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Ivy Torres-Morales

*Florida International University, itorresv@fiu.edu*

Rebecca Bakker

*Florida International University, rbakker@fiu.edu*

Jill Krefft

*Florida International University, jkrefft@fiu.edu*

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# **Tracking Departmental Name Changes for Electronic Theses and Dissertations**

Florida International University  
Digital Collections Center

Ivy Torres Morales (itorresv@fiu.edu)

Rebecca Bakker (rbakker@fiu.edu)

Jill Krefft (jkrefft@fiu.edu)

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# Tracking Departmental Name Changes for Electronic Theses and Dissertations

## Introduction

University programs and departments are ever evolving, presenting unique challenges when attempting to systematically archive and preserve student scholarly work. At Florida International University (FIU), we use a controlled vocabulary for graduate program names in our electronic theses and dissertation (ETD) collection. While this system worked initially for current electronic theses and dissertation deposits, as we began digitizing older eETDs, we recognized the errors in metadata for program names and the complexity of program name changes in a controlled vocabulary.

Florida International University was founded in 1972 and has grown to be the nation's largest Urban Research University, with five campuses, an enrollment of over 57,000 students, and 190 unique degree programs. In 2009, FIU began the ETD program as a voluntary initiative, and by 2012, it became mandatory for all theses and dissertation programs to submit an electronic version of their theses or dissertations to the institutional repository, [Digital Commons](#). The ETD workflow (Figure 1) calls for graduate students to submit their respective theses/dissertations along with appropriate metadata directly into Digital Commons. FIU's University Graduate school manages the initial submission of ETDs and the FIU Libraries' Digital Collections Center processes the documents for preservation and publishes them in Digital Commons. The Digital Collections Center also conducts quality control and monitors usage of the ETD collection, and currently processes 85-100 ETDs a semester.

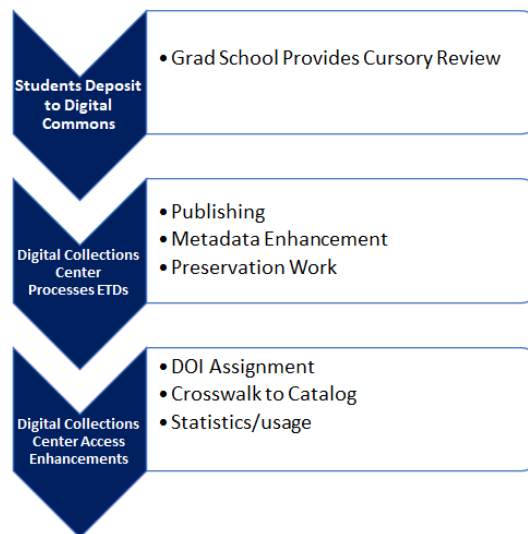


Figure 1. FIU ETD workflow

In 2014 , after receiving a tech fee grant, the Digital Collections Center and university partners began a project to digitize the legacy collection of physical theses and dissertations held by FIU Libraries, and incorporate them into the ETD collection in Digital Commons, as a way of expanding the scope and scholarly output of the university. This Retrospective Theses and Dissertations (RTD) project included documents from the first FIU graduate students in 1976, up until 2011, when all submissions became electronic. As the bound theses and dissertations already existed as books at the FIU library, they had corresponding library catalog records with the respective metadata associated for each document, and that list was extracted and compiled into a tracking spreadsheet for the 4,500 records in the RTD project. The degree discipline for each document was listed in a miscellaneous notes field for each MARC record, however, so when the data was compiled it was not possible to directly map that in the metadata export.

As we began adding the digitized RTDs to our Digital Commons repository, we realized the existing metadata, along with the drop-down program list created when we implemented the ETD program, was no longer sufficient to address the changing names of Majors and Programs throughout FIU's four-decade long history. The degree discipline metadata harvested from the catalog was mapped to the nearest common Major or Program from the current drop-down list, instead of fully representing the name of the program listed on the theses or dissertation. As a result, the record's metadata did not accurately indicate the degree discipline received at the time. For example, there were many RTDs for a Master of Arts in "Comparative Sociology." However, "Comparative Sociology" is no longer a degree available and so theses and dissertations in that discipline were instead placed under the university's current "Global and Sociocultural Studies" program.

