Intriguing New Model for Improved Visibility and Access to Theses and Dissertations

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Intriguing New Model for Improved Visibility and Access to Theses and Dissertations

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Abstract

The George A. Smathers Libraries at the University of Florida (UF) are participating in an innovative program to explore whether making electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs) available in print through online retail sites can have positive impacts for graduates, the university, and the general public. Digitization and metadata enhancement have improved discoverability and ease of access for ETDs in the Institutional Repository at the University of Florida (IR@UF). However, through this new program, research can be shared widely beyond academe with practitioners, corporate researchers, independent scholars, and international readers.

This paper will describe how the Smathers Libraries have worked with a corporate partner, BiblioLabs, to leverage online retailers' discovery engines to promote print versions of ETDs while alerting readers to the free digital versions available in the IR@UF. This paper will also share how alumni, current graduate students, and other campus stakeholders have responded to the pilot of this new service. The libraries are monitoring referred traffic to the IR and sales data. UF is the first university to contribute content to this effort, but we expect others to follow suit if the data supports the expectations of the university, the Smathers Libraries, and our graduates.

Introduction

The University of Florida (UF) is a large comprehensive research university. UF's mission is to enable students to lead and influence the next generation and beyond for economic, cultural, and societal benefit (University of Florida, n.d.). The 2020 *U.S. News & World Report* ranking placed UF seventh among public universities in the United States ("2020 Top Public Schools: National Universities," 2019).

With an enrollment of over 53,000 students, UF is home to 16 colleges and more than 150 research centers and institutes. Over 30% of UF students are in graduate and professional degree programs, with 772 PhD, 1,211 professional, and 4,353 master's degrees awarded in 2017–2018 ("Institutional Planning and Research at the University of Florida," 2019).

The George A. Smathers Libraries at the University of Florida are committed to supporting student research and scholarship through a range of services. One example is preserving and providing access to theses and dissertations submitted by UF graduate students in our institutional repository, the IR@UF. UF theses and dissertations represent a unique and important body of intellectual property that both the authors and the university wish to make broadly available. The Smathers Libraries play a major role in this process. UF has required electronic theses and

dissertations (ETDs) since the incoming class of 2001. As of December 2019, the Smathers Libraries' ETD Collection includes 27,117 items: 14,617 of these are ETDs that were submitted electronically, and 12,500 of these are ETDs digitized through the Smathers Libraries' Retrospective Digitization Project begun in 2006. Initially an opt-in program, it became an opt-out program in 2012. To maximize the visibility and usability of these works, the Smathers Libraries contracted with Access Innovations (<https://www.accessinn.com/>) to create enhanced metadata for retrospectively digitized theses and dissertations using an automated process and a controlled vocabulary derived from the JSTOR thesaurus.

The Intriguing Initiative with BiblioLabs

The Smathers Libraries are always looking for new services, resources, and programs to offer students, faculty, and staff. In the fall of 2017, the Smathers Libraries were approached by BiblioLabs to test the concept of using digital theses and dissertations to create print-on-demand files that could be made available for sale by Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and other online retailers. There would be no cost to the author. The sales price would be fixed, regardless of the number of pages or the presence of color and other illustrations. The author would receive a 20% royalty on revenue after expenses (UF waived its right to an institutional fee to increase authors'

Figure 1. Sample copies of BiblioLabs books.

royalty rate from 10% to 20%). Participation would be entirely at the discretion of the author.

The Smathers Libraries shared this concept with the UF Graduate School and Graduate Student Council, and focus groups were held to obtain feedback from graduate students. The concept was well received. In September 2018, the Smathers Libraries signed an agreement with BiblioLabs.

