

Polimnia project: issues and problems of realising a deposit of theses at the University of Parma

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Abstract

The international professional literature indicate that the introduction of electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs) can be a long, challenging and sometimes frustrating process. Those responsible for steering through such a change need to promote organisational adjustments and persuade university authorities, faculty, students, administrative staff and librarians. Among other factors, the success of the transition depends on a number of local aspects, such as the institutional culture and attitude towards students' research outputs, and the effectiveness of existing procedures for the management, cataloguing and provision of dissertations. An increasing number of universities in Italy has launched initiatives in the area of EDTs, whose main purpose seems to be improving access to dissertations' content, enhancing scholarly communication, and populating open archives and institutional repositories. However, at present there is little information available about the specific challenges that have been faced, the issues raised, the strategies applied and the impact of these initiatives on the local and national academic context. The aim of this paper is to discuss the preliminary results of the University of Parma project for the introduction of electronic dissertations. The project started from an in-depth analysis of the local context and followed a pragmatic approach, with the purpose of minimising resistance and satisfying the needs of all stakeholders. The data gathered from a pilot experience at the Faculty of Humanities made it possible to study, although at a small scale, attitudes and experiences of undergraduate students and supervisors towards the electronic submission of dissertations. The project's objectives, release policies and implementation steps will be described, with a reflection upon the positive outcomes but also upon the problems that will have to be faced in the next future.