CASE STUDY: DIGITAL ARCHIVING AND ACCESS PROGRAM (DAAP)

Tulane University
Since 1956, Tulane University has submitted their dissertations to ProQuest® for storage on microfilm. In 2004, the institution decided to have many of their volumes digitized to make it easier for researchers and students around the world to take advantage of the rich research that had been produced during that time.

“It was a two-stage project really,” said the institution’s Archivist, Ann Case. “We decided to have all our older dissertations digitized because we wanted to make them available digitally. It was a really simple process—ProQuest already had the microfilm versions of the dissertations, so we just paid them to have them digitized—it was great!” At the end of the project, Tulane was given a disc of their digitized dissertations, including those that were still embargoed.

The second part of the digital archiving and access project was to digitize approximately 115 dissertations held by the institution’s School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. “We originally explored having dissertations published from 1890 to 1956 digitized; but it quickly transpired that doing this would be fraught with problems. The old dissertations had been bound together, with many typed on onion skin paper, and I felt that to take the volumes apart in order for them to be scanned and digitized might prove too risky,” said Ann. “But, then I found out that the School of Public Health had around 115 dissertations that had never been submitted to ProQuest for microfilming. I felt it was important to get these into the ProQuest database, so we decided to move forward with that project instead.”

Making sure that all the dissertations were present and correct was the first hurdle for this aspect of the project, as volumes were being stored in numerous places. “There were a couple of challenges,” agreed Ann. “One of the biggest issues was that not all of the dissertations were housed in the University Archives, so we had to make sure we could locate them, and account for them, before moving forward with the digitization.”

The second challenge was that these dissertations too, had already been bound. The institution did not want to risk damage to the works by unbinding them, so each book was scanned as a bound work. The final challenge to overcome was that as the School of Public Health had been slower to create their digital upload portal than the other granting schools, there were still current paper copies of dissertations to locate. As Ann further commented, “I wanted to be sure I had all the dissertations from the school before making the last push to submit for digitization.”

At the time Tulane embarked on the Digital Archiving and Access Program, other options were available for digitizing scholarly works. Indeed, the institution has its own digital unit in-house, and also considered using The Internet Archive to digitize the dissertations, as they used this to digitize their yearbooks.

“There were other options available,” agreed Ann, “but for me, the importance was having our dissertations included in the ProQuest database. All our previous works were included and, since summer 2013, all our dissertations are now submitted electronically, so DAAP (Digital Archiving and Access Program) continued our policy of having dissertations available through ProQuest.”

Ann’s experience of working with ProQuest on the project was a positive one. “It was a fairly painless experience, and the problems that did occur were more on my end in trying to get together the proper volumes to ship to ProQuest for scanning,” said Ann. Despite careful checking, some volumes were sent in error but these were quickly picked up by ProQuest and returned to Tulane. “We’d paid to have 115 dissertations digitized and because there had been some overlap between our list and ProQuest’s list; it meant we had less to do than previously thought. As I mentioned earlier, we still had some recently produced dissertations which were unbound and not yet digitized, so I was able to send these instead to make up our quota.”

With a positive experience of DAAP, would Ann recommend it to other institutions? “Actually, I have recommended the project to others, just this last week! I was speaking with a colleague at another Louisiana institution and said that there are some definite benefits for participating in the program—namely that you don’t have to keep making copies of the dissertations yourself! You can just send them off to ProQuest and get them to do it for you. But as well as benefits for library and archive departments at institutions, it’s just such a great service for researchers. They can do keyword searching across everything, from the oldest research right up to the most contemporary research available.”