The Process

Behind the scenes, the program has a clear division of work. Staff at the Smathers Libraries provide the digital files and the metadata to BiblioLabs, initiate contact with authors, and promote the service. BiblioLabs formats the files for print-on-demand, obtains an ISBN, and places the publications with

online retailers, with an option for hardback or paperback. BiblioLabs also provides monthly reports outlining opt-in and opt-out information, sales by month, detailed sales data for the month of the report, total sales by title, sales by subject area, and sell-through rate. All sales statistics come from Ingram (BiblioLabs' print-on-demand distributor).

Participation is entirely at the author's discretion, and as noted above, there is no cost to the author. When opting in, authors check a box to agree to the terms and conditions of the program. The agreement is between the author and BiblioLabs. In the agreement, the author grants BiblioLabs the nonexclusive right to sell and distribute their work commercially. There is no transfer of copyright. The agreement has an initial period of 10 years from the date of execution and automatically renews for successive 10-year

UF UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

I would like to make my thesis or dissertation available for sale in print.

MORE INFO

First name: **Carolyn** Middle name: Last name: **Morris**

Thesis/Dissertation Title: **Toward a scientific criticism of literature**

Subtitle (optional):

Dissertation year: **1951**

ORCID (optional): **0000-0001-8155-1004** **LOOK UP** **CREATE**

Description: **criticism, criticism, interpretation, etc, literature and science, biological evolution, consciousness, genetics, humans, literary criticism, literature, paradigms, riddles, social evolution**

Category: **190-1004** **ADD ANOTHER CATEGORY**

Dissertation URL: **http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00029564/00001**

☐ I have read, understand and agree to the terms and conditions

☐ I'm not a robot

CONTINUE → **NO THANKS**

FAQ

I am very committed to Open Access for my research, does this program compromise that? **▼**

How much does this program cost? **▼**

Are there royalties? **▼**

What role does the university play in this process? **▼**

Can I take down my thesis or dissertation? **▼**

Does the program respect embargoes? **▼**

What will my print research look like in its printed form? How are the covers handled? **▼**

How are the theses and dissertations set up on Amazon? **▼**

How will the research be priced? **▼**

If you have any questions about the program don't hesitate to contact us: support@bibliolabs.com

Figure 2. Sample opt-in screenshot.

periods unless canceled by the author. Authors may remove their work from the program at any time by notifying BiblioLabs.

Work began by sending outreach e-mails to alumni authors (mostly for works from 1934 to 2006 scanned as part of the Retrospective Digitization Project, as they had the most complete metadata and contact information). The e-mails explained the new service and invited authors to include their work by opting in. Since late 2018, the Smathers Libraries have e-mailed 6,217 authors. As of December 2019, 641 authors have opted in to the program and 44 authors have opted out. While we are unable to calculate the percentage of authors opening e-mails, BiblioLabs has reported that over 94% of the people who click through from the e-mails to “learn more” sign up. The program has had a total response rate of 11%. Generally, there have been many positive responses from alumni. They are interested in exploring a new way to increase the reach of their work, excited to have a trusted place to print their thesis or dissertation for themselves or as a gift to family members, and grateful to continue to receive services from their alma mater. There have even been a handful of requests to donate royalties to the Smathers Libraries. Promoting the BiblioLabs program has been a wonderful opportunity to maintain relationships with alumni of UF graduate programs

while finding new ways to promote the innovative services of the Smathers Libraries.

The Early Results

The first batch of titles went live in January 2019. As of December 2019, 425 unique titles are available on Amazon. There is a discrepancy between the number of authors that have opted in (641) and the number of available titles (425), because the remaining titles require additional quality control before BiblioLabs can send them to production. The project team is working to determine the exact factors that affect quality and cause delay in availability to improve the program for future rounds of participants.

As of December 2019, 1,829 total units have been sold. Ingram’s sales reports do not include sales by channel, but BiblioLabs assumes that most sales are coming from Amazon. Top-selling subjects include Technology and Engineering (28% of sales), Science (22%), and Education (11%). With four titles available and 72 units sold, Architecture is the subject area with the highest sales compared to the total inventory of UF/BiblioLabs titles available for sale, with a sell-through rate of 18%. Authors have earned over \$13,000 in royalties. Royalties are paid monthly via PayPal, and the average author has earned \$31 in royalties to date.

