/program fields more consistent to be able to use the filters more easily.

4. BEHIND-THE-SCENES

Administrator privileges: model to follow? Who needs access? What access do they need?
Submission agreement: customize agreement for each series
Email templates: what messages were sent before, set them up as default messages in bepress
Training: coordinate training between administrators and bepress

Administrator privileges: Even though only a few people need access, we decided to follow a journal's "Chief Editor" model –
Administrator, Reviewer, Backups, and Read-only (registrar)
Bepress email: "it sounds like you're going to need a couple of admins over separate structures for the Arts & Sciences and Engineering schools. Each of these admins will be the chief editor/admin of their respective structures, and regular admins of the other structures, in order that they might support one another while not getting flooded with the other structure's email traffic. This will also make it easier to just add on the assistant dean as an admin who can login, poke around as needed and get reports, and not have to deal with a lot of email. Your list of reviewers can be entered into the system under each structure and retained there for ease of assignment, and the reviewers will track all of their reviews through the interface made available through their My Account pages."

Submission Agreement: our Copyright/Digital Access librarian updated this for the schools' series.

Email template: Had the grad school admins focus on the language for
Arts & Sciences: sent me copies of emails they sent and we fit those into the template. Messsages for "Formatting corrections required," "You're missing paperwork," and "You're approved!" For Corrections or Paperwork, we have the language for both in one template, and reviewer deletes the part that's not needed.

Engineering: didn't request revisions because they already received the final version, so we just set up a "You're approved message."

5. DOCUMENTATION

Instructions for students - based instructions on materials provided by U Tennessee Knoxville
Instructions for administrators - based instructions on materials provided by U Tennessee Chattanooga
Document changes -

Workflow procedures

Would like to integrate instructions more into repository site and/or possibly set it up as a libguide

6. TESTING

Try out submission form
Review instructions
Shared forms and instructions with digital library staff, graduate school, and others involved in initial meetings for feedback. In the meantime, we had our next regular meeting in July and discussed progress – this is where questions about the submission agreement came up, so we went back and updated those.

7. LAUNCH

Update webpages, links, etc
Watch and wait

- I updated our pages and sent text and URLs to bepress to have that content updated
- Deleted the old form
- Told Grad School people to update their links

8. TROUBLESHOOT

Updates?
Next regular meeting is in September

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS /LESSONS
Plan to roll it out during a less busy graduation period, e.g. August instead of May
Don't try to fit the old process into the new one – need to reevaluate
Revise, revise, revise
Stay in contact
Work on demo site

QUESTIONS