

Webinar Logistics

- This webinar is being recorded. The recording and associated slides will be sent to all participants after the webinar.
- Please submit your questions to the Q&A feature at the bottom of your screen.
- You are welcome to use the chat to discuss with other attendees.

Making Dissertations & Theses Accessible:

Considerations for Graduate Deans
related to the April 24, 2026, ADA
Title II Deadline for Digital
Accessibility



PARTNER INNOVATION
WEBINAR SERIES

Making Dissertations & Theses Accessible: Navigating The Change

Markus Kemmelmeier

Vice Provost for Graduate Education / Dean of the Graduate School



University of Nevada, Reno



University of Nevada, Reno

University Quick Facts

- **Established in 1874**
- **Enrollment:** 24,000 undergraduate
 - 3,500 graduate students
- **R1 Carnegie designated**
- **Research Funding:** \$195 million annually
- **60 doctoral programs, 85 Master's programs**
- **300 ETD's per year**
 - ~170 Ph.D. dissertations
 - ~130 Master's theses



Webinar Agenda

1. Introduction (Markus Kemmelmeier, Graduate Dean)
2. Kennesaw State University (Juliet Langman, Graduate Dean)
3. University of Pittsburgh (John Fudrow, Repository Librarian)
4. University of Nevada, Reno (Kara Cleveland, Director of Operations)
5. ProQuest (Mark Dill, Product Manager)
6. Panel Discussion / Audience Q&A

Please use the Chat Feature to submit questions!

Change in Federal Rules as of April 24, 2026

- Electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs) must meet Web Content Accessible Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level AA requirements to comply with Title II of the Americans with Disability Act.
 - Nondiscrimination regarding individuals with visual disabilities
 - Enables assistive technology to read electronic documents
 - Rule is not retroactive; only new ETDs
- [Final Rule](#) passed in 2024 under Biden Administration
- Consequence in case of noncompliance:
 - Federal investigations, enforcement action
 - Lawsuits by advocacy groups, private parties
 - Potential exclusion of visually impaired individuals

Universities must respond

- Expands existing requirements to render student- and public-facing materials accessible
 - Recall ~2018 surge of complaints, lawsuits, federal enforcement action
- Requires **cooperation** different groups on campus to ensure the accessibility of the final ETD
 - Students/Candidates
 - Faculty Advisors
 - Program Directors
 - Graduate School
 - Librarians/Information Scientists
 - Digital Services/Digital Learning Unit
 - ProQuest

Questions of

- Organizational Structure
- Communication
- Training Resources
- Remediation Resources

Critical Questions

- Who is responsible for remediating the documents?
- How is accessibility requirement and process for remediation communicated?
- What training or resources have to be provided?
- Who verifies that the document is accessible (enough)? How is it verified?
- What is the standard for accessibility? What tools should be used?
- How can we minimize the remediation work required to achieve this standard?
- How does remediation work for different types of users (e.g., Word, LaTeX)?
- What if students cannot render a document sufficiently accessible?
- How can ProQuest help to ensure the accessibility of ETDs?



KENNESAW STATE
UNIVERSITY

- ❖ Established 1963
- ❖ R2 Carnegie Designated
- ❖ Fall 2025 Enrollment 51,375
- ❖ Graduate Enrollment 5,304
- ❖ ETDs per year
 - ❖ 70-80 Doctoral
 - ❖ 130-140 Masters'
- ❖ 9 Academic Colleges
- ❖ 9 Doctoral Degrees offered
- ❖ 13 Masters' Degrees with thesis option

Accessibility: The Basic Four

Document Structure

- Semantic (Heading) Structure
- List Styles
- Tables
- Text Color Contrast
- Descriptive Links

Alternative Text

- Text alternative for images, charts, graphs, etc.
- No images of text

Media Accessibility

- Transcripts of audio recordings
- Closed Captions of video with times audio
- Audio descriptions for video where content is communicated only visually

Accessible Applications

- Ensuring third-party applications and content are compliant
 - Accessibility statements
 - Voluntary Product Accessibility Templates (VPATs)

ETD Overview

- Centralized approval process
 - Through Library and Graduate College
 - Employ Digital Commons as dissertation/thesis repository
 - ProQuest harvests from the repository and disseminates ETDs through its databases
- Word templates, associated checklists maintained
 - LaTeX templates will be available by April 2026
- Workshops available to support faculty and students
- Review and repair support available to students

