Finding Relevant Dissertations

4th Library Seminar for HCE Graduate Students, January 14, 2016

“Tools for Healthcare Ethics Dissertation Reviews”:
http://http://guides.library.duq.edu/hce-dissertations

- ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global - Always use this first!
- Duquesne University Electronic Theses & Dissertations (ETDs)
- Classic Catalog: The Gumberg Library Online Catalog - for older theses and dissertations
- NDLTD: Networked Digital Library of Theses & Dissertations
- OATD: Open Access Theses and Dissertations
- WorldCat
- CINAHL: Cumulative Index to Nursing & Allied Health Literature
- Links to databases of theses and dissertations by country/continent
- Information on how to get dissertations not available for free online or at the Gumberg Library
Searching for Dissertations for your Dissertation Review

1. Use the databases on the “Tools for Healthcare Ethics Dissertation Reviews” site in the order in which they are presented, from left to right.

2. In your dissertation review, you are searching relevant databases to see if someone else has already used your proposed dissertation topic. If someone has already used the topic, you will need to change yours, since a dissertation must be an original research project.

3. Usually students will ask for help with their dissertation review when they already have their dissertation topic determined. Then we search the relevant databases hoping that someone has not already used their topic. But it is a good idea to use at least ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global earlier in the process to get a sense as to which aspects of a subject have already been written about, and which aspects are still open to researchers. Then you can make a more informed choice regarding your topic, and will not have a nasty surprise later when you find that someone has already claimed the topic.

4. Once you have a dissertation topic, but before searching, think of synonyms for every major concept in your topic. This is important since different people may write about a particular topic and use very different terminology. You will probably need to conduct a number of searches in each of the databases on “Tools for Healthcare Ethics Dissertation Reviews” using these variations in terminology to make sure that your topic is truly unique. That all being said, sometimes there really are not any good synonyms for a word describing a concept.

5. As you search, be on the lookout for useful search terms you have not already thought of.

6. Keep a search log. Since, as part of your dissertation review process, you will be required to document the steps you took, it is a good idea to write down the exact searches you do in each of the databases on “Tools for Healthcare Ethics Dissertation Reviews.”

7. You should also write down the number of results your get from these database searches. While ideally, we are hoping to find no dissertations on your topic, your database searches will probably retrieve some, the records for which contain your search terms. You will need to look over the abstracts, previews, and/or full text (if available) for any dissertations that are retrieved in order to be able to write about why the topics of these are different from what you propose. For most, you will probably just be able to say that the words and phrases you used in searching happened to be in the database records, but that the dissertations were on different aspects of the subject.

8. Along with keeping a written search log, you may also want to print out each search interface after you have entered your search terms but before you run the search, so you have an exact record of what you searched and how you searched it. You should also, then, print out your
search result (if there is one and it is not too long) to have an exact record of the dissertations your searches retrieve and which you have to examine.

9. Let’s say you search and find a dissertation that is close to what you want to do, but not exactly the same. Print out the record for this. As you document your search process, you will want to mention this dissertation so that you can say how it is different from what you want to do, or how you will tweak your proposed topic to assure it is unique.

Search Tips That Can Be Used in Most Databases

1. To search for an exact phrase, put the phrase in double quotation marks.
   
   Example: “healthcare ethics”

2. Use truncation to find different forms of a word. To truncate, take the ending off a word and put an asterisk on the resulting root.
   
   Example: “psych*” will retrieve “psychology,” “psychologist,” “psychological,” etc.

3. Use Advanced Search interfaces. These will usually give you multiple search boxes. Enter each of your separate concepts on a different line on the interface.

4. Most databases will allow you to be more specific in searching by looking for your search terms in specific fields. Start by just running your search as a keyword search, meaning just let the search engine look for your search terms anywhere it finds them. This is the broadest search you can do. If you get too many results to reasonably look through, choose to look for your search words as subjects, which is a more specific way to search. You may also want to look for your search terms in titles of documents, since words in titles usually indicate what a document is about.

5. Keep your searching simple. It is better to run lots of individual searches that are correct, rather than trying for one mega-search with incorrect search syntax which will either not get you a result at all, or which might leave out something that you really need to see.