

Retrospective Digitization of Theses and Dissertations: Revisiting Issues and Considerations

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Introduction

Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) play significant roles, not only as new forms of scholarly communication, but also as drivers for the development of institutional repositories and digital libraries in general. The University of North Texas (UNT) was among the early US institutions that moved quickly and aggressively to implement an ETD program. In 1999, UNT required the submission of theses and dissertations in electronic format. The UNT Libraries have been playing an active role in supporting the UNT ETD program by integrating ETDs into the existing digital resources. ETDs receive significant usage in the UNT Digital Library system, compared to the overall percentage of digital objects.

Realizing the value of creating a mechanism for easy access and wider distribution of UNT's scholarship, the UNT Libraries started a digital retrospective conversion project for older (pre-1999) theses and dissertations previously available only in paper form. The goal of the retrospective digitization project is to digitize some 10,000+ pre-1999 theses and dissertations and make them available online with open access. The first phase of the project started in summer 2010, uploading and integrating the 1930's theses into the existing ETDs and other digital resources.

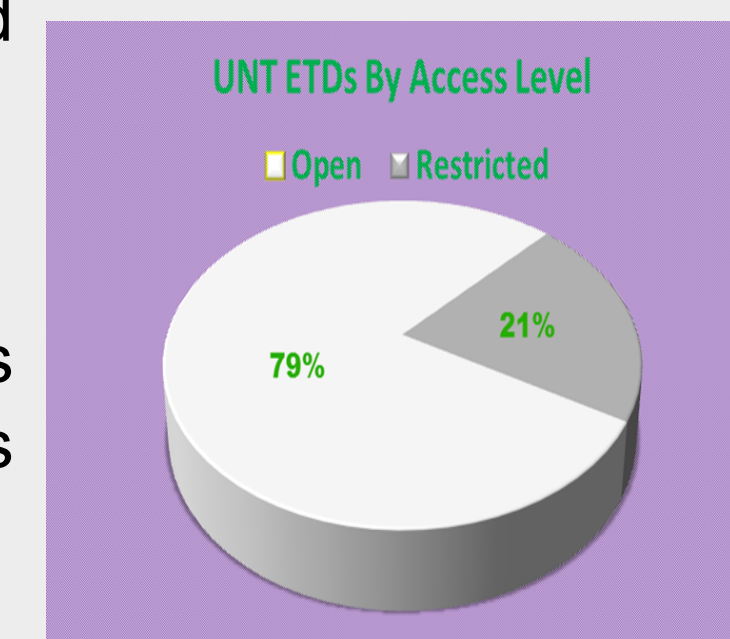
Background

Access Levels of UNT's ETDs

Public: - open; there are no restrictions on these resources.

UNT-Community: - restricted to users associated with the UNT.
-Users are required to login, if they are located outside UNT campus.
-Restricted ETDs published after 2007 will be moved to "Public" after a 2-5 years embargo period has passed.

UNT-Strict: - restricted to UNT Community.
-This will be strictly enforced and users are always required to login using their UNT's ID (EUID), regardless of their location.

