Guidance Documents for Lifecycle Management of ETDs

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Guide to Options for ETD Programs

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Topics Covered
- Deposit Procedures.
- Repository System Options.
- ETD Program Management.
- ETD Program Services.

8.1 Introduction
Many academic institutions around the world have implemented programs to store and manage electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs). The widespread growth of ETD programs and their perceived advantages for graduate education and long-term preservation and access to scholarship have been documented elsewhere (Lippincott 2010). This document is intended to provide useful guidance for academic decision-makers considering new implementations or overhaul of existing ETD programs, with a special focus on the options in such programs that may warrant special attention and discussion.¹ These options may need special attention for a variety of reasons. There may be many questions and factors to consider associated with particular choices in implementing ETD programs, either at the policy level or in particular aspects of implementation. Because ETD programs are still relatively new despite being widely implemented, there may simply be a lack of clear consensus or understanding among stakeholders about the fundamentals of such programs, what is meant or implied by the terminology used in planning ETD programs, or misunderstandings about assumptions (real or imagined) underlying ETD programs. While the benefits of ETD programs are now widely accepted, the range of options, pace of innovations in ETD services, and controversies surrounding different options in ETD programs may be justifiably daunting to academic administrators. Institutions may delay implementation or improvements to ETD programs because of fears and uncertainties over ETD program choices. Restricted or open access? Implement an ETD repository or lease a commercial service? Who will have responsibility for what functions? These are only some of the questions that must be considered and periodically re-considered when managing an ETD program.

¹ A great deal of useful research and information resources has now been produced concerning ETD programs that can provide well-informed advice and perspectives in planning for the many possibilities and choices to be made in depositing, accessing, and managing ETDs over time. Where there are citable resources, these will be referenced. Where there are no clear sources of information on a topic, an attempt will be made to descriptively set forth the different sides of the issue.
8.1.1 Benefits and Impacts of ETD Programs
The starting assumption for this briefing is that an institution perceives some value to implementing an ETD program, and that the decisions that require consideration are in the specifics of the implementation decision, rather than the fundamental question of whether or not such a program is worth implementing. This reflects the literature and practice within the field. While there have been some attempts at rigorous investigations into the value and impacts of ETD programs (Brown et al. 2010; Macduff 2009), most institutions that have implemented ETD programs do so because of a widespread perception that such programs have inherent (albeit hard to quantify) benefits in terms of improved management, preservation, and access to theses and dissertations. Seminal publications by Dr. Edward Fox and Gail McMillan have set forth the basic claims concerning the benefits of ETD programs. Annual conferences such as the international ETD Conference and the US ETD Association (USETDA) conference attest to the extensive interest and faith in ETD programs by many institutions. The benefits of ETD programs are often articulated directly in the institutional policies concerning such programs; a good example of this is the North Carolina State University ETD Guide (NCSU 2011). The basic value proposition of ETD programs is a relatively non-controversial question, and therefore lies beyond the scope of this briefing.

8.1.2 Key Decisions for ETD Programs
The more ambiguous aspects of ETD programs lie in the specifics of implementation options and decisions, and this is a more useful place to concentrate this discussion. The following are the key areas of decision-making that this document will address; these are the categories of high-level decisions that usually receive the most attention in planning an ETD program or overhauling it:

- Access policies.
- Deposit policies.
- Repository system options.
- ETD program management.
- ETD program services.

8.1.3 Information Resources on ETD Programs
When planning or considering the implementation of an ETD program, decision makers should know that there is now a significant body of research on this topic that may be consulted, and which has been collated in the project bibliography. This briefing will call out debates from this literature that planners should be aware of, as well as referencing more detailed resources. Perhaps the most comprehensive clearinghouse of information on ETD programs is the international organization known as the Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD). The NDLTD website provides a range of informative resources and planning documents at http://www.ndltd.org/resources to consult. This briefing was developed in consultation with the NDLTD leadership, and will reference many NDLTD resources.

