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Title: Ph.Digital? Implications of new media for the dissertation and the degree

Authors: Keith Morgan and Kelsey Libner (North Carolina State University)

Abstract: The first Ph.D.'s in the United States were granted at Yale in 1861. One, fittingly entitled *Ars Longa, Brevis Vita*, was six pages long and written by hand in Latin. From that small start, American universities standardized the process of dissertation research to what has been often described as the pinnacle of the U.S. educational system. Despite this success, beginning in the 1930s there have been undercurrents of criticism about the direction of graduate education in this country. In the past ten years, there has been renewed and concentrated critical discussion of the purpose and outcomes of the Ph.D. program. The Carnegie Foundation's Initiative on the Doctorate, The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation's Responsive Ph.D. Initiative, and the University of Washington's Re-envisioning the Ph.D. are but three examples. These investigations show some similarities with earlier examinations (see Berelson, 1960, and Olson and Drew, 1998) but also take up some new themes. In a context of technological change as well as re-examinations of the Ph.D. degree, this paper will consider the pressures that technological change places on the form and function of the dissertation. Our argument will be placed in the context of the history of the dissertation, and the Ph.D. as a ritual with an important social function.

Edminster and Moxley (2002) argue that new media can expand the representational limits of the dissertation. Building on their work, we will look more specifically at opportunities and challenges that new media forms present in selected disciplines: architecture, history, biology, and applied mathematics. As part of these scenarios, we will consider the evolution of the dissertation from paper, to an online analogue of paper, to hybrids of paper and new-media forms which could not truly "live" on paper.

Even as we explore new directions for the contents and form of dissertations, we recognize that these documents do not exist in a vacuum. We might think of them as ritual objects in a complex rite of passage -- the Ph.D. degree -- developed to anoint a kind of priesthood of scholars. They lie in a tight matrix of reciprocal relationships,

academic standards, and perhaps even social norms. To change dissertation requirements or standards is to put pressure on that matrix. Therefore, change is likely to be a slow and difficult process.

We will go on to summarize discussions around re-envisioning the Ph.D. and, by extension, graduate education in the United States. As ETD programs are adopted more widely, we will argue that ETD planning should be responsive to this larger context.

The ETD community has made great strides in tackling the challenges of making dissertations electronic. Meanwhile, 142 years after the first dissertations were submitted in the United States, there is a rising tide of commentary and discussion about the appropriateness of the dissertation as we have known it. We see promising points of connection between these two communities and believe they would benefit from greater alignment of priorities.

References

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- Edminster, J., & Moxley, J. (2002). Graduate education and the evolving genre of electronic theses and dissertations. *Computers and Composition*, 19, 89-104.
- Olson, G. A., & Drew, J. (1998, September). (Re)Reenvisioning the dissertation in English studies. *College English*, 61(1), 56-66.

Title: ResearchBlog at The ETD Guide: Creating a Community for Academic

Authors: Joseph Moxley and Anne K. Jones (University of South Florida)

Abstract: We have created a multi-user blogging space to foster collaboration between academic communities and between students writing theses and dissertations committee members: <http://researchblog.org>. Blogs are frequently updated pages that allow for the creation of a more direct and personal online, written voice. Already, many innovative graduate students blog their research ideas in order to gain feedback and to network with other academics all over the world. Phdweblogs.net is an initiative to bring together PhD students' weblogs from all around the world facilitating online networking and researching. Researchblog is structured similarly to writingblog.org- another blog we maintain that has 500+ users. Individuals maintain blogs and then these daily entries are posted within the individual's blog, but also the most recent entries from each blog are posted to a central page. This enables the bloggers at etdguide.org to see the thoughts of the different writers all blogging at etdguide.org, combining features of the discussion board with features of the blog. Unlike other research blogging sites like phdweblogs.net, the blogging space at etdguide.org will connect students writing ETDs with the professors that chair ETDs and librarians with both the writers and the committees creating ETDs. This blog will allow for the questioning of the direction of ETDs by those who are stakeholders in ETDs. It will also