



Discussion document on best practice for issues around theses publishing

Introduction

Traditionally, theses for higher degrees were published by universities in hard copy only. Now increasingly, these are also archived and may be made freely available via university repositories. They may or may not have associated licenses such as those from Creative Commons which also allow reuse.

Questions have arisen at COPE forums and other venues as to whether publication of theses, especially freely available ones, should be considered as “prior publications” when work from a thesis is submitted for publication to a journal. This document sets out some of the issues and suggests principles to consider.

We welcome feedback on this discussion document, after which it will be published as a guidance document. We particularly welcome comments from individuals and groups working in the Arts and Humanities, where we recognize there may be different practices and expectations from what is described below.

Reference
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What theses are relevant to publications?

There are two types of theses that are relevant to journal publishing.

First, the traditional thesis that contains the first account of work done during the course of a higher degree, and which is written usually in the form of multiple chapters bound together. The work in these chapters is otherwise unpublished and is usually largely the work of one person, the person who is studying for the degree under supervision from one or more senior academics.

The second type of thesis – thesis by publication—is one that consists, in whole or part, of papers that have already been published in academic journals.

Authors, especially in the arts and humanities may, publish their thesis in its entirety with a commercial or non-commercial publisher in the form of a book or monograph after their degree has been conferred.

General advice

Where a thesis (or a thesis chapter) contains otherwise unpublished work, such as the first description of an experiment or an original synthesis of an area of academic study it should NOT be considered prior publication. That is, it is acceptable for the work, or parts of the work, contained within the thesis to be submitted as a manuscript to a journal for publication or as a monograph to a publisher for publication. This condition applies even if the thesis is freely available via a university’s repository with or without the application of a license such as one from Creative Commons, which allows reuse.

General advice continued

In this way, the same principles should be applied as for preprints posted on preprint servers such as arxiv.org¹ or bioRxiv², or SocArXiv³.

If the thesis is comprised of papers already published, then these papers WILL be considered prior publication and cannot subsequently be published as original work. The usual considerations for duplicate publication apply in such cases i.e., secondary publication can only occur with the express permission of the journal that has published the work and the full awareness of the journal that is republishing it. If the articles have been published in journal where a Creative Commons license is applied, then the conditions of that license should be followed.

Specific points

The following apply to work derived from an original thesis, not a degree by publication

- On submission to a journal, the thesis should be acknowledged as the source of the work, usually with a citation to the thesis.
- When the article is published it must also include a citation or other acknowledgement of the thesis
- The same principle applies to data within a manuscript, or to individual figures or tables if they are derived from a thesis
- If any part of a thesis has co-authors, the usual rules for authorship apply and they should be in agreement with the decision to submit paper or papers for publication.
- Authors should be aware of and are responsible for knowing their own universities' policies on the publication of theses in order to ensure that any journal publication does not violate that policy.

Conclusion

Journals

- Should have clear policies about work derived from theses and should usually consider them as similar to preprints
- Should provide clear instructions on how to cite work derived from theses

Authors

- Should inform journals about any work contained in a thesis that form the basis of a submitted manuscript – ie provide a citation to the thesis
- Should be aware of their institutions' policies on publication and availability of theses

Examples of journals which have policies on theses

<http://libguides.caltech.edu/publisherpolicies>

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03075070802049236>

¹ <https://arxiv.org/>

² <http://biorxiv.org/>

³ <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/jebhy/>