2013 Baseline ETD Survey Data Analysis

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Introduction

The purpose of the 2013 NDLTD, Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations, baseline survey was to overcome a lack of baseline data about ETDs. To that end, we set out to create a survey that would collect as much helpful information as possible regarding program planning, collection content and size, collection management, and assessment. We also hoped to identify current best practices as well as problem areas for all institutions, and to chart the longitudinal progress of this growing responsibility.

Demographics

Using the freeware Qualtrics, we asked 30 questions—multiple choice, short answer, Yes/No, and open answer. We distributed the survey announcement and link to the survey through email to various listservs for each stakeholder community involved in ETD management (e.g., Council of Graduate Schools, ETDs, Association of College and Research Libraries, Association of Research Libraries, Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations—NDLTD, and the Coalition for Networked Information). We also disseminated it to attendees of the most recent international and national ETD conferences. Our goal was to reach as many people who worked with ETDs at higher education institutions as possible.

The survey was completed by 199 people. However, after eliminating incomplete surveys and duplicate responses from the same institution¹, we analyzed 161 responses. The international responses totaled 29 (27%) and the responses from the United States totaled 132 (73%). About a third of all respondents (35%) were members of the NDLTD.

This ETD baseline survey involved representatives from all targeted stakeholder communities, including individuals self-identified as ETD Librarians, Repository Managers, Deans/Administrators, Graduate Readers, Scholarly Communications Librarians, Collection Development Employees, Technical Services Employees, Cataloging/Metadata experts, and “Other.”

Survey Findings

One of the key survey questions was, “Does your institution have an ETD Program.” In the survey we defined an ETD program as one in which digital copies of theses and/or dissertations are accepted and maintained. There were three response options: 1) Yes; 2) No/my institution has no plans to implement one at this time (hereafter coded as “No/No plans”); and 3) No/my institution is planning to implement one (hereafter coded as “No/Yes plans”). The last option led to follow up questions about implementation plans, what factors influenced their decision, and what aids they might find helpful in order to implement an ETD program.

Ninety-two percent responded Yes, while 2% responded No/No plans, and 6% responded No/Yes plans. Of those institutions with plans, 45% were implementing their ETD programs during the year of the survey, 18% responded the year following the survey, and 36% responded within three years of the survey. Through open-ended comments we learned that a variety of factors influenced their decisions. Most notably, 36% mentioned access and half of those specifically said Open Access.

¹ 21 institutions are represented twice in the dataset due to separate employees completing the survey individually and with different answer choices on some questions. 3 are international, 18 are US. In future surveys, we hope to mediate this problem with additional instructions and/or more targeted invitations to participate.
When we asked what would help institutions implement an ETD program, we learned that they wanted (from most to least frequently mentioned) guidance documents (1st); online materials (2nd); instructional workshops, attending an ETD conference, and meeting with others who have ETD programs (3rd), and support from a national organization (4th). “Other” comments included an institutional directive and a workshop on getting buy-in from outside the library.

We attempted to determine if those in different stages of implementing an ETD program would prioritize the types of aid differently. Those at all stages of development ranked guidance documents the highest. Those implementing ETD programs during the year of the survey ranked online materials equally high. Those implementing ETD programs the following year also gave the highest ranking to workshops, meetings, and national organizational support. Those survey respondents who are up to three years away from implementing their ETD programs, also ranked workshops highly, and all other choices were ranked second highest. Clearly, those with the longest planning horizon are hungry for all types of support.

Of those with existing ETD programs (92%), we asked about the content coverage of their programs (see chart below). Participants could to select all that applied.

![Figure 1. ETD Programs Content Coverage](image)

The survey asked how institutions managed their ETD collections. Well over half of the survey respondents (65%) reported that they had campus repositories. Others reported that external vendors (14%), an external state-based repository (8%), or others (13%) managed their ETDs. Of those institutions with their ETDs in a campus repository, responsibility for that repository varies by managerial units, as shown in the graphic below.
The survey respondents indicated their institutions used the following repository software:

- DSpace, 43%
- BePress: Digital Commons, 12%
- ETD-db, 8%
- CONTENTdm, 8%
- Ex Libris: DigiTool, 2%
- Eprints, 2%
- VTLS: Vital, 1%
- Locally Developed, 12%
- Other, 12%

In response to what formats were acceptable for ETDs, the vast majority of institutions (n=133) accepted PDFs, while 32% (43) accepted any file format.
Other file formats mentioned in the comments included several proprietary formats, even though that is not a wise preservation strategy. These included Adobe Flash and Microsoft Office products. Other formats mentioned included: .odt, .rtf, LaTeX (text); .aif, .mp3, .mp4, .mpv, .snd, CD-DA, MIDI (audio, the largest number of suggestions); .swf, (video); and .ppt. Only one respondent mentioned EPUB, the open access ebook standard, though PDF’s e-portfolio was mentioned also.

