

STOP
The
PRESSES

IS THE MONOGRAPH HEADED TOWARD AN E-ONLY FUTURE?

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ITHAKA S+R



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As scholars and students have grown increasingly able to gain access to needed scholarly materials in digital format, both their work processes and libraries' approaches to managing these materials have been fundamentally transformed. For journal literature in particular, the digital version—either a born-digital current issue or a digitized backfile—has become the default mode of access in most cases, with many libraries consequently deaccessioning little-used print journals in favor of electronic-only access. The digital availability of journal issues has made it clear that the atomic unit of a journal is an article, raising a host of questions about what this means for the journal as a bundle. While print versions of scholarly journals continue to play an important role in meeting community preservation goals, digital versions are, with a few important exceptions such as richly illustrated titles, proving to be a reasonable substitute if not an absolute improvement in satisfying discovery and access needs for scholarly journal materials. Now, as more and more scholarly monographs grow increasingly accessible in digital form, libraries and publishers are grappling with how to answer the question: will monographs also make a complete transition from print to electronic format?¹

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For purposes of this paper, the monograph denotes a long-form, typically book-length, scholarly narrative, typically written by an academic and published by a university press for an audience of fellow scholars (with occasional crossover use for instructional purposes). The monograph discussed in this paper is especially important in many humanities and some social sciences fields.²

ELECTRONIC VERSIONS ARE NOW WIDELY AVAILABLE

In print, publishers typically issue less than 1,000, and sometimes fewer than 500, copies of monographs. In these cases, academic and especially research libraries are the main customers. When demand warrants, a press may print a second edition or offer a paperback edition, the latter typically when there is significant course adoption potential.³

In recent years, many scholarly monographs—with perhaps the key exception of illustrated art history titles—have been published simultaneously in digital and print formats. Today, scholarly monographs are distributed digitally through the consumer channels of Amazon, Apple, Barnes & Noble, and Google, and they are also included in library channels, through publisher platforms such as those maintained by Springer and Wiley, as well as through aggregations, such as Ebook Library, EBSCO, Oxford Scholarship Online, Project Muse, and JSTOR.⁴

Ebook bundles offer some libraries a means to expand their monograph collections, just as the bundled site license model (ie. the “Big Deal”) in its first generation increased access to a wider variety of journals. For libraries whose

1 I am grateful to Rick Anderson, Heather Christenson, Patricia Fidler, Ross Housewright, Matthew Long, Kimberly Lutz, Deanna Marcum, Nancy Maron, and Kate Wulfson for their contributions and suggestions.

2 Other fields recognize different types of works with the appellation “monograph.” For example, in botany, a monograph is a systematic treatment of a genus or group; it contains extensive information on taxonomic history, morphology, and distribution.

3 The best estimates suggest that university presses – whose book publishing output goes well beyond the scholarly monograph – make roughly one-quarter of their book sales to libraries. See Joseph Esposito, “Hawking Radiation: Figuring Out How Many Books Are Sold to Libraries,” The Scholarly Kitchen, February 22, 2012, available at <http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2012/02/22/hawking-radiation-figuring-out-how-many-books-are-sold-to-libraries-2/> The share of their scholarly monograph output that is acquired by libraries is undoubtedly higher than this, especially when course adoption titles are excluded.

4 JSTOR and Ithaka S+R are two of the services offered by ITHAKA.

users crave immediate access after they find books online, or which serve a growing number of online students, ebooks are also a utilitarian choice.

While new distribution channels allow digital books to reach a wider audience, tracking sales has become more complex, and overall less transparent. University presses report growing sales in some fields through consumer digital channels such as Amazon's Kindle, and it is generally believed that many academic libraries have licensed extensive ebook collections. Still, market penetration of library channels is only imperfectly understood at this point.

In addition to these channels, which simultaneously release ebooks alongside their preexisting print counterparts at the point of new publication, a number of significant efforts have digitized existing print books. Many publishers have digitized some portion of the titles in their backlist, often making them available for sale through library channels. And Google's books digitization initiative, most famously, has provided free access to many out-of-copyright books and paid access for more recent materials in partnership with publishers.

