Building Connections and Streamlining Workflows Through Business Process Improvement

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Graduate Education at Illinois

155+ Master's degree programs
90+ Doctoral degree programs
1,300-1,400 Thesis deposits each year

16,000+ Graduate Students enrolled in degree programs
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduate College</th>
<th>University Library</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Affairs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Thesis Office</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Registration</td>
<td>• Reviews all theses / dissertations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Degree auditing</td>
<td>• Appoints all doctoral committees</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Degree certification</td>
<td>• Provides outreach to students and departments throughout the thesis process</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Part of the Student Success team</td>
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<th><strong>Repository Services</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>• After degrees are certified, uploads theses / dissertations into repository (IDEALS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Transfers items to ProQuest</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Fulfills embargo change requests</td>
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Business Process Improvement

• Business Process Improvement Shared Service
  1. Created a process map to show every step of our process
  2. Identified areas for improvement / change
  3. Discussed solutions and identified next steps
  4. Identified 9 actionable items and created a detailed plan / timeline
Our Goal

To reassess the steps from final exam appointment through degree conferral to improve workflows and communications for students, departments, and the Graduate College.
INITIATIVE #1

Reduce Touchpoints on Forms
**OLD PROCESS**

**FORM # 1:** Department Reviewer Approval of Thesis  
(received by Thesis Office via email)  

Thesis is reviewed  

Thesis is deposited  

**FORM # 3:** Grade Change Forms for Thesis Courses  
(received by Academic Affairs in hard copy)  

**NEW PROCESS**

**FORM # 1:** Department submits form that indicates:  
- Department Reviewer approval  
- Committee approval  
- Grade change for thesis courses  
(received by Thesis Office via Secure Form Drop Off)  

Thesis is reviewed and deposited  

Form transferred to the Office of the Registrar  

**FORM # 2:** Committee Approval of Thesis  
(received by Thesis Office electronically)
Digital Signatures

Old Procedure
• Only accepted wet signatures

New Procedure
• Accept scanned signatures
• Accept Adobe signatures (with time/date stamp)
INITIATIVE #2: Improve Communications with Students Around Degree Milestones
Emails sent to students:

- When doctoral committees are appointed
- When student submits title page
- When thesis approval forms are received
- When students are approaching time limits

Information included:

- Links to policy / deadlines
- Links to format requirements and templates
- Information about required deposit items
- Information about embargos
- Links to campus resources
Katherine Hatcher is proposing he...@superchiasmatic

Got notice that my preliminary exam committee was approved by the grad college!

Kudos to @GradCollegeIL for recognizing the stress of doing these exams & including this tidbit in their notice email!

[Alt text: screen shot of email with details of counseling & stress services]

Preparing for exams and writing a dissertation can be a stressful time, but there are units on campus to help support you. The Counseling Center has resources to support students including workshops and individual appointments. You can also learn about stress management on the McKinley Health Center website.

Best wishes as you prepare for your examination. If you have any questions about the dissertation process, please let me know.

8:29 AM - 27 Aug 2019

2 Retweets 11 Likes
Title Page Pre-Check

• Students email title page
• Check format
• Check academic record
• Check committee information
INITIATIVE #3:

Increase Online Support for Students
Thesis Support

• Increased resources and guidance for students
  • Templates
  • Sample pages
  • Formatting FAQ page
  • Blogs
  • Videos / Webinars
  • Office Hours (both online and in person)
**New Year - New Thesis Goals**

It's February and your New Year's resolutions have started to become habit... or fallen by the wayside. Fortunately, there's still 11 months in the year to make your thesis a priority. The start of the new year and the new semester is a great time to think about what direction you would like your thesis work to go and to make plans accordingly. Below are five tips to help you set (and stick with) thesis-writing goals.

**What I Wish I Had Known while Writing my Thesis: Tips and Advice from Grad College Staff**

When Emily began working at the Graduate College, she had just taken her final exam and was revising her dissertation. This task coupled with working full-time ended up being much more stressful than she could have imagined. Little did she know that Corie Hall is full of talented individuals who knew first-hand the struggles of completing a thesis and were happy to share their stories and advice. Read on for some of the feedback she found helpful.

**Check out our Copyright Resources**

Copyright can be a tricky subject for students working on their theses. Luckily, we have resources to help! Our Copyright Tools page includes guides, tools, resources, and videos to help you understand copyright and your thesis. You might also check out our FAQ page and our blog, Grad School 101: Copyright and Your Thesis, to read answers to frequently asked questions.

**Reminder to Back Up Your Files**

Just a friendly reminder to back up your thesis files, including drafts, data, spreadsheets, pictures, and notes. You might consider signing up for Data Nudge through Research Data Service, which will send you monthly email reminders and tips for managing your research. While backing up files might seem like a tedious task, make sure to do so regularly so you don’t lose all of your hard work.

**Dedicate Time away from Your Thesis**

As you start planning your semester schedule, make sure to set aside some time each week to NOT work on your thesis. You might sign up for a fitness class on campus, volunteer to be an usher at the Krannert Center, join a bowling league at the ARC, go to lunchtime yoga at the Krannert Art Museum, take a cooking class or two, or find something in the community that interests you. Having dedicated time away from your research will give your mind a break and help you to be more productive.

**Office Hours**

GRADUATE STUDENTS

**SUMMER ASK EMILY!**

**THESIS OFFICE HOURS**

**JUNE 7**

2 to 4 PM IN-PERSON
MAIN LIBRARY RM 214

**JUNE 21**

10 AM to NOON LIVE ONLINE
FACEBOOK MESSENGER

go.grad.illinois.edu/thesis_workshops
INITIATIVE #4: Better Collaborate with Library
Communication and Workflow

• Have meetings each semester
• Shared workflow maps
• Removed redundant work
• Discussed best practices for responding to inquiries
INITIATIVE #5:
Track Deposit Data to Better Use Staff Time
Thesis Deposits at Illinois

• Three deposit periods each year: April, July, December
• Each has two deadlines, one for Doctoral and one for Master’s
• The final version of the document is submitted to the Graduate College
Weekly Thesis Deposits for 2018

Week Deposits
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52
4 2 4 6 7 4 2 4 6 4 8 6 15 26 80 182 146 116 99 12 9 5 17 13 16 26 61 99 10 11 5 39 111 74 1 0 4 2 5 18 14 39 3 6 7 18 14 5 7 0 1
Using Data Proactively

• What and How?
  • Track submissions / deposits (Month, Week, Day)

• Why?
  • Thoughtful / intentional planning helps better use staff time
  • Makes a case for hiring extra help during busy periods
Takeaways
Lessons Learned and Best Practices

#1: Don’t be afraid to ask “Why do we do this?”

#2: Consult with someone unfamiliar with your processes

#3: Keep students at the center of process improvement
Questions?

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