

Grey Literature produced and made available by Universities – Helping future Scholars or Plagiarists?

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Abstract

Universities and other institutions of higher education are far the greatest producers of grey literature (GL). Most of their education process is based on various written essays or other sorts of similar tasks. Even more important, the whole process is usually finished by some sort of written theses/dissertation (graduation work, diploma) that shows a graduate is capable of research work and has a proper knowledge of the field.

The traditional paradigm was to make this material available through academic libraries. The Internet has helped to simplify this process and relieve academic librarians from trivial and routine tasks. It has also made it easier for all potential users, often students themselves, to access these materials, adding to other materials they can use that are part of GL materials. This sounds like a great leap forward if current research did not indicate that academic plagiarism is now a very serious problem worldwide.

The research presented in this paper presents how librarians are getting involved both in making materials available and at the same time in fighting plagiarism and how their expertise in dealing with different information sources, including those called "grey literature," can be used to help teaching staff in their struggle to maintain the quality of academic education. This is also one of the factors turning traditional library tasks and services toward the more professional expertise expected by information technology experts. The survey of academic libraries in Slovenia presents the availability of theses and dissertations and other services offered by academic libraries and librarians and their future plans.

Introduction

Universities and other institutions of higher education are important producers of grey literature (GL). Higher education programs are usually concluded by some sort of written paper, a thesis or dissertation, which shows that a graduate is capable of research work and has a proper knowledge of the field. A student does this task following the successful completion of all study program requirements, and the written paper is subject to approval. Although called by various names in different countries and languages and at different universities (thesis, dissertation, graduate or diploma work, final papers, etc.), the form of the paper is more or less standard. The work is written and has a title, abstract, table of contents, main part, and bibliography. The main part or body consists of

- introduction,
- review of the literature,
- methodology,
- results/findings,
- analysis and interpretation of findings, and
- summary, conclusions, applications, and recommendations for further study

These papers are not the only grey literature originating at universities—research contributes its share—but form by far the greatest part of it. Their vast numbers place universities among the greatest sources of grey literature.

The special value of theses lies in the fact that they are reviewed, checked, and evaluated. Theses are submitted to a committee consisting of a mentor/supervisor and two or more committee members who usually act as the reviewers. Normally the committee members are professors and experts in their field and have the task of reading theses, making suggestions for changes and improvements, and giving the final approval. Only after the final approval do theses become official, and the fact that a student's work goes through a review process by the university is the guarantee of its quality.

A thesis is a written text representing the independent research and authorship of a single individual. Its purpose in higher education remains the same today as it has been for centuries, across countries and disciplines. It would be beyond the scope of this paper but still worth mentioning that this remains the principle despite various critiques of both the romantic notion of authorship and the epistemological assumptions that form traditional notions of independent scientific and scholarly research: research today involves teamwork, multi-authorship is the rule in most scientific disciplines, but the thesis remains the last bastion of single authorship.

What happens afterwards? A student successfully completing a degree on the basis of a thesis receives his diploma, approval that he is ready to join the social division of work or the labour market in a certain role. The proof of this readiness, the thesis, remains at the academic institution. Traditionally, theses were regarded as library material because they were available through academic libraries. Libraries made