A number of initiatives, typically experimental in nature, have developed electronic-only or electronic-first publication strategies. The first generation of these initiatives included the ACLS Humanities E-Book and Gutenberg-e. More recently, colleges and universities have become interested in publishing e-only scholarly monographs as a vehicle to providing them via open access business models; examples have included the now-defunct Rice University Press, the developing Amherst College Press, and the Oberlin Group's Lever Initiative. Notwithstanding these efforts, today most all scholarly monographs are issued in print form, as a codex, though they are increasingly paralleled by digital versions.

A PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY

Now that digital versions are increasingly available, will libraries come to cease collecting print and undertake large-scale de-accessioning of existing print collections? At many academic libraries, circulation of print materials has declined substantially over the past decade.⁵ Looking at the evidence, libraries are making a number of different choices, and the effect of electronic books upon acquisitions of print versions and retention of print originals is not yet settled.

Both in terms of new acquisitions and existing collections, there are many examples of libraries stepping back from print. Some libraries have taken the approach of establishing a preference to collect ebooks, in certain cases, rather than print versions.⁶ Others have begun to initiate planning exercises for how they could share print collections of monographs to reduce the resources expended on acquiring, housing, and preserving these collections.⁷ In some cases, librarians are pursuing these alternative directions because they do not believe multi-format redundancy to be a wise expenditure of limited resources. In other cases, they feel pressure by institutional leaders who have expressed a disinclination to fund capital projects to expand library space to accommodate collections growth.

At the same time, these new directions are probably not yet the norm. Many libraries continue to build print collections even as they seek resources to expand digital collecting as well. There are open questions about the

⁵ Rick Anderson argues that declines in circulation frequently mask an even steeper decline in circulation rate, taking account of growing enrollments. "Print on the Margins," *Library Journal*, June 15, 2011, available at <http://content.lib.utah.edu/cdm/ref/collection/uspace/id/7570>.

⁶ One example is Duke's e-preferred approval plan, some details about which are documented in Ann-Marie Breaux, Nancy J. Gibbs, and Aisha Harvey, "Launching an ePreferred Approval Plan," slides from a presentation at the Charleston Conference, November 4, 2011, available at <http://www.slideshare.net/CharlestonConference/launching-an-e-preferred-approval-plan-by-aisha-harvey-duke-university-libraries>

⁷ Kieft, R., & Payne, L. (2010). A Nation-Wide Planning Framework for Large-Scale Collaboration on Legacy Print Monograph Collections. *Collaborative Librarianship*, 2(4). Retrieved 2013-09-10, from <http://collaborativelibrarianship.org/index.php/jocl/article/view/119>

digital rights management of ebooks that may dissuade some libraries from making the shift: Can ebooks be used to fulfill interlibrary loan requests? Are users allowed to download the complete book or only sections at a time? What is the policy on simultaneous users? And what are the risks associated with foregoing local collecting in favor of licensed resources more generally, in terms of issues from pricing stability to preservation?⁸ With some of these types of questions in mind, some libraries considering collection management questions even for journals express a commitment that they will continue to build locally owned collections and have “No plans to deaccession in the medium term future.”⁹

As libraries grapple with a vision for their collections, they face, along with the publishers and distribution partners of these materials, a period of uncertainty. Will digital content platforms develop features and interfaces that provide a compelling alternative to the codex, or will they instead develop a rich role as a complement to the codex? The period of uncertainty currently facing libraries and publishers alike will be resolved by an improved understanding of how reading and other usage behaviors are changing and whether and how they will continue to change in the future.

USING BOOKS

Several studies have examined preferences and/or behaviors associated with book formats in an academic context. For example, at institutions such as Wellesley College and the University of California, studies funded by Springer suggest growing acceptance of ebooks as a format, albeit with decided preference for print versions and some indications that students’ preference for print may be greater than that of faculty members.¹⁰ Recognizing the importance of user preferences and behaviors, my colleagues and I introduced a number of questions related to scholarly monographs in our 2012 surveys of faculty members.

In the Ithaka S+R US Faculty Survey 2012, 70% of respondents reported using scholarly monographs in digital form “often” or “occasionally” during the previous six months.¹¹ This figure is so high in part because there are so many use cases for a book. Monographs are complex works with structural elements such as chapters, discovery tools such as tables of contents and figures and indices, and bibliographic tools such as works cited and footnotes.

