

CASE STUDY: PROQUEST DISSERTATIONS & THESES PUBLISHING

Michigan Technological University

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Michigan Technological University's Graduate School offers a variety of PhD, Masters and Graduate Certificate programs. The main focus is STEM programs, with particular emphasis on engineering. However, given the school's location near to forests and lakes, it also has a good reputation for its environmental programs including a business program, Applied Natural Resource Economics.

The current student enrolment is 1,359 but plans are in place to increase this to 3,000 by 2035. With such ambitious growth plans, one of the biggest challenges the school is facing is how it can improve systems and processes to help it cope with a much greater number of students. "As you can imagine, with the number of systems and processes we have, this is a little daunting!" admitted Debra Charlesworth, Assistant Dean. "On the admissions side, we are going online with processes for submitting applications and will continue to focus on this and automating other processes over the next two years." Part of this work included launching a new personalized website for students called "MyMichiganTech" which links to the school's administrative database – BANNER – and tracks application status and other information the school holds on their students. "Banner is used by a lot of US institutions, and linking it to MyMichiganTech gives students a checklist of items they need to complete their applications and shows them their application status. Our goal is to make things easier for our students – and for ourselves – across the board, so we're exploring automation of other areas too including submission of forms, and allowing students to track their degree completion milestones on MyMichiganTech."

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Debra Charlesworth, Michigan Technological University

But before the review of admissions and other processes, first on the agenda was reviewing how the submissions process for their dissertations and theses could be improved. "That was easy," said Debra. "Even before I started this job one of the first things I got put in place was ProQuest's online submissions system for dissertations and theses." The reasons behind this were simple. "For administrative purposes, the online submissions process is super-easy. It's helped us organize our own processes more efficiently and meant we've been able to reduce staff time processing submissions as we no longer have to send boxes of paper dissertations etc. to ProQuest. From the university's perspective, we chose to submit our dissertations and theses to ProQuest because they are the oldest disseminator of dissertations and theses and they make our students' work widely accessible, which in turn raises the profile of us as a graduate institution."

Another key benefit is the preservation of work. "Of course, we have systems in place to ensure our work is securely archived, but submitting to ProQuest gives that extra peace of mind that there is another repository which is providing a safe home for scholarship."

Institutions and other organizations are investing time and effort into developing repositories to ensure preservation of scholarly works, but to what extent does Michigan Tech think it is important for institutions to also participate in national or global repositories?

"Very important," was Debra's answer. "It can be hard to find all relevant research across all subject areas if work is stored in multiple repositories – and of course, not all the work gets published in scholarly journals in the first place. By having a national or global repository, it makes it easier for students and scholars to find what they need to know about their subject and to see what areas of research others are exploring, to help progress research and development. I think it's really important for researchers to have access to that work."

Michigan Tech has submitted dissertations to ProQuest electronically for several years, but is there anything that could be done to improve the experience? "In an ideal world, it'd be great if ProQuest could introduce preliminary checks so that students can find out, before submitting their final dissertation, that the document meets all the necessary criteria. We ask students to submit their draft dissertation to us first, which they do via our learning management system Canvas. We then check the document for formatting, fonts etc. and ask students to address our comments before they submit the final version to ProQuest. If ProQuest could find a way to help this process, it would save our faculty and students a lot of time and effort." Overall, Michigan Tech is extremely satisfied with their experience of working with ProQuest. "We're a very happy customer!" Debra concurred. "When we set up the online submission process we were very, very early in the process, but it was so smooth, and very fast and easy to set up online. I would encourage any school who is thinking about going online that it is extremely easy to make the transition."

And would the institution be happy to recommend ProQuest dissertations and thesis program to other institutions? "Yes, absolutely for all the reasons I've already said. The system is really easy to set up, it promotes our students work in a really good way, and serves as a good back up for our scholarship. Plus, ProQuest's customer service is fantastic, too. For example, if I submit a technical query, I know that someone has read it, understood it, and the response that comes back has a solution I know will work. All my communications with the customer service team are dealt with quickly and efficiently, and if we ask for any changes to be made to our system set up, it's done very rapidly, generally within one business day. I can't say enough good things about ProQuest – their service has always been great!"

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