To understand the key choices in implementing ETD programs, recent descriptive surveys of such programs are a good place to start. A 2010 survey by Joan Lippincott of the members of the Coalition for Networked Information concerning ETD programs resulted in 88 responses from 142 institutions contacted. (Lippincott, 2010) This survey documented the widespread implementation of ETD programs and reported that the majority (73%) of responding institutions had already instituted an ETD program of some sort, with five additional institutions indicating that they were planning such an implementation. In 89% of the institutions, ETDs were reported to be a subset of larger institutional or consortial repository holdings. An implication of these figures is that institutions that are now considering ETD program implementations are likely to be in categories that the CNI survey did not focus on, including smaller institutions, or institutions that to date have had significant reservations about ETD programs. Wherever possible, this briefing will attempt to address the anticipated concerns of such institutions.

The CNI survey examined a range of factors and perceptions concerning ETD programs, including system implementation strategies, access and embargo considerations, format options, and other ETD services and policies to best serve graduate students. While these are certainly not the only decisions that must be made in planning an ETD program, these categories of options are a useful frame of context and will be used for the purposes of this briefing. The CNI survey is also not the only source that will inform this briefing; other reports will be cited as appropriate. Many of the following controversies are also informed from actual conversations reported anecdotally from the field by practitioners.

### 8.2 Access Policies and Intellectual Property Issues

**Key issues**

- Violation of copyright by authors of ETDs.
- Violation of copyright by those who access ETDs.
- Anxiety about quality of ETDs.
- Embargo controversies.
- Copyright and ownership of ETDs.

Perhaps the most intimidating set of options in ETD programs surrounds a complex series of inextricably linked issues associated with network access to and intellectual property rights of theses and dissertations. Curiously, these issues have only become widely visible and controversial as theses and dissertations have become digital and accessible via the Internet. While print theses and dissertations in most university library archives were traditionally made readily accessible to scholars seeking to access and read them, institutional decision-makers in recent years often have far more reluctant reactions to the idea of making ETDs freely accessible on the Web. When it manifests, this reluctance is perceived as inconsistent and somewhat ironic by many ETD program proponents. The response often runs as follows: Why should access to the electronic versions of theses and dissertations be restricted when access to print versions is not? As mentioned previously, one of the primary reasons for implementing ETD programs is the perceived value of making these key academic documents more accessible rather than less accessible. Given that increased awareness of a scholar’s work is broadly perceived to be an
advantage rather than a disadvantage in academia, improving the accessibility and discoverability of student theses and dissertations is seen as a benefit.

However, the anxieties that come forward concerning ETD accessibility usually revolve precisely around the tremendous increase in discoverability and reproducibility of documents that can be freely downloaded via the Web (the digital form of the electronic thesis or dissertation is usually conflated with Web accessibility when these concerns manifest, although these two properties of ETDs are obviously distinct). These anxieties usually sort out into the following areas of concern.

8.2.1 Violation of Copyright by Authors of ETDs
While the issue of copyright violation in theses and dissertations has always been an issue, it escalates when ETDs are made available on the Internet. Academic administrators may fear that copyright violations (intentional or unintentional) that may exist within student theses and dissertations will become more visible when exposed on the Web. The somewhat obvious rejoinder to this concern is that the institution should implement effective measures for detecting and preventing copyright violations whatever form the thesis or dissertation takes, whether electronic or print. There are now a growing number of tools for automatic detection of plagiarism, both commercial services and free options (although either option requires that someone in the institution does need to take responsibility for routine plagiarism checks). While it might be true that copyright violations are more prone to be discovered when the general discoverability of theses and dissertations increases, this does not seem to be a particularly compelling reason to limit access to ETDs.

A more rational, yet subtle, concern arises in situations in which limited permission has been obtained by the student from the copyright holder to reproduce an image or other content solely in the print copy of the thesis or dissertation submitted for graduation, but not in an openly accessible ETD. There are still categories of theses and dissertations for which this scenario is relatively common. Some disciplines in which this may be the case include art history and performance-based fields of study in which expectations have not caught up with the possibilities of the technology or institutional practice. One straightforward remedy for this scenario that has been put forward by institutions that seek to maximize accessibility of ETDs is simply education and awareness building for both students and their faculty committee members, with the aim that more general permissions be obtained for copyrighted material included in theses and dissertations such that ETDs can be made freely accessible. The other point is to again emphasize that effective measures for detecting and preventing copyright violations in ETDs should be in place procedurally.