Cover to cover reading is not to be dismissed, but it is by no means the only mechanism of “reading” a monograph. Some readers skim an introduction and conclusion to determine whether to read more fully; others use built-in discovery tools to navigate the text and then, in many cases, engage deeply with only a portion of the author’s argument, perhaps at the chapter level. Art historians often flip through books to use images and other illustrations as another useful guide to the author’s argument. Faculty members assign selections from a book to their students.¹²

8 For a treatment of many of these issues as they pertain to trade publishing and consumer ebook platforms, see Clifford A. Lynch, “Ebooks in 2013: Promises broken, promises kept, and Faustian bargains,” *American Libraries*, June 24, 2013, available at <http://www.americanlibrariesmagazine.org/article/ebooks-2013>. By Clifford A. Lynch

9 Mimi Calter, “Western Regional Storage Trust: Cooperative Storage for Print Journals,” presentation at the The Fiesole Collection Development Retreat, April 13, 2012, slides available at http://www.casalini.it/retreat/2012_docs/calter.pdf

10 Chan Li et al., “UC Libraries Academic e-Book Usage Survey” (University of California Libraries, May 2011), available at http://www.cdlib.org/services/uxdesign/docs/2011/academic_ebook_usage_survey.pdf and Deborah Lenares, eBook Use and Acceptance in an Undergraduate Institution (Springer, nd), available at http://static.springer.com/sgw/documents/1370809/application/pdf/H6593_CB_WhitePaper_eBooks_Undergraduate+Inst.pdf. See also Cynthia L. Gregory, “But I Want a Real Book’: An Investigation of Undergraduates’ Usage and Attitudes toward Electronic Books,” *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (2008): 266-273 and Jon Rimmer et al., “An examination of the physical and the digital qualities of humanities research,” *Information Processing and Management* 44, no. 3 (May 2008): 1374-1392.

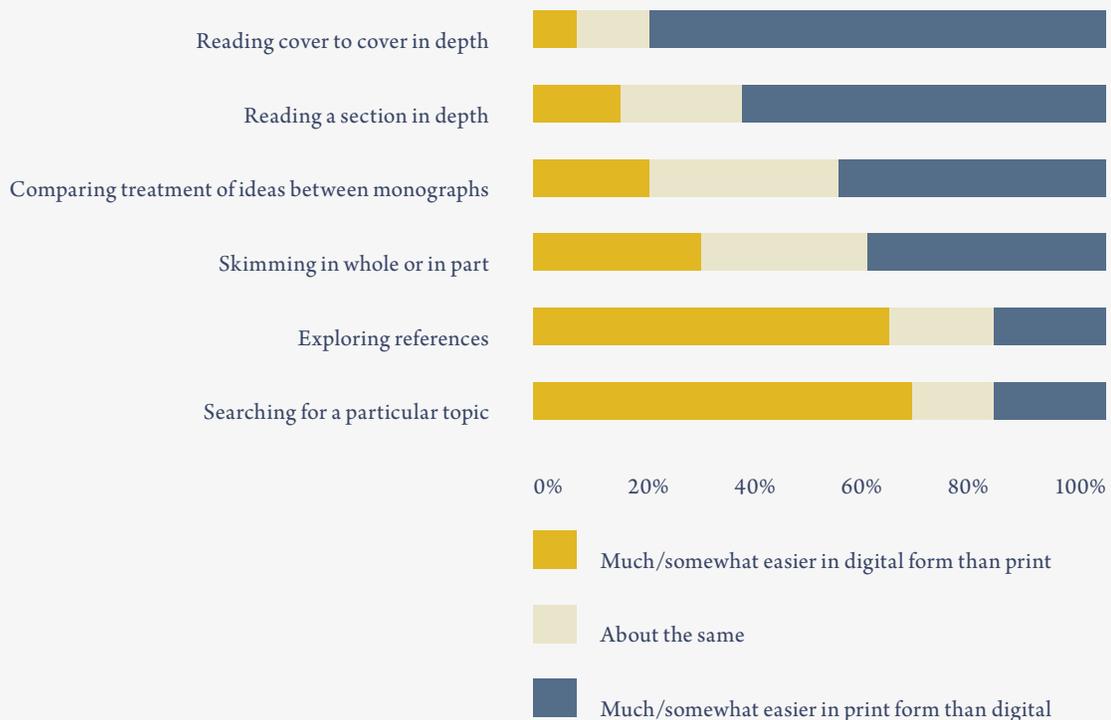
11 Ross Housewright, Roger C. Schonfeld, and Kate Wulfson, *Ithaka S+R US Faculty Survey 2012* (New York: Ithaka S+R, 2013), available at <http://j.mp/14477ff>.