Stakeholders engaged

- Graduate Council
- Doctoral program coordinators
- Library staff
- Graduate College staff
- Students and advisors
- Masters' thesis program coordinators
- Writing Center

Phased Approach



2022-2023

Initial discussion on accessibility

Review of existing dissertation archives

Partnership with KSU Library/Digital Commons



2023-2024

Dissertation Templates created & revised

- voluntary usage

Reorganization of Digital Commons repository

Proquest partnership initiated

Creation of workshop for students



2024-2025

Doctoral Dissertation Templates revised

- required usage

Masters' Templates introduced

• voluntary usage
2 workshops designed

- Why an ETD template?
- How to format your ETD



2025-2026

Masters' Templates revised

- required usage

Development of LaTeX version of ETD template

Introduction of YuJa Panorama LMS
Accessibility Platform

Accessibility and ETD Creation

@the University of Pittsburgh



University of
Pittsburgh®



- Established **1787**
R1 Carnegie Designated
Fall 2025 Enrollment **35,528**
Graduate Enrollment **9,849**
ETDs per year **~650**
14 Professional Schools

ETD Process Overview

- De-centralized approval process
 - Each school reviews formatting and mediates approval
 - Migrated workflow to ProQuest ETD Administrator (2025)
- Word and LaTeX templates maintained
 - First created in ~2005
 - Updated as often as needed
 - Tutorials and workshops presented by ETD Support (ULS)
- Focused on accessibility, usability, readability, and consistency.

PDF Accessibility Standards

- Document Identifiers
 - Title
 - Creator/Author
- Reading Order
- Tagged Structure
 - Heading Styles
- Images/Figures
 - Alt Text
- Tables
 - Column Headings
 - Cell Shading Contrast
 - Machine Readable
- Hyperlinks
 - Alt Text
- Accessible Fonts
- Supplemental Files

Source Edits vs PDF Remediation

- Time spent remediating depends on multiple factors
 - Can the author edit the source file?
 - Is the editing process finished, or will there be other versions?
 - Do you have alternate text for figures, or can the author provide that?
- What are the standards that you will be checking against?

Reframing Workflows for ADA Deadline

- Interim Policy
 - A checklist of minimum accessibility requirements was created
 - Students would be responsible for performing this accessibility check
 - Resources and tutorials are provided for the students
- Future Planning
 - Determine areas of need for resources and support
 - Establish feasibility of accessibility check process
 - Identify pre- and post-submission tools for editing and remediation
 - Explore template modifications and guideline revisions

Lessening the Burden on Students

- Proposal for a Modified Scholarly Publishing Model
 - Student uses customized template to draft their ETD content
 - Word/LaTeX/Other...
 - Final content version is approved by defense committee
 - Does not need to be fully formatted or checked for accessibility
 - Student and School finalize graduation requirements and deliver to team.
 - A designated team of publishing experts at the university would process and refine the formatting of the files before releasing to ProQuest/D-Scholarship@Pitt

Making Dissertations & Theses Accessible: University of Nevada, Reno

Kara Cleveland & Markus Kemmelmeier

Director of Operations | Dean of the Graduate School



University of Nevada, Reno

When it dawned on us....

- August 2025

Committee formation	
Libraries	Graduate School
Faculty volunteers	Office of Digital Learning
	Office of Information Technology

- Fall 2025

Assessing the Need	Assessing Resources
Initial communication with Graduate directors, faculty	Existing Accessibility-related processes Online resources & personnel
Collecting samples of ETDs	Consult with General Counsel's Office
Word users vs. LaTeX users	Tools required for Word/LaTeX users

Outline of a Process (1 of 2)

- Graduate students must render thesis accessible
 - “Part of thesis formatting process“
 - Download template
 - Online Accessibility Course, modules for Word and LaTeX users
 - Workshops

WORD users	LaTeX users
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Pass” Word accessibility checker• Convert to PDF• “Pass” Adobe Acrobat Accessibility Checker (meets WCAG 2.1)• Save Acrobat Accessibility Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• LaTeX accessibility package, tools• Compile PDF• “Pass” Adobe Acrobat Accessibility Checker (meets WCAG 2.1)• Save Acrobat Accessibility Report