8.2.2 Violation of Copyright by Those Who Access ETDs
Another controversy centers on fears that wider access to the theses and dissertations of an institution’s students will make these works more likely to be plagiarized. While plagiarism is always something to be alert to, arguments to this effect again appear to be hollow upon closer consideration. While instances of plagiarism may (or may not) have increased because of widespread electronic access to theses and dissertations, that is not a reason to constrain access to the work of an institution’s students. It may very well be another justification for implementing better mechanisms for automated mechanisms for detection of plagiarism, however. And it may also be another justification for awareness raising
programs among students and faculty as to the specifics of what constitutes plagiarism and ways to prevent it.

8.2.3 Anxiety About Quality of ETDs
The most frequently raised argument against implementation of ETD programs is based on fear by either administrators or faculty that wider access to the theses and dissertations of an institution will somehow lead to greater exposure of deficiencies in these student works. This concern most often takes the form of reluctance expressed in closed meetings when the idea of an ETD program is initially being proposed, and is driven by (sometimes unarticulated) fears by administrators or faculty that their students’ work is sub-par or somehow otherwise flawed and broader review by external reviewers will surface these faults.

Rejoinders to this viewpoint are clear upon closer inspection: if the administration or faculty have concerns about the quality of student work, or if there is a perception that faculty are allowing students to submit inadequate theses and dissertations, then steps should be taken to remediate this situation rather than seeking to obscure it. Of all the objections raised against providing electronic access to theses and dissertations this objection may be the most counter-productive as it may never actually be articulated, yet may be lurking silently behind-the-scenes so to speak. If an ETD program implementer suspects that this fear may be present, it is best to simply get it out in the open and discuss it objectively. Talking about such fears is usually the best way to overcome them.

The previous three controversies over ETD program access policies are relatively straightforward to respond to because they are based largely on misconceptions. The following access policy recommendations are more substantive.

8.2.4 Embargo Controversies
The most protracted discussions that occur in implementing ETD programs often involve complex discussions on various aspects of “embargos” in which access to ETDs is delayed temporarily or permanently. There is a tremendous range of embargo options, with the chapter on Access Levels and Embargoes more fully addressing the range of possibilities to consider. We will here only attempt to summarize the main categories of embargo arguments that are most often discussed during the creation of ETD programs.

Sometimes faculty members (especially in the humanities) are strong advocates of embargos. The claim has frequently been made that students who release a humanities dissertation through an ETD repository will be precluded from subsequently publishing their dissertation as a book. The argument is that such dissertations should therefore not be made publicly accessible and should be embargoed. The level of anxiety over this issue among some humanists is such that it sometimes leads to claims that all humanities ETDs should be permanently embargoed, or even that access to all institutional ETDs should be permanently embargoed by policy. Proposals such as these are generally considered extreme positions, and have been strongly contested in recent years for several reasons. A 2011 survey by McMillan et al. demonstrated that 72% of publishers will accept submissions of openly accessible ETDs for consideration, and an additional 14% indicated that they would consider such submissions if the contents and conclusions in the manuscript are substantially different from the ETD. In fact, only 4% of
publishers responded that they would never consider such submissions. Some scholars report a significant advantage to releasing their ETD as an early version of a later publication, primarily because of the visibility and recognition it affords them in advance of the publication.

The opposite extreme position is that all ETDs must immediately be made permanently open access upon deposit. This position is countered by examples in which at least some period of embargo is strongly warranted. The strongest such objection to making a thesis or dissertation openly accessible immediately concerns the quite legitimate issues involved if there is an associated patent application. When there is a pending patent application based on some aspect of the work involved in a thesis or dissertation, many institutions constrain all public access to the work. This is because public release of any material that discloses substantive details of an invention before it is patented may likely constitute “prior art”, and as such will render a patent application invalid. There are other situations in which an embargo of some period may be requested for good reasons; an example might be that the student is seeking to publish the dissertation with one of the tiny 4% minority of publishers that explicitly refuse to consider submissions of ETDs.