12 Ithaka S+R’s research support services projects have explored these behaviors qualitatively. See Jennifer Rutner and Roger C. Schonfeld, *Supporting the Changing Research Practices of Historians* (New York: Ithaka S+R, 2012), available at <http://j.mp/XIsEX7> and Matthew Long and Roger C. Schonfeld, *Supporting the Changing Research Practices of Art Historians* (New York: Ithaka S+R, forthcoming 2014).

LONG-FORM READING

Scholars have developed preferences about when to use digital or print books based on the advantages that each format provides. In the surveys of faculty members in fall 2012, my colleagues and I asked respondents to indicate their format preferences for monographs in a selection of six important use cases. The respondents did not demonstrate a strong overall preference for either print or digital books, but rather indicated their clear preferences for one format or the other depending on the particular activity at hand. A strong majority of respondents indicated that they prefer print monographs to electronic when reading cover to cover or a section in depth, with only a handful preferring digital books in these situations (see Figure 1). On the other hand, when they are considering exploring references or searching for a particular topic, most scholars clearly preferred the digital experience. Other activities—such as comparing the treatment of ideas between monographs or skimming in whole or in part—garnered a wider range of responses, with some scholars strongly preferring print and others preferring digital. Similar findings obtain for the UK.

Figure 1: “Below is a list of ways you may use a scholarly monograph. Please think about doing each of these things with a scholarly monograph in print format or in digital format, and... indicate how much easier or harder is it to perform each activity in print or digital format.” Percent respondents who indicated that each of these practices is either easier, harder, or about the same in print or digital formats.



For the most part, faculty members are comfortable making a choice based on their sense of which format will best suit the particular activities they are performing at the time. At the moment, this generally entails choosing digital versions when convenience and easy ability to search across a wide corpus are important and choosing print when a more in-depth focus on a single work is called for.

While we do not have trendline data to assess whether there are changes in preferences taking place over time, our single-point-in-time data from fall 2012 indicate that many respondents perceive a dual-format environment:

suggesting that the same academics prefer print versions of monographs strongly for some uses and digital versions strongly for other uses. The key barrier to transitioning to a digital-only environment is providing for in-depth reading via electronic versions. Whether this has to do with limitations in annotation or note-taking options, the inability to compare multiple monographs readily, the eyestrain associated with many reading interfaces, or other factors, is not known. At this point, however, the codex remains faculty members' preferred mechanism for in-depth reading of scholarly works.

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DISCOVERY

While long-form reading may remain an essential purpose of the scholarly monograph regardless of format, the introduction of digital publishing and the integration of full-text into discovery services are proving transformational.

A study of historians' research practices that a colleague and I completed in 2012 indicated the singular importance of Google Books for certain types of discovery. Its index of millions of full-text books allows researchers to conduct exploratory searching on keywords and phrases, discovering materials they otherwise might never encounter. Once a scholar discovers a work, he or she can often make do with snippets or a small selection of pages when only limited access to it is available through Google Books. In other cases, this limited access is sufficient to help a scholar determine whether to purchase or borrow the book from a library for more extensive use. Now that many humanists rely upon Google's book discovery service, which inelegantly links a user through WorldCat to find an item in a library, what is the role of the library catalog and the suite of discovery services that many libraries provide?¹³

On the other hand, up until now, full-text search has never been the dominant form of discovery for the monograph, and scholars continue to find information in books in many other ways. For example, our 2012 Faculty Survey findings indicate the importance of book reviews as a mechanism for humanists to discover and assess newly published scholarly monographs. Book reviews help researchers learn about new monographs and in the process of doing so decide whether reading a given work is worth their time. As more scholarly monographs are issued in digital form and discoverable in ways never before possible, will the role and value of the book review shift? What would it look like for book reviews to be repositioned not exclusively as components of a journal issue but rather as essential components of modern discovery services for monographs?

