

## Plagiarism in theses and dissertations

### The Problem

The number of allegations of plagiarism in theses and dissertations is growing. This serious issue challenges the legitimacy of the degrees awarded by the university. If plagiarism is not detected until after documents have been submitted to the Graduate School and/or degrees have been awarded, then degree revocation is a potential outcome. The investigation of these cases and the process for degree revocation involves innumerable person-hours of departmental faculty, Graduate School staff, the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards, and the Office of the General Counsel.

### A Solution

If every thesis and dissertation is scanned for plagiarism and certified free of plagiarism prior to submission to the Graduate School, the problem is avoided (or greatly diminished).

### The Cost of the Solution

*Financial* – The university has a license to use iThenticate, a plagiarism detection solution. This program allows documents to be scanned to detect potential plagiarism.

*Human time* – This process requires that someone electronically submit the document for scanning. Next, the iThenticate report must be analyzed to determine whether issues identified are truly plagiarism. The detection of plagiarism requires expertise in the field of the research; thus the major professor is best positioned to interpret the iThenticate report.

### Proposal for Consideration

Departmental staff receive each thesis and dissertation prior to the date of the defense. Departmental staff submit the document for plagiarism detection via iThenticate. Once the report is generated, departmental staff give this report to the major professor (maybe all of the committee?). The major professor reviews the report and works with the student to correct issues of potential plagiarism prior to the defense.

### Implementation Plan (who does what)

- University – Train departmental staff to submit documents so that reports can be generated.
- University – Train faculty members to interpret the reports.
- University – Train students to avoid plagiarism.
- Departments – Develop an ‘in house’ plan for ensuring that all theses and dissertations can be certified free of plagiarism prior to submission to the Graduate School.
- Graduate Council/Faculty Senate – Endorsement of the plan to certify theses and dissertations are free of plagiarism.

### Goal

Implementation for Fall 2017.