- Students submits thesis + **Acrobat Accessibility report** to faculty advisor

Outline of a Process (2 of 2)

- **Faculty advisor** reviews thesis and **Accessibility Report**
 - If “passed”, sign off on thesis
 - If any instance of “failed”; return to student
 - If problem, seek help from Accessibility specialist (Digital Learning/Services)
- Faculty advisor submits Final Review form & **Accessibility Report** to the Graduate School
- Student submits thesis to ProQuest

Adobe Acrobat Pro

- Available on all University-owned machines
- No free download license for students

Students must

- Use campus computer
- Get trial version
- Purchase the application

Implementation

- Communication plan (March 2026)
 - Graduate faculty
 - Students
- Training events
 - Graduate Director events (April 2026)
 - Student workshops (April 2026)
- Continuously updated suite of online materials, accessibility modules
- Partial compliance May & August 2026 graduations
- 100% compliance by December 2026



ProQuest ETD Administrator

Making Dissertations & Theses Accessible

Mark Dill : Product Manager | Wed, Feb 25th

ProQuest ETD Administrator

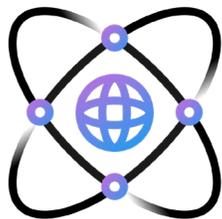
Supporting Global Scholarship



691
institutions



932
Sites



16
countries

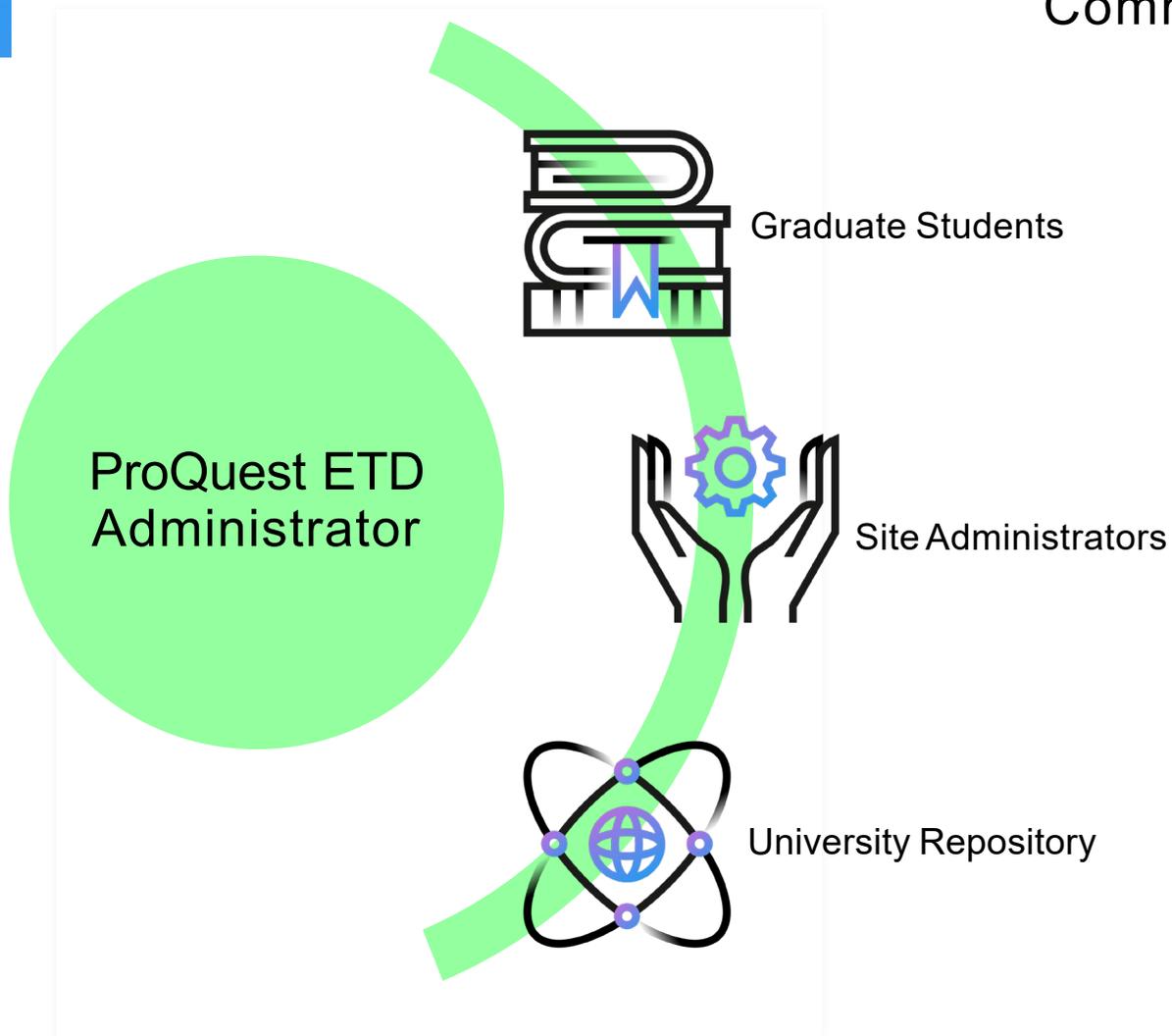


80k
submissions

Developing scalable
solutions for diverse
institutions and global
student communities.

ProQuest ETD Administrator – Accessibility Obstacles

Common Themes Identified Through User Feedback



1. **Define Accessibility:** Address the absence of a shared definition, unclear ownership, varying institutional requirements, and inconsistent responsibilities across departments prior to IR submission.
2. **Technical Hurdles:** Overcome the complexity of producing accessible PDFs, reliance on specialized skills, uneven software access, and the high cost and limited effectiveness of post-creation remediation.
3. **Reduce Administrator Burden:** Mitigate the added workload of accessibility checks, prevent delays to approval and publication timelines, safeguard on-time graduation goals, and resolve challenges in enforcing guidelines.

ProQuest ETD Administrator: PDF Accessibility Review Tool

New PDF Accessibility Review Tool

- What: Optional feature that will allow users to check for PDF accessibility.
 - Three possible outcomes: (Pass, Warning, Fail)
