Introduction

The purpose of the 2013 NDLTD Baseline ETD Survey was to overcome a lack of recent 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 to be aware of, 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 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 our personal contacts and 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. After eliminating incomplete surveys and duplicate responses from the same institution1, 161 responses were analyzed. 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.

The 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 questions was, “Does your institution have an ETD Program.” 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/No 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 this year, 18% next year, and 36% within three years. 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 asking those same institutions (6%) what would help them implement an ETD program, the responses were (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 an ETD program implementation would prioritize the types of aid differently. Those at all stages of development ranked guidance documents the highest. Those implementing ETD programs this year ranked online materials equally high. Those implementing ETD programs next 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.

Among those with existing ETD programs (92%), we asked about the content coverage of those programs (see chart below). Participants could check all that apply.

Figure 1. ETD Programs Content Coverage

We asked the survey respondents who answered Yes (92%) to describe their ETD programs in terms of mandatory to optional submissions. The strong majority (n=120, 69%) made inclusion mandatory for all PhD students and all applicable Masters programs. Only 11% of the respondents’ institutions have departmental or unit mandates but not institution-wide mandates; 14% accept undergraduate theses. When asked about their growth of their ETD collections, the most common growth pattern was less than 500 a year. Most (n = 65) of the institutions with this level of growth made inclusion mandatory for PhDs and applicable for Masters programs; this was by far the most common practice. Those that grew at a rate of less than 100 items a year, however, showed the most diverse practices. Numerous participants indicated that their institutions made inclusion mandatory only for PhDs, or the mandatory requirement was not institution-wide but dependent on individual departments. Others made submission to the ETD repository optional across the board, and included undergraduate theses.

The survey asked how institutions managed their ETD collections. Well over half (66%) of those who responded Yes said that they had campus repositories. Others reported that they were managed by an external vendor (13%), an external state-based repository (8%), or were managed by other means (13%). 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, a definite 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, though that is not a good preservation strategy. These included Adobe Flash and Microsoft Office products. Other formats mentioned were: .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.

Figure 4. ETD Formatting Approval & Maintenance Responsibility

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.

Figure 5. ETD Count by Geographic Location
When survey respondents estimated the annual growth of their ETD collections, there was not much difference between US and international institutions.

![Figure 6. ETD Growth by Geographic Location](image)

To address the question of usage, we asked how ETDs are measured at the survey respondents’ institutions. About 40% gather statistics from their repositories for downloaded ETDs. Less than one-third capture activity through their web access logs. However, in this response pool, twice as many US institutions (26%) as opposed to international institutions (13%), report that they do 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.

![Figure 7. ETD Usage Metrics by Geographic Location](image)

Just under one quarter of the responding institutions report maintaining usage statistics on their ETD web sites. In this survey response, more international institutions (47%) report usage than do American institutions (17%), and only a slightly larger percentage of American institutions (27% vs. 21%) are “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.

According to the 2013 survey data, ETDs are generally accessible worldwide, with only one international institution and three US institutions among our respondents reporting 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.

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

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While there are a variety of reasons that institutions limit some or all of their ETDs to originating institution-only access, they were easily grouped into the categories below. There are 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 this survey, our international counterparts are seemingly less concerned by copyright and creative works. However, international institutions are 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 restricting 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 do NOT embargo any ETDs, 8 vs. 4. See Figure 12 on the next page.
Embargo periods vary, with 85% reporting embargoing ETDs for more than one year.

Reasons for embargoing ETDs also vary. 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 are 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 was 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 the 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 more recently available about ETDs. It is our goal to repeat this survey every two years and to post the results widely in easily accessible open access repositories such as that of the NDLTD: Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (www.ndltd.org). We appreciate all who responded to this survey and hope that others will complete the survey in the future.