Accurate metadata is of utmost importance when it comes to electronic records, and when we were about a quarter of the way through digitizing our RTDs we realized we were going to need to make changes to our workflow. By that time, some alumni had reached out to us that the program listed on the metadata record for their theses or dissertation was not correct (as part of the RTD project, each alumni is contacted individually for permission to make the document available online, which allows for direct communication). We determined we were going to have to take a comprehensive look at how we were handling degree disciplines for our RTDs and ETDs and make the necessary changes to ensure our records were accurate.

### **Parameters of Digital Commons**

As mentioned previously, at FIU, graduate students submit and provide metadata via a submission form in Digital Commons. These submissions go into the main electronic thesis and dissertation collection. There is one field for degree type (such as Doctor of Philosophy, Master of Music, etc.) and one field that describes the Major/Program. These fields are drop-down menus in order to maintain consistency in the program and degree vocabulary students submit (Figure 2). We recognized that without this standardization, students might provide many

variations of one program name and the drop-down menu served to create a controlled vocabulary for this field.

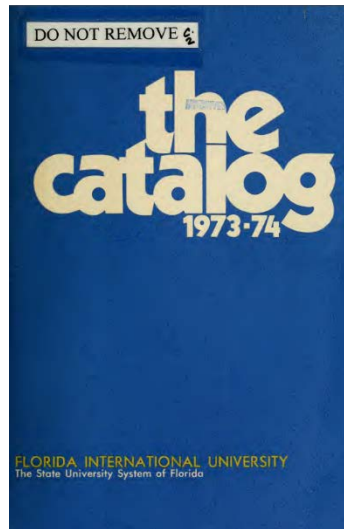
The image shows a portion of a web form. At the top, there is a label 'Document Type' above a dropdown menu with 'Thesis' selected. Below that is a label 'Degree' above a dropdown menu with 'None' selected. A red 'REQUIRED' icon is to the left of the label 'Major/Program'. Below this label is a dropdown menu that is open, showing a list of departments. The list starts with '<-Please Select Department-->' and ends with 'Comparative Sociology'. The first item in the list is highlighted in blue. Below the dropdown menu is a label 'First Advisor's Committee Title'.

**Figure 2. Major/Program Drop Down List on Submission Form in Digital Commons**

The program list in Digital Commons is primarily managed by FIU's graduate school. As new programs became available and other programs ceased to exist, the graduate school would inform us of those changes. However, one drawback of the drop-down list is if a value on the list is modified or removed, the values are also modified and removed across all theses and dissertations records containing that value. Therefore, we could not remove expired degree disciplines from the drop-down list, as it would impact existing records. In order to maintain a controlled list as well as expand the list for old and new programs, we realized we needed to modify our existing workflow.

In our preparation, we reached out to other institutions who used Digital Commons to publish their ETDs to see if there were established best practices for creating a controlled list of program names. Many institutions used free text fields to allow for name changes in programs rather than adding or changing a drop-down list. For institutions where staff input the theses and dissertations metadata, this made sense. In our case, with the documents being submitted by students, we were concerned that the quality control necessary to ensure degree name consistency might be burdensome. An extensive drop-down list that included legacy programs as well as current program names was not ideal but would at least ensure a controlled vocabulary. Our first task then was to identify relevant modifications in the history of FIU graduate programs to make appropriate changes to Digital Commons.

## Identifying program/disciplines names through FIU history



Tracking the evolution of named degree programs at FIU became a necessity to minimize this name ambiguity. Luckily, FIU's graduate course catalogs traditionally promoted the educational offerings over time, and they proved to be the sources of choice to collect the needed data. Another valuable feature of the graduate catalogs was their availability in virtual form: the Digital Collections Center had already digitized copies of most academic years since the school's inception. Additionally, since 2006-2007, FIU offered catalogs to new students only in digital form. However, the main difficulty with using the catalogs was their extensive heterogeneity in language and content. Designing a functional table to collect data from every catalog was a challenge. The initial table design consisted of a single EXCEL worksheet with the following premises:

- Labels (School/College, Programs, and Degree names) to use in the collecting table was somewhat consistent through the catalogs over time
- Data was straight-forward

After reviewing many of the catalogs, the need to abandon the initial premises became obvious, as the course catalogs in the early years lacked a clear vocabulary on certain terms. For example, the meaning of the word "Programs" could be equivalent to Fields, Majors (occasionally used as Specializations), Graduate Degrees, Academic Degrees, Academic Programs, Academic Majors, and Campus Programs, depending on the year of the catalog used. Some of the data complexities discovered had to do with the subtleties of the programs/ degrees themselves. For instance, the 2001-2002 catalog described the following offerings:

*A Doctor of Philosophy in Social Welfare* at the University Park Campus

vs.