The results of the query about who is primarily responsible for approving the formatting of ETDs and who is primarily responsible for maintaining ETDs, are displayed below.

Survey respondents estimated the number of ETDs in their institutions’ collections. While fewer international institutions responded to our survey, the distribution of their ETDs for these respondents is consistent with our findings to date.
When survey respondents estimated the annual growth of their ETD collections, US and international institutions responded very similarly.

![Graph showing ETD Growth by Geographic Location](image)

**Figure 6. ETD Growth by Geographic Location**

To address the question of usage, we asked how ETDs were measured at the survey respondents’ institutions. About 40% gathered statistics from their repositories for downloaded ETDs. Less than one-third captured activity through their web access logs. However, in this response pool, twice as many US institutions (26%) than international institutions (13%), reported that they did NOT measure their ETDs. From the open-ended comments accompanying this question, we learned that both US and international institutions use DSpace statistics and Google Analytics.

![Bar chart showing ETD Usage Metrics by Geographic Location](image)

**Figure 7. ETD Usage Metrics by Geographic Location**

Just less than one quarter of the responding institutions reported maintaining usage statistics on their ETD web sites. In this survey response, more international institutions (47%) reported usage than do American institutions (17%), and only a slightly larger percentage of American institutions (27% vs. 21%) were “looking into it.”
In a 2008 ETD preservation survey, 72% of the respondents did NOT have preservation plans. However in 2013 there was a nearly 180-degree change. The 2013 baseline survey documents that 69% of the respondents’ institutions have preservation strategies for their ETDs.

Also according to the 2013 survey data, ETDs are generally accessible worldwide, with only one international institution and three US institutions of the respondents reported that they do not make any of their ETDs publicly available. Over half of the international institutions responding to this survey make their entire ETD collections publicly available, while only one-third in the US do so.

Of those higher education institutions with ETD programs, the 2013 survey asked if their institutions temporarily limited access to ETDs to the originating university-only. In the US, 65% of survey respondents reported that they temporarily limit some or all ETDs to access by the originating institution. International higher education institutions reported that they were more likely to not limit access to some or all of their ETDs, while US universities were more likely to do so.

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While there were a variety of reasons that institutions limited some or all of their ETDs to originating institution-only access, they were easily grouped into the categories below. There were some striking differences in the reasons respondents reported for limiting access to ETDs. American universities reported being more likely to do so because they were directed by the authors, as well as for publishing and patent concerns. According to the survey data, about half-again as many faculty at international institutions in this sample requested limited access. Based on the survey responses, our international counterparts were seemingly less concerned by copyright and creative works. However, international institutions were more likely to limit access to ETDs due to institution-wide policies or mandates and because of ETDs contain sensitive or confidential information.

Another kind of restricted access is embargoing, which we defined as withholding an ETD from all access. When asked if institutions embargoed ETDs, only one international institution and one US institution responded that they embargoed all their ETDs. Yet twice as many international institutions reported that they did NOT embargo any ETDs, 8 vs. 4. See Figure 12 on the next page.
Embargo periods vary, with 85% reported embargoing ETDs for more than one year.

Reasons for embargoing ETDs also varied. The chart below on the next page documents these based on 163 comments from 136 US institutions and 27 international institutions. No international institutions gave faculty concerns as a reason to embargo ETDs. However, they were far more concerned about sensitive or confidential information in ETDs than were the American survey respondents. Unlike the reasons for limiting access to the home institution, none mentioned institution-wide mandates for embargoing ETDs.
The general comments from American institutional representatives focused on 3 themes: embargoes (24%), digitizing (12%), ProQuest (22%). Other comments were on a wide variety of topics including the format of supplemental materials accompanying ETDs.

The only overlap international comments had with US comments were on the topic of embargoes (33% international; 27% All). Their other theme was institutional repositories with 20% mentioning DSpace. (Cybertesis, Digital Commons also mentioned). They also mentioned training and assistance, digitizing, and statistics.

When given the opportunity to provide general comments, survey respondents provided these.

- “Institutional lethargy/fear/lack of understanding how technically easy this is”
- “Challenges are both technical and administrative”
- “OA is an ongoing area of real confusion and lack of consensus on this campus”
- “We are beginning to question the practice of automatically sending full text to ProQuest.”
- What are good preservation options for ETDS?

Since our plan is to repeat this survey every two years, the 2013 survey asked our respondents to suggest how to improve future surveys. Suggested questions included:

- How do you generate traffic to your ETDs?
- Do you prefer PDF or PDF/A?
- Who pays NDLTD membership?
- “External representation”, e.g., are ETDs cataloged in WorldCat?
- Do you require students to submit theses and/or dissertations to ProQuest? [Why?]

We hope that we have remedied the shallow depths of statistical data available about ETDs. It is our goal to post the results widely in easily accessible open access repositories such as that of the NDTLD (www.ndltd.org). We appreciate all who responded to this survey and hope that additional colleagues will complete the survey in the future.