

NJLA CUS Technology Innovation Award 2007

Nomination

I would like to nominate Barbara Bender, David Pickens, Shaun Ellis, Ann Montanaro, Jay Rimmer, Barbara Sirman and Harvey Waterman for the NJLA CUS Technology Innovation Award. This team of people from the Libraries and The Graduate School - New Brunswick has successfully implemented RUetd, the Rutgers University Electronic Theses and Dissertations program. The innovative approach used to implement this ETD project uses technology in a way that has not been used by other institutions in their ETD applications.

The leadership for the project has come from the Libraries working in close partnership with The Graduate School. Frequent meetings and consultations held throughout the development year have shaped the project and helped the participants understand and meet the needs of all parties involved in the process. Team members have also consulted with other institutions that have implemented ETD programs in order to better identify the challenges of such a process and to profit from their experience and development. The first phase of the program is now in place for Rutgers' largest graduate school. May graduates will begin submitting ETDs during the spring 2007 semester and plans are being developed to make RUetd available to all Rutgers University graduate students within the coming semesters.

Project

RUetd is an open source software application that facilitates the process of submitting, evaluating, and preserving theses and dissertations. RUetd allows graduate students to securely submit their ETDs through a Web browser using LDAP authentication. Once an ETD is submitted, the graduate school administration module provides reviewers with secure access to the paper to ensure that it meets formatting standards and policies. Finally, when the paper has been approved by the graduate school, the Libraries ingest the ETD in RUcore, the Rutgers University Community Repository and export a copy of the bibliographic record to the online catalog. RUcore is built on the flexible framework of Fedora. When the ETD is exported to RUcore, the ingest process automatically creates a persistent ID (using the CNRI Handle system), a digital signature using SHA1 (secure hash algorithm), and an archival master.

Rutgers Libraries had many reasons for undertaking the implementation of an ETD program to replace printed theses and dissertations. First, it makes research done at the University readily accessible to scholars and part of the global research community. ETDs are available much more quickly than print versions, and can have many simultaneous readers. Furthermore, the ability to search the full text of ETDs makes them extremely valuable to researchers, who previously relied on searching titles or keywords to locate a relevant print version.

Another objective of RUetd is to save Libraries the costs associated with binding, cataloging, shelving, and maintaining theses and dissertations. RUetd gathers information and metadata from the student during the submission process thus minimizing the amount of time a librarian needs to spend cataloging the work. And, ETDs require no physical library space. These are both real savings to the Libraries.

Many contemporary theses and dissertations have supplementary materials that either augment the thesis, or are valuable digital resources themselves. A final objective of the Libraries is to store, manage, and provide access to these materials. Students are given the ability to submit these materials in digital form, along with descriptive metadata, which allows the library to better manage content preservation as the formats continue to evolve.

The Libraries are not the only ones who stand to benefit from the implementation of the ETD program. The graduate schools gain a better system for organizing and evaluating the documents. The automated margin and page number checking program added to the submission process eliminates the tedious task of taking a ruler to every page. RUetd also provides the graduate school with tools to track students throughout the submission process, and they can export graduation information from the system for official use. The graduate schools also benefit from the flexible collection structure implemented in RUcore. Each graduate school will have a collection of ETDs so they will also be able to include their ETDs within their academic department collections. Finally, the graduate school can use data collected in RUetd to better recognize members of the faculty who are active in serving on student advisory committees.

Since many different communities at Rutgers have an interest in establishing an ETD program, it takes vision and good leadership to facilitate a collaborative environment where all parties feel their needs are being addressed. By taking the lead on this project, the Rutgers University Libraries have reinforced their reputation as a community of forward thinkers who can apply the appropriate technical solutions to meet the University's research goals.

Nominee Contacts (Project Leads):

Ann Montanaro (montanar@rci.rutgers.edu)
Head, Systems Department
Rutgers University Libraries
Technical and Automated Services
47 Davidson Road
Piscataway, New Jersey 08854-5603
Phone: 732-445-5896 / fax: 732-445-5888

Barbara Bender (bbender@rci.rutgers.edu)
Associate Dean of Academic Support and Graduate Student Services
The Graduate School-New Brunswick
25 Bishop Place