*A Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work* at the Biscayne Bay Campus.

In this instance, one degree might have been heavily clinical in contrast with the alternative or have other reasons for the variation in degree name. These sorts of disparities persisted throughout the course catalogs. Other perplexities found in the School's catalogs could be attributed to the continuous institutional expansion, and lack of centralized information between campuses. For instance, the 1978/1979 catalog promoted a "Master **of** Business Administration" at the newly opened North Campus, while the Tamiami Campus advertised a "Master **in** Business Administration." Decisions had to be made about whether these inconsistencies were results of typographical errors, or if they signified meaningful differences between degree programs at their respective campuses that should be carried over into our master list of degree disciplines.

The analysis of the degrees through review of the course catalogs generated the following statistics:

- 48 FIU catalogs reviewed
- One EXCEL workbook with 57 worksheets created
- Three EXCEL worksheet designs attempted
- Seven EXCEL Table designs attempted
- 37 Nine-column worksheet tables produced (years 1972-1973 to 2006-2007)
- 11 Ten-column worksheet tables generated (years 2007-2008 to 2017-2018)
- 3,979 EXCEL entry rows created

The content findings also turned statistics as follows:

- 13 Campus or modality name modifications identified
- 46 School or College name revisions recorded
- 86 Program-name alterations (new and modified) counted
- 165 degree-names changes (new, or modified) recognized

## **Methodology**

The course catalogs recorded the expansion of FIU in terms of degrees, campuses, and teaching modalities. Midway through the project, the Digital Collections Center team made recommendations to refrain from collecting data about Specializations, Concentrations, Majors (mostly used to mean Programs) and Tracks and Exit options (Thesis, non-Thesis). It was determined that we needed to keep our analysis at a top level to track the necessary data (Figure 3).

Data collected in all tables referred to:

- Schools/ Colleges
- Fields / Majors/ Graduate Degrees/ Academic Degrees/ Academic Programs/ Academic Majors/ Campus Programs/ Modality Programs

- Specializations/ Concentrations/ Majors/ Tracks – Limited to earlier years
- Degree Types
- Exit Options – Collected only for a few earlier tables
- Main campus programs (Tamiami/ University Park/ Modesto A. Maidique)
- Second-oldest campus offerings (Interama/ North Miami/ Bay Vista)
- Broward County degrees. Also denominated Broward County Center, FIU Broward, FIU Broward Pines Center, and FIU I-75 programs
- Evening and Weekend programs, or degrees

	Field/Majors/Graduate Degrees/Academic Degrees/Academic Majors/Campus Programs/Modality Programs	Specialization/Concentration/Major/Track	Degree	Exit Options	University Park	Biscayne Bay Programs	FIU Broward - Pines Center Programs	Downtown Programs	Evening and Weekend
1	School/ College								
2	College of Architecture and The Arts	Architecture	Master of Architecture		X				
3		Architecture	Master of Arts in Architecture		X				
4		Interior Design	Master of Arts in Interior Design		X				
5		Landscape Architecture	Master of Arts in Landscape Architecture		X				
6		Visual Arts	Master of Fine Arts in Visual Arts		X				
7		Interior Design	Master of Interior Design		X				
8		Landscape Architecture	Master of Landscape Architecture		X				
9		Music	Master of Music		X				
10		Music Education	Master of Science in Music Education		X				
11	College of Arts and Sciences	African -New World Studies	Master of Arts in		X	X		X	
12		Asian Studies	Master of Arts in		X				
13		Comparative Sociology	Master of Arts in		X				
14		Economics	Master of Arts in		X			X	
15		English	Master of Arts in		X	X			
16		History	Master of Arts in		X				
17		International Studies	Master of Arts in		X				
18		Latin American and Caribbean Studies	Master of Arts in		X				
19		Liberal Studies	Master of Arts in		X			X	
20			Master of Arts		X				

**Figure 3. Degree/Program Name Change Spreadsheet**

Tables from the years 2007 to 2017 introduced an additional column-heading to include the Downtown campus (also referred to as Downtown on Brickell) programs. It was not possible to review all catalogs on a single day. Thus, the following strategies helped to manage the memory of novelties and changes:

- Gathering information from the two, or three, page listings described within the first 25 pages of each catalog.