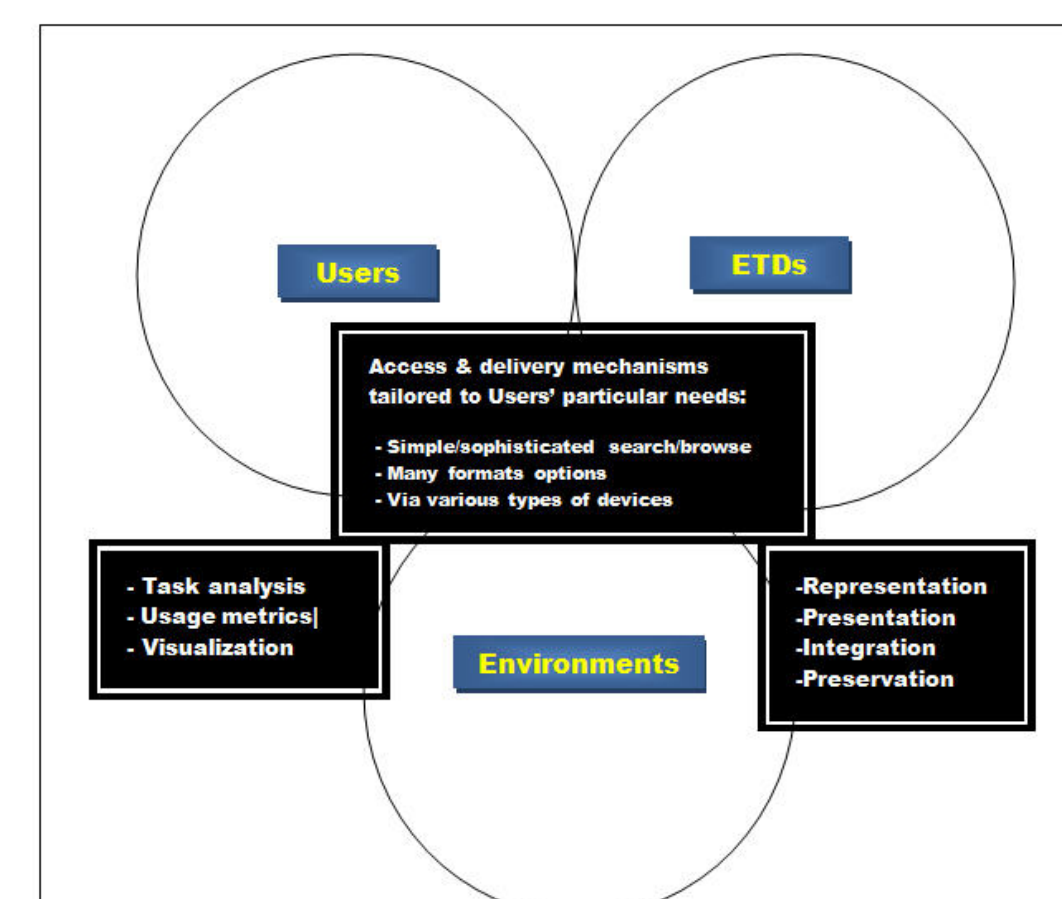


Review of the Issues

The current practices and workflows in retro digitization of theses and dissertations vary significantly among higher education institutions in the US.