Most ETD programs have therefore resisted proposals for automatic blanket policies, but encourage open access while providing students with processes for requesting embargoes with appropriate justifications. These processes are often structured through the specifics of the deposit policy the institution implements (see the following section).

**8.2.5 Copyright and Ownership of ETDs**

The quite basic question of assertion of intellectual property for the ETD as a work is sometimes a source of disagreement or controversy. In most institutions the assumption is that the student author holds the copyright with the institutional ETD program retaining a permanent right to display the work in the ETD repository. This is not always the case; an example of an exception is MIT, which asserts copyright for theses and dissertations that are created with financial or technical support from the university (MIT, 2011).

Producing the thesis or dissertation may frequently be the first time the student has occasion to think of themselves as an author. This is another opportunity for an ETD program to usefully provide information concerning the rights of authors in asserting copyright over their work. The chapter *Guidelines for Implementing ETD Programs – Roles and Responsibilities* provides additional information about the kinds of instructional programs that an ETD program may wish to consider implementing in conjunction with other services.

**8.3 Deposit Procedures**

**Key Issues**

- Mandatory versus optional deposit.
- File formats.

After access and copyright issues, the next key area of decision in implementing an ETD program is the specification of a procedure for depositing the ETD. Questions concerning this aspect of ETD programs
often get mired in very specific details, but should be informed by an overall set of goals for the ETD program.

8.3.1 Mandatory versus Optional Deposit
A fundamental question any ETD program must grapple with is whether or not all theses and dissertations are to be deposited into the institutional ETD repository. If there are exceptions, what rules structure the deposit process? When are ETDs made publicly accessible? Who is responsible for which roles in the entire lifecycle of the ETD?

In the 2010 CNI survey 43% of institutions reported that ETD deposit was mandatory for both doctoral and masters students. (Lippincott, 2010) Many institutions have transitioned to the viewpoint that the ETD submitted is the document of record, rather than the submitted print thesis or dissertation. Electronic theses and dissertations are potentially much easier to deposit, provide access to, and to preserve through replication.

8.3.2 File Formats
Questions often arise during implementation of ETD programs concerning which file formats should be allowed for ETDs. Many programs have concerns about the complexity of managing and preserving multiple file formats over long periods of time. This is again a complex topic, and this section will only attempt to highlight some of the relevant controversies; the chapter on Managing the Lifecycle of ETDs: Curatorial Decisions and Practices will more fully discuss this issue.

A 2008 survey by McMillan found that 85% of ETD programs accept PDF submissions of theses and dissertations, but there was far less consensus on other multimedia file formats. (McMillan 2008) While there is little consensus on which multimedia formats are the best to manage and preserve, there is a growing consensus that ETD programs must go beyond simple archiving of the thesis or dissertation as a PDF. Many theses and dissertations now include rich statistical datasets, images, or other associated information that comprise content associated with the intellectual work of the research project. An issue that has occupied many well-established ETD programs in the past few years has been the question of how to begin archiving these far more complex forms of information together with the basic PDF representing the thesis or dissertation submitted for degree candidacy. Both new and old ETD programs are taking up this issue as a capability that must be incorporated into ETD deposit workflows, but this is quite a difficult task. Checking the validity of incoming PDF submissions is difficult enough procedurally; how will thinly-staffed ETD programs take up the much more complicated task of validating and documenting complex ETD objects that may include dozens or even hundreds of distinct files? Creating effective metadata for such complex and variable ETD submissions is a daunting notion, yet virtually all experts agree that this level of metadata is a necessity for long-term management of ETDs. There is no such thing as benign neglect of objects in digital archives, which must be actively managed over time to survive at all. This issue warrants serious consideration by any ETD program, whether long-established or just coming on the drawing board, and there are no easy answers, only tradeoffs and priorities to consider.
8.4 Repository System Options

Key Issues
- Locally managed repositories.
- Commercially managed repositories.
- Consortial repositories and other hybrid Options.
- Distinction of access and preservation systems.