- Using colors to identify changes on consecutive catalogs and increase readability. Each spreadsheet used:
  - Green to code anything new, including modifications.
  - Light orange to call the attention of programs at the main campus.
  - Blue to represent the second-oldest campus.
  - Bright yellow to bring attention to possible mistakes.
  - Light-salmon to identify Broward programs.
  - Light brown to feature evening and weekend offerings.
  - Bright violet to spotlight the Downtown campus degrees.
- Working on consecutive EXCEL spreadsheets one by one.
- Copying the most recently completed EXCEL Worksheet and pasting it into the next blank sheet to recognize changes. Then, contrasting it against the new catalog and adjusting its colors accordingly.

### **Lessons Learned**

We learned that course catalogs at FIU were in some ways marketing tools to segment, target, and position the different educational offerings to prospective students. Though historical in nature, they could not be relied upon as completely historically accurate indicators of the degrees offered throughout FIU's history. The catalogs in some ways reflected the aspirations of the university more than the reality and demonstrate the ways FIU strove to find its educational niche. For a new and rapidly growing school, this is not surprising, but did mean that we had to use the data we compiled with a grain of salt. For example, if a degree was offered for one year and then never showed up again, it made sense to investigate if there were any graduates of the program before we added the name to our master list.

In addition to its marketing practices, the institution's continuous re-organization induced the change of name of many of its degree-offerings, Departments, Schools, Colleges, and campuses. The most widespread occurred in 2007/2008 when FIU modified all its Colleges and Schools' offerings to make way to the opening of the School of Medicine in 2009/2010. At the time, many programs closed or relocated to different Colleges.

Additionally, thorough familiarity with the catalogs facilitated the development of a mindset favorable to simplicity. Furthermore, identifying "landmark" catalogs with degree offerings at newly inaugurated institutional spaces expedited the classification of labels. Finally, it would have been best to set EXCEL table designs using the most recent catalog, which had all campuses and modalities in place.

### **Outcome**

The benefits of having a list like this is we now not only have an accurate representation of our degree disciplines, but we also have an artifact of FIU's history. The difficult work of compiling and organizing this information has already been undertaken, and we have shared the information with the Graduate School and Academic Affairs. Our University Archives

department has also recognized this as an important resource to assist with their local authority record development for institutional materials. Future development would be to redesign the content of the entire workbook into a single Worksheet could happen using dropdown menus for fields with multiple historical column labels.

Our first task following our investigation was to add older program and degrees to the drop-down list in Digital Commons. We are adding the programs to the drop-down list as they become necessary. This means as the RTD records are created in Digital Commons and we identify a program is missing from the drop down, we have the program added to the drop-down list. This is to avoid unnecessarily adding programs and overwhelming the list.

Our next step is to correct the programs on RTD metadata already posted and publicly available in Digital Commons where the programs were incorrectly described. This presents challenges, particularly in identifying which RTDs have the incorrect program. While this work was extensive and sometimes tedious, we are invested in maintaining the integrity of the metadata for these records as stewards of our institutional record.

**Ivy Torres Morales** is a Library Associate for the Digital Center, the Ask Desk, and the Geographical Information Systems departments at the Hubert Library of Florida International University. Part of her Digital Center functions includes researching, collecting, and interpreting data for projects such as the USETDA in collaboration with the Assistant Director of Digital Collections, the IR Coordinator librarian, and the Digital Collections Librarian. In her capacity, Ivy supports the Digital Collections department's efforts to maintain high standards in the curation process of Electronic Theses and Dissertations to facilitate their continued access to the educational community.

**Rebecca Bakker** is the Digital Collections Librarian at Florida International University, where she works with university and community partners on digital projects, digital scholarship and collection development. She oversees the mass digitization project of the university's Retrospective Theses and Dissertations. In addition, Rebecca regularly conducts workshops, trainings and classes on digital humanities skills such as oral histories, digitizing, digital tools and metadata creation.

**Jill Krefft** is FIU's Institutional Repository Coordinator supporting open access to research, scholarship, creative works and history of the FIU community. In this role Jill supports efforts to provide access to digitized and born digital collections produced at FIU while maintaining high standards for metadata, collection curation and preservation. These efforts ensure continued access to unique collections supporting education and community engagement in South Florida.