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PROQUEST DISSERTATIONS & THESES INSTITUTION USE CASE

Dissertations are a Boon for Undergraduate Researchers

University leverages advanced scholarly works to offer a wealth of insight and information for beginning researchers.

The Librarian for Philosophy, General Reference and Core Electronic Resources at one of the top public universities in the United States shared his experiences helping undergraduate students achieve their research goals. In his experience undergraduate students frequently encounter dissertations when they do a general search through the library card catalog or discovery service like Summon. Many early undergrad students are very unfamiliar with this content type and while students don't often look directly to dissertations when first gathering sources or putting together a literature review, these scholarly works are sometimes the only resource available on a niche subject the student is researching.

When inexperienced researchers discover these resources, they are met with excitement as well as intimidation. "In cases like this," he explained, "some undergraduate students mistakenly think the abstract that appears with the citation in the catalog or discovery engine is the entire document."

It can be overwhelming or disappointing for the student to realize the dissertation is actually a dense book-length work "they don't want, or have time, to read in its entirety," he continued.

In such a situation, a student might be tempted to reconsider their research topic and select one that has more readily available sources. That can be discouraging for students that are just finding their academic voice and subject area of interest. But for this Librarian, this situation presents a valuable opportunity to introduce students to effectively and efficiently use dissertations in their work.



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For an example, the librarian recalled working with a student interested in researching what college students thought about to search for LinkedIn for post-graduation employment compared with the in-person recruitment opportunities provided at the institution.

As expected, relevant literature on this topic was limited, but via the university library discovery layer search (powered by the Summon API), the student unknowingly struck the jackpot with a dissertation from PQDT Global titled, "Perceptions of College Students Towards the Use and Usefulness of LinkedIn as a Professional Networking Tool."

Initially daunted by the complexity and amount of information in the dissertation, the student was tempted to switch topics. But this Librarian seized the opportunity to demonstrate how to use these advanced scholarly works in research and why they are such value resources.

"I showed the student how to search for the parts relevant to their need," he said. "Especially the bibliography."

The bibliography can be treasure trove for a student struggling to find materials related to a research question, he explained. "Here they can discover references to shorter works like journal or newspaper articles that they are looking for."

Investigating dissertations is "an efficient way for undergraduate students to plumb research that's already been done. Dissertations are produced by graduate student authors who have spent a great deal of time and effort exploring the topic and documenting what they found," he added.

For an undergraduate student, these insights and information can be invaluable for getting started on their own research projects and for learning how to evaluate credible sources. Teaching new undergrad students about dissertations and their usefulness can remove early frustrations with the research discovery process, resulting in improved autonomy and improved likelihood of long-term academic success.

The screenshot shows a ProQuest document page. At the top, it says "Full Text | Dissertations & Theses". The title is "Perceptions of college students towards the use and usefulness of LinkedIn as a professional networking tool" by Ewing, Carlos Shantel, Mississippi State University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2016. 10100316. Below the title are icons for Download PDF, Order a copy, Cite, Email, and All Options. The main content area has tabs for Full text - PDF, Preview - PDF, Abstract/Details, and References (64). The References tab is active, showing a list of references. The first reference is "LinkedIn. (2015). LinkedIn. Retrieved from https://www.linkedin.com/". The second is "SOCIAL CAPITAL: THEORY AND RESEARCH" by Lin, Nan; Cook, Karen; Burt, Ronald S. The third is "Emotional labour and the pursuit of the personal brand: Public relations practitioners' use of social media." by Bridgen, Liz. The fourth is "Cited by (40) LinkedIn. (2018). About LinkedIn. Retrieved from https://about.linkedin.com/trk=homepage-basic_directory". On the right side, there is a search bar and sections for "Cited by (1) Documents with shared references (13895)" and "Related items" which includes "Women Entrepreneurs' Digital Impression Management on LinkedIn" and "Psychological Contract Breach and Counterproductive Behavior in Exempt and Nonexempt Employees".

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