The 2010 CNI survey identified three main repository strategies for implementation of ETD programs: 1) locally managed repositories, 2) repositories managed by consortia, and 3) repositories managed by commercial firms. There are many perspectives on the pros and cons of these different options; the following is an attempt to summarize the salient points of these different positions.

8.4.1 Locally Managed Repositories
Also known as institutional repositories (IR), these are systems implemented at particular universities using open source software or locally developed systems. Many institutions implement a local system for managing a variety of institutional digital content (hence the name “institutional repositories”) typified by ETDs, faculty scholarship, local grey literature, and locally digitized content. Such institutions realize operational efficiencies through managing all these different types of content in one functional system. There is now a large literature that describes the implementation of locally managed institutional repositories (Bailey 2011), detailing the pros and cons of individual systems and strategies for implementation. This brief guide will not attempt to summarize all of the options available to an academic library seeking to implement an institutional repository; but will instead categorize the broad types of options that should be considered when thinking about ETDs and IRs.

The first option is whether or not to limit the repository to ETDs. While the most common option is for ETDs to be managed as one type of content among many managed within the IR, there are some institutions that have long maintained a separate repository just for ETDs. A notable example of this standalone strategy is Virginia Tech who has been a leader in the ETD movement almost from the beginning. (Sharretts and French 1999) The advantage of this approach is focus and constraint; the repository does not need to accommodate any workflows and metadata beyond what is needed for acquisition and administration of ETDs. Because ETDs are the sole focus in this scenario, it may be possible and desirable to develop features that are specific to improving access and usability of ETDs. Examples include interfaces for browsing and studying ETDs within departments or network charts of students that studied under particular professors.

However, the far more common option is for the institutional repository to manage ETDs within a larger context of genres and content types. This strategy has many advantages. There are significant costs to maintaining a local IR, and centralizing the acquisition and management of all types of locally generated content can leverage staff and other resources required to sustain an IR operation. It may be far more affordable (or at least palatable) for an academic library’s administration to fund one IR for everything (including ETDs), rather than separate systems and workflows for different type of content. Maintaining
one centralized system for all locally generated content can also minimize the number of interfaces that users have to learn in order to access a library’s locally generated content.

A question that receives a great deal of attention in implementations of local IRs is whether or not to locally install an open source software package (such as DSpace or Fedora), or instead outsource the IR to a commercial solution (such as Digital Commons). Commercial solutions will be discussed in the next section. Local implementations of open source software packages give the institution a great deal of control and independence, but require more up-front investment in the technical staff to run the system. Running a local IR system requires that specific technical staff be available locally to install and maintain the system. Managerial oversight must also be vested in someone so that ongoing decisions and oversight occur in a reasonable time frame. Smaller libraries often partner with their campus IT centers to run institutional repositories, but medium to large institutions usually invest in a library IT department that has the capability to run servers and manage software (most frequently in conjunction with integrated library catalog systems).

8.4.2 Commerci ally Managed Repositories

Outsourcing to a vendor can minimize the up-front implementation expenditures required for local staff to run a system, but will still require significant expenditures for the fees associated with leasing access to a commercial system. An outsourced option will also require that the workflows associated with the vendor’s system be adopted locally. Despite the drawbacks, many libraries see outsourcing as an attractive option given the high cost of technical staff. Letting a large commercial vendor run the system is appealing in that running the software becomes someone else’s problem, but it also requires a significant degree of confidence that the vendor will be able to resolve problems encountered in a satisfactory manner. The issue of eventual migration from one system to another also becomes somewhat more problematic in the case of a commercial vendor; once ETDs have been deposited for several years in a commercial system, it may be extremely difficult to extract them for use in another repository.

To the extent that the institution intends for the IR to function as its ETD repository, the decision about whether or not to implement a local IR or use a commercial service is a key decision to make, and the question comes down to priorities. What is the most important priority: flexibility and local control or minimization of technical staff?

