

Access to Research Degree Thesis by Other Scholars

A key outcome of a research programme leading to the award of a PhD, EngD, MPhil or MD(Res) degree is the accessibility of the thesis embodying that research for the benefit of scholars and the public generally. A research candidate might also publish material generated from their research in the form of a paper in a journal.

Storage of the Thesis

After the viva examination, and the subsequent approval of any minor corrections required by the examiners, a final copy of the thesis must be submitted electronically to the Imperial College Library.

The College now has a digital repository known as Spiral (<http://spiral.imperial.ac.uk>), which provides access to an electronic copy of the thesis through the internet.

Theses submitted in any other format will not be accepted and may result in the award of the degree being delayed. Supervisors and students are able to request an embargo to the thesis, preventing the thesis from being publicly available for an agreed period of time.

Prior to 2007, the sole format of the thesis was generally the hard copy on the library shelves but since then the electronic copy of all Imperial-awarded theses have been added to Spiral and are available to members of the College only. Theses which currently exist only in hard copy can be added to Spiral upon application by the student and the principal supervisor.

All theses submitted for examination after 1 March 2013 will automatically be made open access in Spiral, unless the candidate together with their supervisor apply for an embargo.

A bound, hard copy submission is no longer required for Imperial College theses.

Applying for an embargo

While in the majority of cases candidates will naturally wish their theses to be readily accessible to other scholars principally through Spiral, the College recognises that there may be situations where an embargo to the thesis would be appropriate for a defined period.

Imperial offers a flexible and extendable embargo system to address a number of particular issues. A two year embargo, extendable normally in two year periods up to six years maximum, may be sought to both formats of the thesis, if either the student or their primary supervisor requests this. The usual reasons for seeking an embargo include [a] allowing time to publish papers; [b] commercial sensitivity of some of the material; [c] allowing time to obtain a patent; [d] extreme sensitivity of some of the material e.g. in vivo experiments; and very rarely [e] UK national security. The application form for a restriction of access to the thesis can be found at this link – thesis declaration form:

<http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/registry/exams/thesisandvivas>

If a situation arises whereby a student or the principal supervisor may need to request a restriction of access after the thesis has been placed on open access in Spiral or where an inadvertent breach of copyright has been identified or where an allegation of plagiarism has been made, the College has a rapid take down policy which ensures that the thesis is removed from open access while the particular issue is investigated and resolved.

After the agreed embargo period all material will be published open access in Spiral. When a thesis is released from embargo, a warning will be sent to the student / primary supervisor to let them know when publication will take place and include a reminder that if since submission material within the thesis has been published elsewhere it should be confirmed that appropriate permissions are in place.