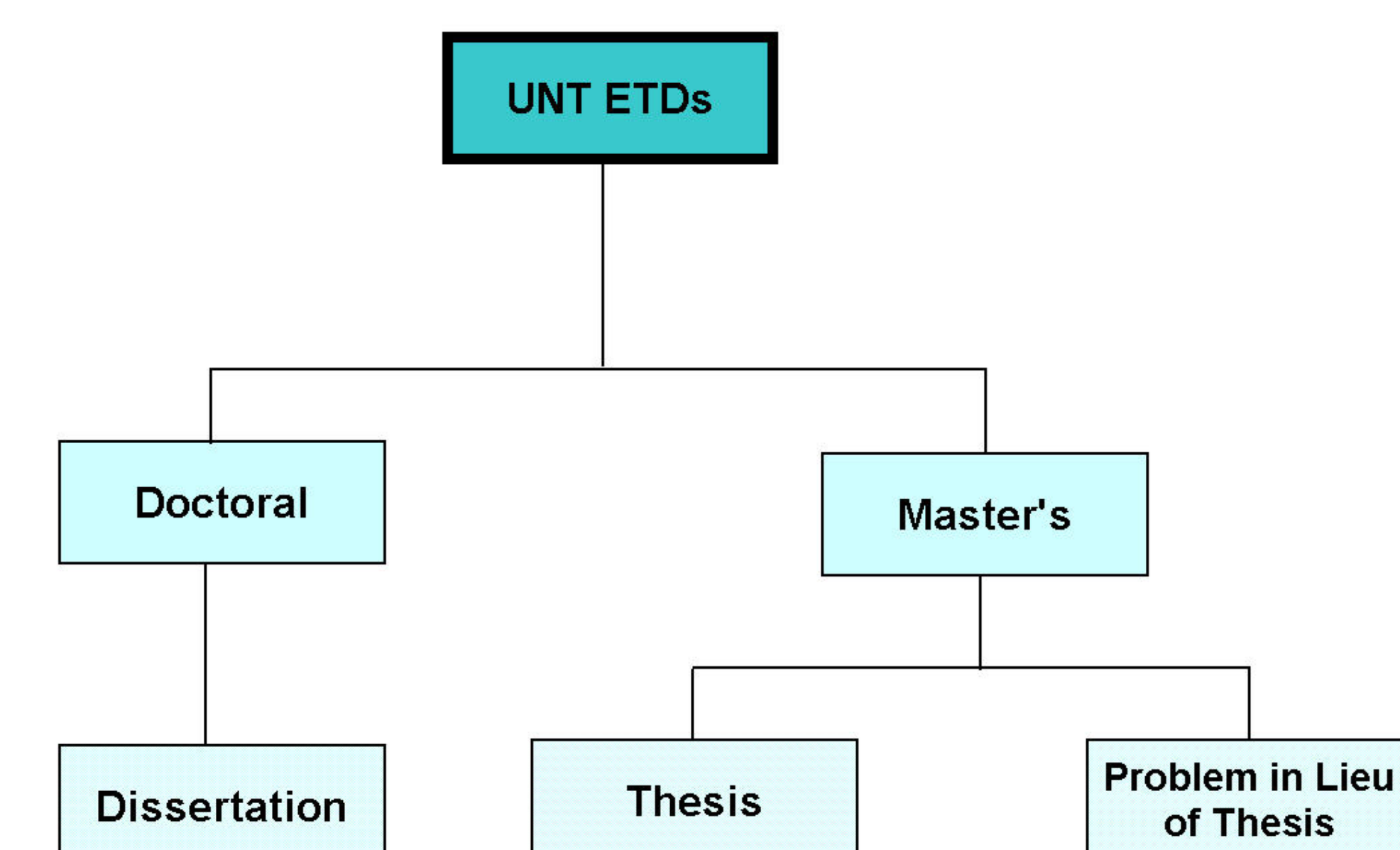
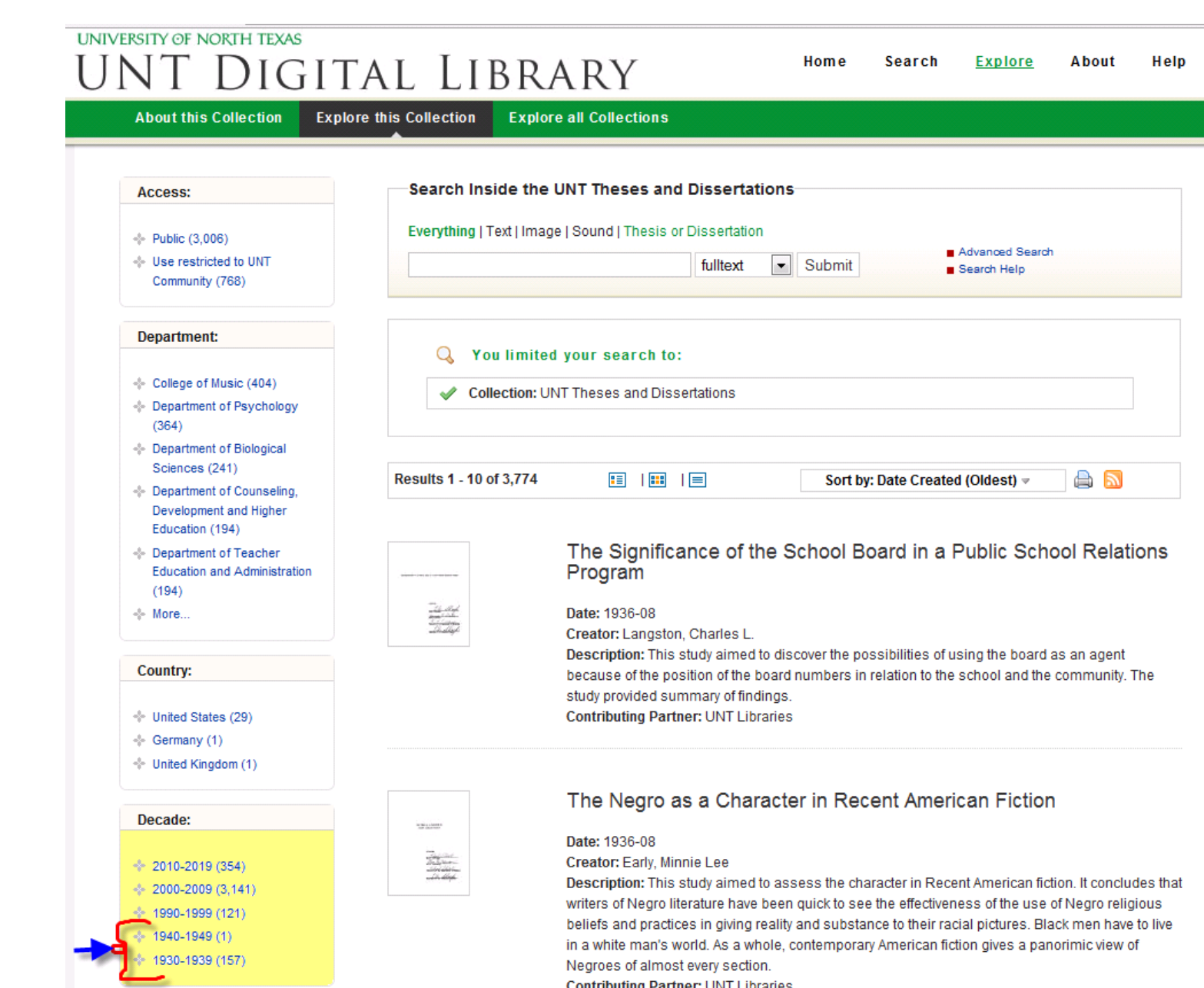
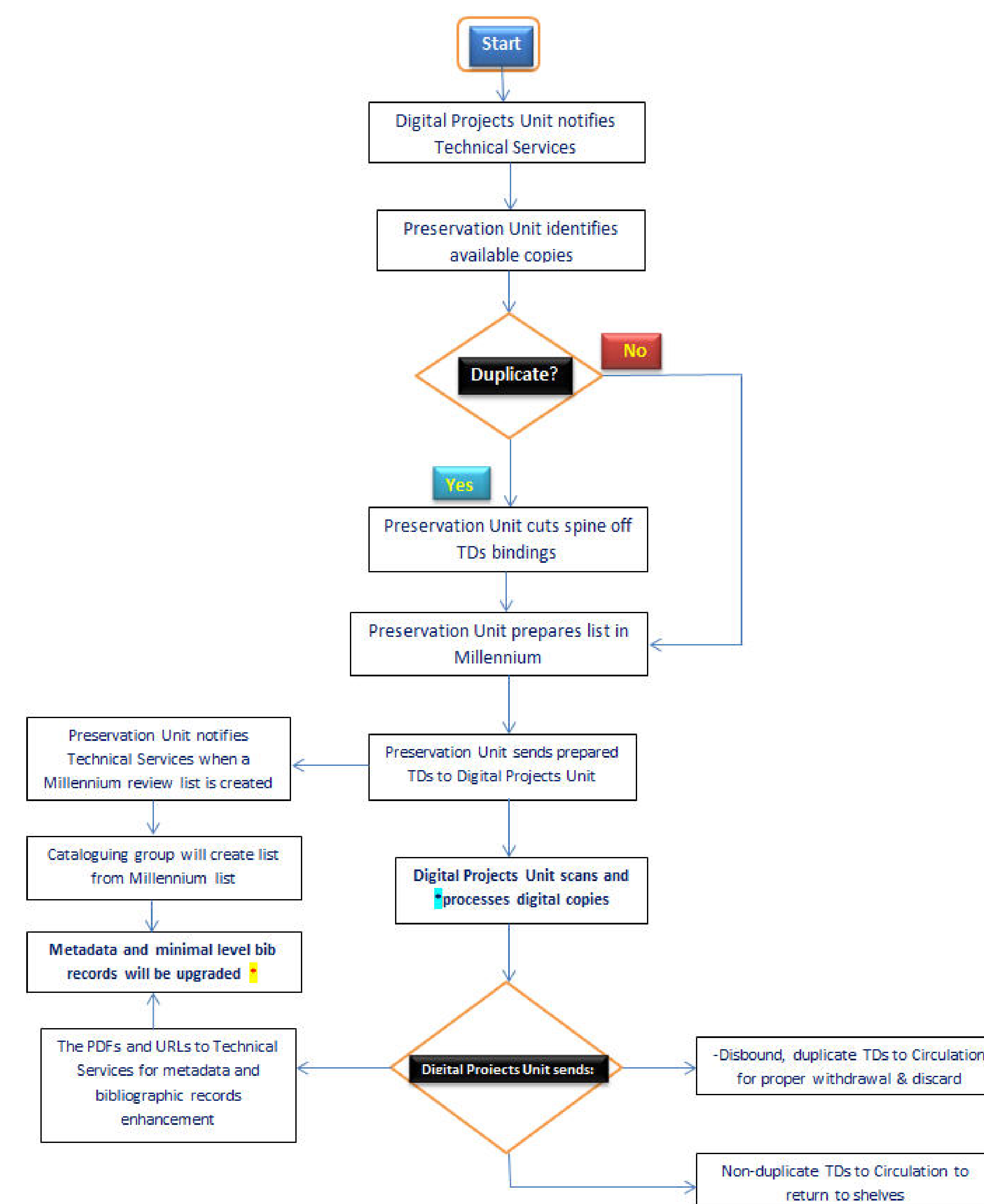
- » Outsourcing vs. In-house
- » Standards and best practices
- » Discovery and delivery options
- » Rights management issues
- » Preservation issues

The steps involved when converting paper-based TDs into digital formats and the approach to the main issues depend on individual institutions' circumstances, (mission, priorities, target users, capacity, available resources, current practice, existing system, collaborators requirements, etc.)



Considerations for Successful Digitization

In light of the principles for building good digital collections, planners of retro digitization of TDs need to consider various issues and value-added services that facilitate management of the digital content and make it more visible, accessible, usable, reusable, interoperable, and persistent.



Summary

Over the past year, the UNT Libraries have put forth great effort in making digital collections more accessible and useful in research processes. Considering the unique value and openness of ETDs, digitizing and providing access to the wealth of information that before had only limited user and distribution, should further promote the scholarly output of UNT's alumni. The successful digitization of TDs and curation of ETDs indeed, requires effort across the entire life-cycle to ensure that ETDs are managed, preserved, & made accessible in a manner that today's users expect!