8.4.3 Consortial Repositories and other Hybrid Options

It may be the case that there is a regional consortium that maintains a large shared repository system for ETDs and other varieties of locally generated digital content. An example is OhioLINK, a shared digital repository, including ETD collections, maintained for many institutions in Ohio. Another example includes the shared ETD repository services provided by the California Digital Library for UC system institutions. Leveraging investments in technical staff through a regional consortium can enable the creation of significantly more capable repositories and greatly enhance the IR capabilities of cooperating libraries.
8.4.4 **Distinction of Access and Preservation Systems**

An unobvious distinction that IR implementers should be cognizant of is the distinction between access and preservation capabilities in planning. Any ETD solution must distinguish these two functions. Access to deposited ETDs is the combination of user interfaces and programmatic training provided to users who wish to gain access to an institution’s ETDs. *Preservation* of ETDs encompasses systems and negotiated organizational agreements that ensure that ETDs will be accessible over indefinite periods of time to future users. Preservation systems may be quite different from the IR installations that provide access to ETDs. When considering long-term preservation, implementers should consider strategies for distributing secure replicated copies of the ETDs in geographically dispersed locations, the classic strategy for long-term survival of print materials. This may entail inter-organizational partner agreements with other institutions such as the MetaArchive Cooperative facilitates. Thinking through options for ensuring long-term preservation of ETDs is a worthwhile investment of time and resources to protect the unique institutional assets that ETDs represent.

8.5 **ETD Program Management**

The first, and perhaps most fundamental, set of questions facing those who wish to implement an ETD program is *who will be responsible for what aspects of the program?* The roles and responsibilities among three key stakeholder categories must be thought through carefully: graduating student authors of ETDs, the graduate school, and the library. Students obviously produce the theses and dissertations, and must be clearly advised of what actions they must take to deposit the electronic versions of their work. Graduate schools are responsible for certifying that students have met all requirements for graduation, and must clearly articulate the specifics of these requirements. Libraries are responsible for long-term preservation of the ETDs, and (usually) maintenance of the ETD program.

Having stated these basics, there are obviously many specific procedures that must be developed if an ETD program is to succeed. Each of the three key stakeholders must understand what their responsibilities are, and what information the other stakeholders need to take action appropriately. Since libraries are the institutions responsible for long-term preservation of ETDs, libraries are most often the institutional actor that initiates an ETD program on a campus. But the students and graduate schools must also buy into the concept of an ETD program and become engaged early on if it is to succeed.

8.6 **ETD Program Services**

Some final options that should be considered in implementing ETD programs include the ancillary services that will be implemented as part of the program. If implemented well, these services can greatly enhance the utility of the program and help “sell” administrations on the justification for the program.

Advice concerning plagiarism is often an ancillary or associated service that goes hand-in-glove with ETD programs. By advising students and faculty on the specifics of what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it, an ETD program can significantly contribute toward the successful completion of a student’s graduate program. If students and faculty advisors are better equipped to avoid plagiarism, more theses and dissertations will ultimately progress to completion.
Another type of ancillary ETD program service that can enhance graduate education overall are usage statistics and other indicators of ETD significance. Joan Lippincott highlights the ways that such reporting mechanisms can illuminate the impacts of particular ETDs, and the ways that ETD programs can broaden the visibility of the theses and dissertations of an institution. (Lippincott 2006)

8.7 Summary
There are many questions and factors to consider associated with particular choices in implementing ETD programs, either at the policy level or in particular aspects of implementation. The categories of high-level decisions that usually receive the most attention in planning an ETD program or overhauling it, include: Access Policies, Deposit Policies, Repository System Options, ETD Program Management, and ETD Program Services. In the area of access, this document addresses concerns around copyright, quality, embargoes and ownership ultimately underscoring that improving the accessibility and discoverability of student theses and dissertations is seen as a benefit. In the area of deposit, the document advocates for being informed by an overall set of goals for the ETD program, with respect to mandatory versus optional deposit, and file formats. In the area of repository systems, the document, rather than advocate for one approach, puts forward the pros and cons of each of locally managed, commercially managed, and consortial solutions. Finally the document emphasizes that each of the three key stakeholders, the authors, graduate schools and the library, must understand what their responsibilities are, and what information the other stakeholders need to take action appropriately.
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