 - Report for each ETD to share with students/faculty
- When: Coming Q2 2026
- Who: Will be available for all site administrators on release
- How: Administrators can check PDFs as needed. Is not required to run for delivery to ProQuest.

PDF Accessibility

Run an accessibility check on the submitted PDF to ensure it meets accessibility standards. Results can be shared with the student author for remediation.

[Run Accessibility Check](#) [Share Results](#)

Latest Check Completed Passed The PDF passed all accessibility checks. No issues were found. Checked: 01/15/2026 11:45:32 AM EST

Check Details

PDF Document: Dissertation_final3b.pdf (31 kB)	Check Date: 01/15/2026 11:45:32 AM EST
Status: Passed	Issues Found: 0

Accessibility Check History

PDF File	Check Date	Status	Issues Found	Actions
Dissertation_final3b.pdf (31 kB)	01/15/2026 11:45:32 AM EST	Passed	0	View Download
Dissertation_final3a.pdf (31 kB)	01/13/2026 12:14:22 AM EST	Passed	0	View Download
Dissertation_final2.pdf (31 kB)	01/12/2026 10:25:52 AM EST	Warning	3	View Download
Dissertation_final1.pdf (29 kB)	01/10/2026 09:15:57 AM EST	Failed	12	View Download

ProQuest ETD Administrator: Future Enhancements

- PDF Accessibility Review & Workflow Enhancements
 - Expand review tools into the author submission workflow
 - Enable site-level configuration (Required vs. Optional, custom settings)
 - Enhance reporting functionality
 - Update and modernize the administrative dashboard
- Automated Document Remediation
 - Author-driven remediation: Provide automated accessibility remediation directly within ETD to support self-service correction
 - Administrator-driven remediation: Enable administrators to initiate automated remediation when needed

ProQuest ETD Administrator: Discovery Community

Help improve the ProQuest ETD Administrator experience



Get early access to new features and help inform timeline and product roadmap



Participate in regular virtual community workshops to:

- Review new ideas and test new features
- Discuss your application needs through user stories
- Participate in other product discovery activities



Be part of a national community of colleagues

Please let us know if you're interested in the Discovery Community!

Upcoming Events:

SUMMER WORKSHOP & NEW DEANS INSTITUTE



CHICAGO, IL

JULY 11-15,
2026



PARTNER INNOVATION
WEBINAR SERIES