While the well-organized open-stack collection represents the essence of serendipitous discovery to many academics, libraries have systematically fragmented these collections over the past several decades through the provision of high-density storage, cooperative agreements for collection sharing, and any transition they may be pursuing away from print. While the fragmentation at the largest libraries may be offset to some degree by the prospect of increasing the number of works available at smaller institutions, the desire for serendipity remains

13 Schonfeld and Rutner.

strong among many users. Given that there is no hope for many libraries of recreating the single-site book collection for browsing, are there other steps that can be taken to re-establish opportunities for serendipitous discovery in the emerging environment?¹⁴

MORE THAN JUST NARRATIVE

The advent of mass digitization programs over the past decade, and their focus on large-scale scanning production, has quieted our consideration of the impacts of the digital format on the monograph. But the richness of scholarly monographs beyond just the narrative indicates opportunities for the digital medium to provoke changes in the very nature of the work. Escaping the alphabetical linearity of reference works as they are turned into richly accessible databases has been a major success for a different field of scholarly publishing; in many cases reference databases provide such a value differential as to eliminate the need for print altogether. The proposition of equivalent impacts on the monograph matters to libraries and content providers alike because if borne out they could have a decisive impact on the print to electronic transition.

Notably, scholarly monographs typically build their argument from the basis of primary sources, such as archival records, visual images, or quantitative data. In a print environment, there were limits in the extent to which such primary sources could be integrated into the work. With the exception of art images that have been reproduced at high quality and great expense in art history monographs, and the occasional data table in certain works of quantitative social science, primary sources have only rarely been reproduced in the monograph. Rather, references are provided, making it possible for a reader to locate and access the original source, such as an archival record, albeit with difficulty. The difficulty of inspecting an archival record, zooming in to inspect the details of a reproduced image, or accessing a dataset to reanalyze it, required most readers to place a reasonable amount of trust in the author in selecting from and analyzing primary sources and shaping an argument around them.

Electronic-only or electronic-first monographs could offer up the possibility to integrate an even broader amount of primary sources, such as archival records and sound and video recordings, into the monograph, and not just linked to it. Many authors are eager for such a development, with the opportunity to show even more from their sources than has previously been possible. But bringing primary sources into the narrative more richly could have other effects as well. With primary sources directly available in the monograph to many readers for the first time, the author's interpretive control will decline while the reader will be empowered to take on a greater interpretive role. If deeper connections can be created between primary sources and their analysis, will a new form of narrative emerge to acknowledge a somewhat enhanced role for the reader?

These deeper linkages with primary sources suggest real opportunities but also real limits for libraries and content providers. Intellectual property concerns and privacy considerations, along with ill-suited platforms, have made it difficult for authors to digitally capture their archival sources and make them broadly available in connection with the analytical content of their monographs. Similarly, it is difficult to develop deep integrations and bidirectional linking with digital library services containing primary sources such as art, music, and video. Datasets have proven to be comparatively simple, with repositories such as ICPSR providing preservation and access for many fields in the social sciences; ICPSR also attempts to link back to the scholarship in which its datasets are being used. The types of integration that would be valuable to authors and readers of monographs can only succeed if responsibility rests not with their publishers alone but also with the stewards of primary source materials such as archives and museums, and the digital library services distributing their holdings online.

¹⁴ The project now emerging as the DPLA Bookshelf is an example of efforts trying to grapple with this very issue today. <http://dp.la/info/2013/10/24/bookshelf-announcement/>.

Such a vision of building a richer monograph, one that is less self-contained and more empowering to the reader, may seem compelling to some, but the real barriers to change cannot be underestimated. Even so, should such a vision come to fruition, it could only exist in digital format, making a fuller consideration of the future of the monograph essential to libraries and publishers alike contemplating the prospect of a print to electronic transition for the monograph. Signs of development of such a vision would strengthen the case for a print to electronic transition.

