

**GUIDELINE CONCERNING REQUESTS TO WITHHOLD ACCESS
TO DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS
BY THE ACADEMIC DIRECTOR OF THE DOCTORAL PROGRAM¹**

§ 86 of the Universities Act 2002 governs the publication of academic dissertations. According to paragraph 2 it is possible to withhold access to the dissertation for a maximum of five years:

(1) Graduates shall publish accepted diploma or master's dissertations, doctoral theses, art diploma or master's theses or documentation in support of art diploma or master's submissions by lodging them with the library of the university where the degree is awarded. Before the award of the degree they shall lodge one complete copy of their accepted diploma or master's dissertation, doctoral thesis, art diploma, or master's dissertation or written art diploma or master's submission component with the library. Academic papers or parts thereof which are not capable of reproduction are exempted from the duty of publication. Accepted doctoral theses shall also be published by lodging a copy with the Austrian National Library.

(2) On lodging an academic or artistic dissertation, thesis or submission with the library, the author shall be entitled to apply for access to the copies deposited therewith to be withheld for a maximum of **five years** from the time of delivery. The governing body responsible for study matters shall allow such applications if the student establishes that his/her legal or business interests would be materially endangered by permitting access.

Possible reasons for withholding access:

It is an integral aspect of academic practice, that new ideas and research findings which are obtained in the course of an academic career, especially during the composition of a doctoral thesis, become part of the wider scientific community's discourse. The idea of withholding access to a dissertation stands in stark contrast to this practice. It impedes the academic discourse as it produces a kind of temporary secret knowledge, which can be used only by the author of the dissertation and the examiners and has no value for the larger scientific community. Also there is the danger of producing a disputable image of universities in general, as they should be devoted to the furthering of the academic discourse and are funded for this by the public.

The simple claim „I would not have been granted access to the data had I not promised to withhold access“ or „If access is not withheld, some other party might exploit my data for commercial purposes“ will not be accepted as reason for withholding access. To the contrary, taking up research results and discussing published ideas is essential for an understanding of academic discourse where the goal is to change the scientific landscape in a collaborative effort (exceptions like epoch making break-throughs only prove the rule). The goal of writing a doctoral dissertation can never be the accumulation of commercially exploitable competitive advantages or the production of a business plan in the guise of a dissertation.

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To make sure: This does not mean that sensitive data should be shared with everyone. It is absolutely reasonable to keep original data private. The scientific conclusions drawn from these data in form of the thesis, however, must in principal be made available.

It is our policy that the results of a doctoral thesis must become part of the public discourse as soon as possible. If you request to withhold access to your doctoral dissertation and thus depart from this policy, you must demonstrate convincingly that

- a) the temporal deferral will be outweighed by the gain of scientific insight
- b) the deferred publication will not lead to a decrease of value for the scientific discourse, e.g. because of outdated results.

An agreement with the academic director of the doctoral program justified in such a way must logically be obtained at a time when a negative decision that would lead to substantial changes within the thesis can still be accommodated. Neither the doctoral candidate nor the academic director can be expected to react upon such a request once the final bound thesis has been submitted.

Course of Action:

Please notify the doctoral office or the academic director of the doctoral program **as early as possible** about your request to withhold access to your doctoral dissertation.

In the doctoral office the so-called „Sperrbescheid“ will be printed out and you have to fill in the form. If access is to be withheld for more than one year, you will have to obtain the **signatures of both examiners** of your thesis.

If your request is approved by the academic director of the doctoral program, the bound copies that are allotted to the university library and to the National library will then be stamped as „blocked“.