



## Results of a Survey of Virginia Tech Graduates Whose Digital Theses and Dissertations Are Accessible Worldwide

by John Eaton, Ed Fox, and Gail McMillan

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University's graduate students have submitted theses and dissertations as digital documents since the spring of 1997. In that time more than 2,800 digital documents have been submitted and cataloged in the Virginia Tech library. More than 1,500 of these documents are available worldwide to scholars who conduct searches through the library online catalog <[www.lib.vt.edu/services/addison.html](http://www.lib.vt.edu/services/addison.html)>, by going to the scholarly communications web site <[scholar.lib.vt.edu/theses/](http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/theses/)> or through one of the many search engines available to web users.

Over the last 2 years a simple survey has been sent to 329 graduate alumni whose theses or dissertations (TD) have been available worldwide for more than 1 year. The survey asked for information about the effect that making their document available has had on them. The survey also asked the graduates for comments about the digital thesis and dissertation process. There were 166 alumni who returned surveys, for a 50% response rate. Because returned surveys were anonymous, no information is available on response bias.

### Survey Results

I. Have you been contacted by library patrons about your ETD?

Number of Contacts	0	1-5	6-10	11-20	20 or more
Response	81%	18%	1%	<1%	<1%

II. If you were contacted, how satisfied were you with the contact:

- Helped you advance your research interest?
- Helped you to locate a job?
- Helped you expand your network of research colleagues?

	Satisfied or Somewhat Satisfied	Unsatisfied or Somewhat Unsatisfied
Advanced Research	68%	32%
Locate Job	40%	60%
Expand Network	82%	18%

III. Were the comments about your ETD:

	Positive or somewhat positive?	Negative or somewhat negative?
Response	94%	6%

IV. Have you published derivative works (journal articles, books, chapters) from your ETD?

V. If so, did you encounter resistance from any publishers to accepting your manuscript for publication because it was "online?"

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## Virginia Tech Survey

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	Yes	No
IV. Have you published?	29%	79%
V. Encounter resistance?	0	100%

VI. Are you satisfied that your work is more widely known and appreciated because you made your ETD accessible?

	Satisfied or Somewhat Satisfied	Unsatisfied or Somewhat unsatisfied
Response	96%	4%

### Survey Comments from ETD Graduates

The following are meant to be representative of the comments received from survey respondents.

♦I think the Web site should be more accessible. Right now it seems to be buried . . . and is not reaching the audience that could most benefit from it--current students (graduate or undergraduate).

♦Really helped in job interviews to let prospective employer see examples of my research and writing skills.

♦Work is already known because it is published in peer-reviewed journals.

♦ETD is a great idea. It makes research material available for other researchers to look at. However more help is needed with technical support.

♦Downloaded 69 times? I had no idea.

♦The more we share, the better it is.

♦Make sure intro grad courses cover how it is done! My only regret was not having checked the specifics of (preparing) ETD BEFORE writing.

♦A great project--theses and dissertations have never been readily accessible in the past. Having them online is a positive contribution to research as a whole.

♦Downloaded 25 times without any contacts (hmm?).

♦It's awesome! Wish the process started much earlier. It's a pain sometimes to physically browse through so many research theses. If it's in electronic format, it is a lot easier and efficient.

♦I was pleased to see that a number of people have looked at my dissertation (136). Unfortunately, I have not published any further articles.

♦It was not a simple thing to re-format the publication for the ETD and frankly, I think the option should be available for those who want to post their thesis on the web, but the requirement to do so should be dropped.

♦I think the Virginia Tech ETD project is an excellent undertaking. I

congratulate the Graduate School and Library on their pioneering work in this area and hope they will continue to refine and improve the ETD project. Thanks for allowing me to be a part of this cutting-edge approach to graduate education.

♦It is of great assistance to researchers, on-campus and elsewhere. Would it be possible for me to know who downloaded my (thesis) ETD? This would tell me who is interested in my ETD, in academia/industry.

♦Getting my thesis into electronic format was quite painful. I was frankly surprised at the number of "hits" shown at the top of this page (90) since I've received no contact from anyone accessing my thesis. However, I have found it to be somewhat useful for increasing availability--particularly to off-campus patrons.

♦I think, each student out of state must have access to the library, especially students out of the country. Thank you.

♦An excellent project, though I am somewhat worried about plagiarism.

♦The only recommendation I have is to make .pdf compression software more readily available off campus. I'm not sure how you can do that without expense, but I'm sure you can find a way.

♦Most patrons don't know my current address.

♦Great program. However, I was somewhat frustrated by the difficulty of getting pictures and figures formatted correctly for submission.

♦I like the idea that my dissertation is available more broadly. I have not been contacted . . . but I have run into . . . people at conferences who have said they read . . . my work. Finally, it would be nice to know more details about people accessing my dissertation. How many of the hits were me, showing friends? Thanks!

♦Even though the ETD process was a major pain to complete, I'm glad my work is more accessible to more people!

♦Thank you for making my thesis so accessible!

♦ETD is Great!! It was easy to do and lets people access my work anytime around the world. Keep up improving it.

### Discussion

What do these survey results and student comments tell us about digital TD? They tell us that contacts with authors by users are not very high. This is in part due to the fact that graduates often move after submitting their TD and consequently the e-mail addresses they provide are ephemeral. It may also be due to the fact that scholars are simply not conditioned to contacting the authors of works that they read. Question II reveals that while having TD accessible has not helped most respondents locate jobs, it has had a positive influence for some and it has helped advance their research and networking interests. Question III shows that scholars using others digital TDs are generally complimentary about the quality of the work.

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The questions dealing with publication get at issues about which faculty and students express the greatest concerns. Question IV shows that, for this sample, the publication rate seems low. However given the time since graduation the publication rate may be reasonable. The response to Question V is perhaps most striking of all. None of the 38 graduates who had published experienced publisher resistance to publishing their manuscripts!

The response to the last question asking graduates if they were satisfied that their work had become more widely known and appreciated because it was a digital TD was overwhelmingly positive. The response to this last question and to the other questions in the survey show graduates experiences with digital TD to be highly positive. The student comments are mostly positive and often constructive.

The comments were selected to reflect overall student responses and to be instructive to graduate schools contemplating allowing the digital submission of theses and dissertations.

*About the authors*— John Eaton is associate provost for graduate studies, Ed Fox is professor of computer science, and Gail McMillian is director of scholarly communications for the University Libraries. All are from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia. If you want to know more about digital TDs, contact <ETD@vt.edu>.

## Communicator

Council of Graduate Schools  
One Dupont Circle NW, Suite 430  
Washington, DC 20036-1173

## McNair Memos

*by Orlando Taylor, chair, CGS/COE Joint McNair Committee, and dean, Graduate School, Howard University*

St. John's University has announced that it will waive application fees for McNair Scholars and, in addition, has established an annual McNair Graduate Assistantship/Fellowship to a successful McNair applicant.

The following institutions are currently offering fellowships, assistantships, and other forms of graduate financial assistance targeted specifically for McNair students: Colorado State University, Eastern Michigan University, Howard University, Indiana University-Bloomington, Louisiana State University, New Mexico State University, Oregon State University Graduate School, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, St. John's University, Texas Tech University, University of Alabama-Birmingham, University of Arizona, University of California-Berkeley, University of California-Davis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of Missouri-Columbia, University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth, University of Pennsylvania, University of North Texas in Denton, University of Rochester, University of Tennessee-Memphis Health Science Center, University of Texas-Austin, Washington State University, and Washington University in St. Louis.

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