

American University Thesis and Dissertation Embargo Guidelines

Background

American University has implemented an electronic theses and dissertations program, in accordance with national trends encouraging individual scholars and academic institutions to reduce physical and financial barriers that limit access to scholarly works. In order to support the common interest in broad, rapid and affordable dissemination of scholarly work shared by researchers and their institutions, American University Library hosts the Open Access AU Digital Repository. This repository serves as a means to archive and disseminate scholarship, teaching tools and other works produced by AU faculty and students. As a condition of graduation, students are expected to submit their thesis or dissertation both to the AU Digital Repository and to ProQuest/UMI, which maintains a database of more than 2.7 million thesis and dissertation abstracts from nearly 700 institutions.

The thesis or dissertation is one of the first major works produced by emerging scholars. As such, an important part of the educational experience for graduate students is the opportunity to learn about their intellectual property rights by making choices about when and how to make the thesis or dissertation available to others. The university facilitates this by requiring the student to enter non-exclusive publishing agreements with ProQuest and the AU Digital Repository and by providing embargo options in order to protect students' interests in publishing through other venues. Both the library and committee members should support students by providing information about the available publishing options and scholarly publishing trends.

Embargo Options

Students have the option of choosing to place an embargo on their thesis or dissertation, delaying the release of the document via ProQuest and/or the AU Digital Repository. Students may wish to consider embargoes in the following circumstances:

- The student has a patent pending based on research outlined in his/her thesis or dissertation
- The thesis or dissertation contains sensitive or classified information
- Immediate release of the thesis or dissertation would be likely to impact an existing or potential publishing agreement

In order to protect the students' interest in their thesis or dissertation, students may choose from the following embargo/access restriction options:

- 6 months
- 1 year
- 2 years
- Campus-access only (available for AU Digital Repository only)

Separate embargo selections must be made for ProQuest and the AU Digital Repository. The student may later renew a 6 month, 1 year, or 2 year embargo, by directly contacting the library's thesis and dissertation coordinator (for the AU Digital Repository) and/or ProQuest.

The embargo options discussed above only apply to the electronic copy of the thesis or dissertation managed by the AU Digital Repository and/or the distribution of the thesis or dissertation by ProQuest.

It is expected that students and committee chairs will discuss and reach mutual agreement regarding which embargo option, if any, the student will select. Conflicts between the wishes of students and advisors should be resolved within the department before the thesis or dissertation is submitted to ProQuest and the AU Digital Repository. Because the library and ProQuest consider the thesis or dissertation to be the intellectual property of the student, after submission only the student can initiate embargo changes or extensions.

Exceptions

In extraordinary circumstances, such as when a thesis or dissertation contains sensitive or classified information, a student may desire a permanent embargo. In these cases, the Dean of the school or college must approve the request for the permanent embargo. The Dean's approval is also required if it is necessary for access to the abstract and/or microform copy of the thesis or dissertation to be restricted.