Figure 3. Sample Amazon product page.

The Smathers Libraries have done early analysis to determine if participation in the BiblioLabs program causes higher downloads and/or usage in the IR@UF. The team created two sample sets of randomly selected titles that had opted in or opted out of the BiblioLabs program. While the target was a representative sample of 5% from each set (641 opt-ins and 44 opt-outs), 5% of the 44 opt-outs was too small (2) for accurate analysis so the sample set for opt-out titles was increased to 10. Usage statistics from October 2018 to October 2019 were calculated for two unique sample sets of 33 opt-in titles and 10 opt-out titles. The results were inconclusive, probably due to the small sample size and the limited time the titles have been available for sale. In the first sample, there were 244.3 average unique visits for opt-ins and 163 for opt-outs. In the second sample, there were 286.3 average unique visits for opt-ins and 273.7 for opt-outs. However, usage statistics were also reviewed for the program's current best-selling title, *The Application of Total Quality Management in Construction Field Operations* by Daniel Whiteman (which, as of December 2019, has sold 63 copies). From January to December 2017, the title's record in the IR@UF (<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00031525/00001/>) had 38 unique visits. From January to December 2018, the record had 59 unique visits. From January 2019 to November 2019 (the year the title was released for sale), the record had 404 unique visits. Clearly there has been an impact on the visibility of this title.

This early analysis indicates that titles in the BiblioLabs project have higher levels of use than titles that are not included, but the difference can vary drastically. A larger data set generated over a longer period is needed for a comprehensive view. Both the Smathers Libraries and Bibliolabs continue to monitor and analyze potential patterns.

Next Steps

In 2020, after working with BiblioLabs to improve the workflows, the Smathers Libraries will begin inviting current students and recent graduates to participate in the program. These individuals will benefit uniquely, as BiblioLabs provides an opportunity to establish early-career visibility with more current research. In early focus groups, UF graduate students responded positively to this program, believing that sharing research widely could lead to new opportunities for employment, funding, and collaboration in the highly competitive academic environment. As Benchekroun and Kuepper stated in *The Scholarly Kitchen* (2019), "We're seeing a generational shift as the world becomes increasingly fast-paced and digital, and early-career researchers are leading the charge in adopting (and expecting) a more open research approach."

For current graduate students, the Smathers Libraries hope to create a workflow so the students can opt in to the program as they submit their ETDs. The

UF and BiblioLabs teams will be exploring potential workflows for this in December 2019 and hope to have it operational for graduate students submitting ETDs at the end of the spring 2020 semester. Representatives from the Smathers Libraries are also collaborating with the UF Alumni Association to identify recent alumni who may be interested in participating, starting with a brief announcement in UF's alumni magazine, the *Florida Gator*. The Alumni Association will also provide the Smathers Libraries with e-mail addresses for another round of invitations to participate in the program. Finally, there will be a final follow-up e-mail to alumni who were previously invited to participate but did not respond.

The Smathers Libraries are also excited to explore research opportunities to determine impact as the program continues to generate information. As additional books become available and existing titles have more comprehensive sales and usage statistics,

it will be possible to review longitudinal data. In 2020, the project team plans to seek grant funding to study the impact of disseminating dissertations through commercial retail channels.

Overall, both the Smathers Libraries and BiblioLabs have been pleased by the early results of the program and look forward to receiving additional feedback from participants, exploring new workflows, and improving the program to serve past, present, and future graduate students.

Note

The original presentation slides can be viewed in the IR@UF: <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/I/IR00011004/00001>. Other materials, such as the Author Agreement and template outreach language, can be shared upon request by contacting Chelsea Johnston at cjohnston@ufl.edu.

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