THESES AND TRANSLATIONS IN ICELANDIC LIBRARIES

Eiríkur T. Einarsson,
(eirikur@hasro.is)
The Fisheries Library
Marine Research Institute
Skúlagata 4. P.O. box 1390
121 Reykjavík, Iceland

There are two Universities in Iceland, University of Iceland in Reykjavík and University of Akureyri, located in a small town, Akureyri, on the north coast of Iceland. The third University level school is the University College of Teaching which is located in Reykjavík. The National Library also collects theses and dissertations.

The University of Iceland is the oldest and largest of these universities, established in 1911 and has about 5,500 students. The University library is located in the main University building on the campus, in a far too small space. There are about 300,000 books in the library and the periodical subscriptions are more than 4,000. On December 1st 1994, the University Library and the National Library will be merged to form the “Landsbókasafn Íslands - Háskólabókasafn” (National Library of Iceland - The University Library) in a new building just outside of the main University campus.

The University of Iceland owns at least one copy of each graduation thesis from all departments of the university. The theses are mostly BA or BS theses, but doctoral dissertations are mostly from universities in other countries as the University of Iceland has not had programs for a doctoral degree until recently. A scientist who publishes a major work in his professional area, often has the work evaluated by a committee from the University to decide if it was suitable to present for a doctoral degree. As dissertations are usually in a book form and have been published commercially before they were accepted by the university they are relatively easy to acquire. Those dissertations are often published in Icelandic, but not always.

Generally the BS, BA theses of the University library are shelved together in a special collection, which comprises about 6,300 titles, but doctoral dissertations are handled like books and shelved according to their content. The theses are catalogued on cards, which will be transferred to the computer catalogue in the near future.

The National Library puts effort in acquiring theses and dissertations written by Icelanders in other countries as by law one of the major tasks of the National Library is to acquire everything published by Icelanders or about Iceland wherever it may be published. The National Library maintains a catalogue of doctoral dissertations which is occasionally published in the yearbook, which is also the annual report of the library. Usually the library tries to acquire the theses from the author when s/he is contacted for the title of his/her work.

The University of Akureyri was established in 1987 and has some 400 students. There are no doctoral theses in the library except for those the library has acquired and they are shelved among
other books. The library houses about 100 BA/BS theses written by the students. The theses are catalogued in the in-house computer catalogue of the University.

The University College of Teaching was established in 1971 and has about 2,000 students. The library keeps one copy of each BEd. thesis and the collection is catalogued in the University library's computer catalogue, GEGNIR (saga.rhi.hi.is) and is housed in a special department in the library.

Because of copyright restrictions, the use of the theses in all of these universities is restricted to what the students themselves allow. Students sign forms prepared by the library where they are asked to what extent they allow their theses to be used. In some cases they allow that only chapters of their theses are to be used, but in other cases the whole thesis.

Increasingly BA and BS graduates try to sell their theses for a high price, and usually they succeed. They offer their thesis for the amount around the equivalent to about $180 for each thesis. The ministries often purchase it for this amount but others try to lower the price to something reasonable. I require the students working on their theses in my library to donate a copy of their theses to the library.

Most the Icelandic theses are not of much use to foreigners as they are written in Icelandic, which is only understood probably by less than about 300,000 people in the whole world!

Scandinavia

In 1990 it was estimated that about 10,000 theses were produced every year in the Scandinavian universities. Theses are generally catalogued and are therefore available to those interested, but usually the same restrictions apply for their use as in Iceland. In Finland and Sweden though theses are considered public documents and therefore there are no restrictions for their use, but in Norway and Denmark users need approval from the author.

Translations in Icelandic libraries

No special catalogue of translations is maintained in any Icelandic library. Commercial translation services are operated by the translators themselves. There are translators employed by the government to translate necessary law and regulations from the European Union and other international bodies and by the TV stations for translations of foreign films.

Most of the Icelandic scientists are educated abroad and speak at least English, and usually some other languages as well, such as the Scandinavian languages, French and German. Translations are almost only needed from the Eastern European languages, such as Russian and Japanese and Chinese.

Most of the translations the scientists of the Marine Research Institute need we receive on loan or we buy them from foreign translation services or libraries but we almost never have anything translated especially for them.