

DOCTORAL THESES ARE NOW SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TROMSØ

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Success with master theses

In the fall of 2007, an electronic submission portal for master theses was introduced at the University of Tromsø (UiT). As from January 2008 and onwards, all master theses have been submitted for evaluation through this portal. The rationale for this was partly to introduce a unified and efficient tool for administrating the submitted theses, and partly to get rid of the extra effort needed for the students to submit their theses to UiT's open archive, Munin.

The submission portal has been a great success. The students love the 24/7 submission service, and the possibility to submit from home or elsewhere. From the perspective of Munin, the success was tremendous. Prior to the advent of the submission portal, it was a tiresome job to try to encourage the students to do the extra effort of submitting their theses to Munin. And the result was slim – approximately 15% of the theses produced were made available in Munin. This percentage rose to approximately 70 as a result of the submission portal. (The students are free to decide not to have their thesis publicly available in Munin, and approximately 30% chose not to, for various reasons. Some of these theses may be made available at a later point of time.)

Munin is based on DSpace, and the submission portal is also based on DSpace. The DSpace submission form is adjusted to fit the needs of information for all involved parties. As the theses are approved, and all the administrative tasks are taken care of, the administrative staff clicks the Done-button. This results in an export of theses from the submission portal's DSpace to the Munin DSpace, limited to the theses for which the submitting student has chosen to accept inclusion of his/her thesis in Munin. Next to a bibliographic control, the theses are made public in Munin.

Doctoral theses

When introducing the Munin open archive, we believed the doctoral candidates would jump on the ability to get their theses made publicly available. Doctoral theses are, after all, thoroughly quality controlled research, and to a large extent, these theses have very limited channels of dissemination. So we

were somewhat surprised when we realized that many doctoral candidates were reluctant to have their thesis included in Munin.

In Norway, there are mainly two formats used for doctoral theses. It may be a stand alone monograph, or, most common and increasingly it may be a collection of articles, accompanied by an essay synthesizing the research elaborated in the articles. Some of the monograph type theses may end up as published books through a scientific publisher, while close to all the articles in the theses are either published or planned to be published in scientific journals. We (the Munin staff) realized that our ability to include published and planned to be published material in Munin, would be subject to the publishers' policies. It came as a bigger surprise that many doctoral candidates did not even want to include the synthesis part of their theses in Munin, for the reason that it might expose some results, closer outlined in the (published or unpublished) articles. In fact, many doctoral students never responded to our e-mails, where we invited them to have their thesis (or part of it) included in Munin. We believe the main reason for this was the fear of violating publishers' rules. To some extent we experienced such no-response also from candidates with monograph type theses.

Electronic submissions of doctoral theses

Encouraged by the submission portal's success for the master theses, the library launched a project to introduce a similar service for the submission of doctoral theses. As for master theses, this portal was designed to be beneficial for the students, the administrative staff at the faculties, as well as for the dissemination of the documents through Munin. In the spring of 2010, two faculties were invited to join a pilot project, namely the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education and the Faculty of Science and Technology, and they both agreed to join. Through this pilot, we were able to gain experience and reveal weaknesses to be improved, before launching the portal as the single tool for submitting doctoral theses at UiT.

Again DSpace was used as the tool for the submission portal. In fact, it is the same DSpace instance as the submission portal for master theses. This DSpace thus has two different submission forms, adjusted to the

needs of handling master theses and doctoral theses respectively.

The pilot project was encouragingly evaluated early 2011, and thus the submission portal was launched as a tool also for the remaining faculties of UiT from the spring of 2011.

As per early June 2011, 55 doctoral theses have been submitted through the portal. Very few of the submitting students have expressed problems or dissatisfaction with the submission tool. Also, the administrative staff of the faculties is satisfied. The submission portal enables them to streamline their routines in the handling of the submitted theses.

So what are the effects of the submission portal, on the dissemination of the theses through Munin? Here too, the effect is positive. Through the submission portal, we get access to each and every thesis submitted and approved by the evaluating committee. As soon as the thesis is accepted and may be presented, and the administration at the faculty has finished their tasks, it is exported to Munin. In the submission form, the student are asked to enter all the information the Munin staff needs, in order to decide what may be included in Munin or not, and when. Therefore, the effort we previously had to spend in contacting and communicating with the candidates is now saved. The students submitting their theses must state how they view the option of including their thesis in Munin. It is no longer as easy as before to just ignore this question. If everything goes smoothly, and the information given by the student is sufficient, we may have the thesis publicly available in Munin two or three weeks prior to the presentation and defence of the thesis.

Out of the 55 theses submitted so far, 30 has been approved and finalised by the faculty administration. The remaining 25 are still in the pipeline. Out of the 30 finalised, 24 has been made public in Munin,

which means 80%. And the remaining 6 are all in the category of being made available later, rather than never. 80% “success rate” is very good, compared to approximately 50% in the pre submission portal period. And the 80% is achieved with much less effort than the previous 50%.

Still there are obstacles in the road. The students are still as anxious as before to disseminate anything that may infringe on publishing agreements or jeopardize publishing plans for what is unpublished. We at Munin are of course eager not to impose any such problems for the doctoral candidates and their article co-authors. So we still need to communicate with the candidates on these issues.

With the submission portal, several routines around the doctoral theses may be improved. For instance, it is common to write a press release for each candidate presenting his/her thesis. With the submission portal, all the information needed to produce such press releases is easily found. Furthermore, electronic submission enables easy electronic communication with the evaluating committee. Big files may cause problems for e-mail sending, so developing a service for log in access for authorized persons may be of value.

Disseminating doctoral theses in Munin is still not effort- and obstacle less, even with the submission portal. But the conclusion, so far, is easily drawn: With the submission portal the University of Tromsø has become much more efficient in disseminating its doctoral theses (as well as master theses). The University now disseminates a much higher percentage of the theses, and does so more rapidly and with less effort compared to the pre portal period.



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