

# Boston University Libraries

## FAQ: Embargoes & Electronic Theses & Dissertations (ETD)

### What is an embargo for a BU thesis or dissertation?

An embargo temporarily restricts anyone from viewing, copying, or downloading a thesis or dissertation. The titles and abstracts of all theses and dissertations, regardless of whether or not they have been embargoed, are made available in OpenBU (BU's Institutional Repository) and in the ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database soon after the work is accepted by BU Libraries. An embargo is granted when deemed necessary by a student, their major advisor, and any designated academic administrator required by the student's school or college.

### What is BU's policy regarding the openness of theses and dissertations?

Boston University's policy is that BU theses and dissertations should be made openly accessible when they are submitted so that the benefits of research can be widely shared. Sharing these contributions increases the visibility of the author, the school, and the institution. This policy is in line with the vast majority of BU's peer institutions.

BU allows a student to embargo his or her thesis or dissertation if the student, their major advisor, and any other designated academic administrator request it. The embargo period should be as short as possible so that the work can be made available as soon as possible.

### Why would a student request an embargo?

An embargo may be requested for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to:

- Sensitive material that cannot be published safely or appropriately at the time,
- Plans to publish with a publisher who will not consider openly accessible works for publication,
- Materials under a third party's copyright for which permissions have not been obtained and which cannot be easily included in a supplemental file submitted with the main work, and
- Patentable material.

### What are the drawbacks of an embargo to authors?

When a thesis or dissertation is embargoed, the author's full work is not openly accessible to scholars, publishers, potential collaborators, or potential employers. The main advantages of open access to authors may include increased citation rates [1] and increased opportunities for both collaboration and speaking engagements.

### How does a student arrange for an embargo?

In consultation with their major advisor, a student may choose to embargo their work for a period of time between six months and seven years. Embargoes are renewable. Procedural requirements for an initial embargo include a letter co-signed by the student and their major advisor (and in some schools, approved by an Associate Provost, Dean, or another designated academic administrator) detailing the reason for delay, the length of embargo, and the author's contact information. More information can be found in the Guide for Writers of Theses and Dissertations [2].

### **What is open access?**

Open access is access to knowledge that is digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions. For more information, see the Library's Research Guide about open access [3] and FAQ: Open Access for Graduate Students [4].

### **Does open access of electronic theses and dissertations diminish publishing opportunities?**

Two recent studies have been published on this topic. One investigated publishing opportunities in the social sciences and the humanities [5] and one in the sciences [6]. In the social sciences and humanities, "findings indicate that manuscripts that are revisions of openly accessible ETDs are always welcome for submission or considered on a case-by-case basis by 82% of journal editors and 53.7 percent of university press directors polled." In the sciences, findings indicate "that more than half of the science journals responding (51.4%) reported that manuscripts derived from openly accessible ETDs are welcome for submission and an additional 29.1 percent would accept revised ETDs under certain conditions."

It is difficult to recommend a single course of action for students in any particular discipline. Authors considering requesting an embargo should research the policies of specific publishers with which they would like to work. BU library staff is most willing to help students and their advisors with this research. To request help, please email [open-help@bu.edu](mailto:open-help@bu.edu).

## **REFERENCES**

1. Aman, Valeria. (2013). The potential of preprints to accelerate scholarly communication - A bibliometric analysis based on selected journals. arXiv:1306.4856 [cs.DL]  
<http://arxiv.org/abs/1306.4856>
2. Boston University Libraries. Guide for Writers of Theses and Dissertations.  
<http://bu.edu/library/guide/theses>
3. Boston University Libraries. Open Access Research Guide.  
<http://www.bu.edu/library/guide/openaccess/>

4. Boston University Libraries. FAQ: Open Access for Graduate Students.  
<http://www.bu.edu/library/help/openbu/faq-open-access-for-graduate-students/>
5. Ramírez, Marisa L. et al. "Do Open Access Electronic Theses and Dissertations Diminish Publishing Opportunities in the Social Sciences and Humanities? Findings from a 2011 Survey of Academic Publishers." *College & Research Libraries* 74.4 (2013): 368–380. doi:10.5860/crl-356.
6. Ramírez, Marisa L. et al. "Do Open Access Electronic Theses and Dissertations Diminish Publishing Opportunities in the Sciences?" *College & Research Libraries* 75.6 (2014): 808–821. doi:10.5860/crl.75.6.808.