REVISING THE DISSERTATION

Many first monographs, especially in the humanities, are the result of revisions, sometimes heavy revisions, to the author's PhD dissertation. Dissertations in other fields, such as the sciences and some social sciences, are frequently comprised of a series of article-length papers, which may form journal articles but are rarely compiled into a monograph. Previously, dissertations were often held by the library at the university where they were written and also available for sale via ProQuest's longstanding service. However, in recent years many dissertations have become freely available online immediately following their completion, both via library-managed institutional repositories or other platforms such as Electronic Theses and Dissertations initiatives.

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Some are concerned that an online presence for humanities dissertations, especially, may inhibit the ability of scholars to re-use this material in a first monograph, with serious consequences for employment, tenure, and promotion. In a statement this summer, the American Historical Association noted that in revising material for a book, "the scholar typically builds on the raw material presented in the dissertation, refines the argument, and improves the presentation itself."¹⁵ But in an environment where the monograph is being reshaped in a variety of ways, will the dissertation remain unchanged?

It may be timely to reevaluate whether the form and function of the dissertation serve the pedagogical objectives of PhD programs. This question should be considered in light of the connections between a dissertation and a possible eventual monograph. Would more attention to audience and impact serve graduate students well in proposing a topic and researching and writing their dissertation? Is there a role for a university press editor, or someone with a similar developmental editorial perspective, to serve as a second advisor in the proposal development stage, especially? While this might be a sea change for many dissertation supervisors and university presses, it equally might provide improved alignment between the university's press and its graduate school.¹⁶

In the realm of library publishing, where university presses and scholarly communications offices are wrestling with how to restructure the products of scholarship and the business of their dissemination, opportunities to rethink the connection between the dissertation and the monograph formed by its revision are substantial.

¹⁵ See for example the American Historical Association Statement on Policies Regarding the Embargoing of Completed History PhD Dissertations, available at <http://blog.historians.org/2013/07/american-historical-association-statement-on-policies-regarding-the-embargoing-of-completed-history-phd-dissertations/>.

¹⁶ I am grateful for an exchange on Twitter that included Martyn Beeny, Barbara Fister, Lisa Hinchliffe, Donna Lanclos, and Jason Weidemann, in helping me work out some aspects of this formulation. For further thinking on alignment between press and university, see Laura Brown, Rebecca Griffiths, and Matthew Rascoff, *University Publishing In A Digital Age* (New York: Ithaka, 2007), available at <http://www.sr.ithaka.org/research-publications/university-publishing-digital-age>

CONCLUSION

Monographs are complex tools for communicating scholarship, and scholars approach them in different ways depending on what they are trying to accomplish. Digital versions of monographs have made some of these ways of using books much more efficient, but in other ways they cannot yet measure up to the codex.

At the same time, there are a number of opportunities for the digital monograph to become more richly incorporated into the scholarly infrastructure of digital and digitized primary sources and in discovery processes. Standalone objects in a static digital format may thus not be an end-state; rather a richer infrastructure might well be gradually emerging.

Scholars are still adjusting to the various options available to them for discovering, accessing, using, and creating monographs in a digital environment. Whatever the future may bring, the transition for scholarly monographs away from the print-only world seems likely to be longer and more complex than it was for academic journals.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Many questions about the monograph are by no means settled, and this paper suggests several directions that may be useful for further research and design:

- What are the perceived constraints of existing digital interfaces with respect to long-form reading of scholarly monographs? What functional requirements does print currently serve better than digital with respect to monographs, even recognizing that many of the same individuals are acquiring and using tablets and reader devices for other purposes? How can content platforms and publishers better address the needs of academic readers and other users?
- In an environment that has in many ways grown more fragmented over time, how can libraries and content platforms ensure the most efficient discovery and access experience possible for users of scholarly monographs? Is there a place for serendipity?
- How can stewards of primary source materials in tangible and digital form, such as archives, museums, and digital libraries, most effectively support the digitization of their own materials for discovery and access purposes and provide for rich linkages with the analysis of their holdings found in the scholarly monograph?
- If greater opportunities are provided over time for readers to engage with the primary sources, how might authors respond to reshape the nature of the monograph?
- Will the digital version of the scholarly monograph diverge from the print version as additional features can be added?
- What is the pedagogical role of the dissertation in humanities graduate education and how can its contribution be maximized?