AN INVESTIGATION OF ETDS AS PRIOR PUBLICATIONS
Findings from the 2011 NDLTD Publishers' Survey

Gail McMillan
Virginia Tech
gailmac@vt.edu

Marisa L. Ramirez
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo
mramir14@calpoly.edu

Joan Dalton
University of Windsor
jdalton@uwindsor.ca

Max Read
University of British Columbia
max.read@ubc.ca

Nancy H. Seamans
Georgia State University
nseamans@gsu.edu

ABSTRACT

Do publishers and editors of scholarly journals view theses and dissertations that are readily available on the Internet and through convenient Web browsers as prior publications? This has been a topic of discussion for well over a decade in the ETD community, not only of concern to graduate schools and libraries but also among research faculty and their graduate students. At the same time that a growing number of universities worldwide are requiring ETDs and making the research and scholarship of their graduate students publicly available, many faculty advise their students to restrict online access to their theses and dissertations due to concerns about future publication options. This paper reports on the 2011 survey results of journal editors' and university press directors' attitudes toward online theses and dissertations. This data and the open-ended comments from the survey respondents indicate support for open access to ETDs.

Keywords

Journals, presses, open access, graduate students.

INTRODUCTION

Why do another survey?

Data on this topic is, for the most part, dated. Publishers were previously surveyed a decade ago by two of the authors of this paper. In 1999 Joan Dalton was on a research leave when she conducted the first known survey specifically investigating publishers' attitudes towards ETDs. (Dalton 2000) She surveyed publishers in the sciences. Nancy Seamans' 2000 survey focused on the social sciences. (McMillan 2001, Seamans 2003, Dalton/Seamans 2004) Two years later, Bobby Holt surveyed humanities publishers. (Holt 2002) Seamans and Holt built on the foundation that Dalton laid, adapting her survey instrument. (DLA Survey)

The current survey was also conducted because questions continue to arise as evidenced by the recent discussion on the ETD-L (listserv) and articles in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. We also have evidence that authors are restricting access to their ETDs and that university faculty are advising students to restrict access due to concern about publishers' perceptions about prior publication.

There is very little data on the topic of publishers' attitudes about ETDs. Most of the information resources are based on perceptions of publishers' attitudes, and these perceptions are contradicted by the contemporary data as well as that from a decade ago. For example, the Virginia Tech graduate student exit survey (at the conclusion of the ETD submission process), has gathered data for over a decade. The question relevant to this paper is, "If you restricted access to your ETD, what did you base your decision on?" (DLA Survey) Similarly, in 2002 Ursula Goldsmith's survey of the Louisiana State University faculty became part of her dissertation. (Goldsmith 2002) More recently, in 2009 Angela McCutcheon surveyed graduate school personnel about the impact of publishers' policies on ETDs. (McCutcheon 2010)

During discussions at the June 2010 meeting of the Board of Directors of the Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD), Seamans volunteered to "move a publisher survey forward." (NDLTD 2010) Therefore, we conducted a survey to gather contemporary data for presentation to the 14th International Symposium on Electronic Theses and Dissertations, Cape Town, South Africa, and the associated NDLTD Board of Directors meeting.

Deciding who to survey.

We purchased the most current available data from Thompson Reuter's Journal Performance Indicators (JPI), 2005-2009. The JPI index had 81subject categories with ~7,000 journal titles in the Social Sciences and Humanities. Specifically, there were 55 categories in the Social Sciences Index and 27 in the Arts and Humanities Index.

The data included RPI—Relative Impact Factors--a measure reflecting the average number of citations to articles in a journal. It can be an indicator of the relative importance of a journal within its field. We sorted the data sort on RPI, and selected the top 10 journal titles in each category, located editorial contact information, and removed duplicates (journal titles, editors, etc.). The resulting list of 616 was comprised of about two-thirds social science and one-third in the humanities journals.

By surveying academic presses we thought we could add another important perspective on attitudes towards ETDs. Fortunately, Brenna McLaughlin, the Electronic and Strategic Initiatives Director at American Association of University Presses (AAUP), agreed to email our request for survey participants to its 130 members. Rather than having a subject focus, the university press's mission is to "publish work of scholarly, intellectual, or creative merit…" (AAUP 2011)

How and when were they surveyed?

We used SurveyMonkey, a Web survey tool, to distribute the survey to 616 journal editors. The email invitations included a brief description of the goals of the survey, a link to the online survey, and the endorsement of the NDLTD executive director, Ed Fox. The survey was open May 17th - June 16th, 2011. The 130 AAUP members received the same email request on May 19th.

> Subject: Are Electronic Theses prior publications?
>
> In the U.S. and around the world, Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) are becoming increasingly available through online digital repositories.
>
> As an academic editor or publisher, would you consider an ETD to have been previously published? Would your journal or publishing enterprise consider accepting a manuscript submission derived from an electronic dissertation?
>
> You are invited to complete a brief (11 question) survey on how the academic publishing community views ETDs. Your participation will comprise a valued contribution to the growing conversation about academic publishing in the digital environment.

WHAT QUESTIONS DID WE ASK IN THE SURVEY?

There were 11 questions that collected information on prior publication policies among scholarly academic publishers. Nine of the questions had to do with characteristics of the survey respondents including the nature of the enterprise (e.g., university press or journal), subjects covered by the enterprise's publications, size of the enterprise, and the like.

The key question was: Which of the following statements best reflects the editorial policy or practice governing your enterprise? "Manuscripts which are revisions derived from openly accessible electronic theses or dissertations (ETDs) are..."

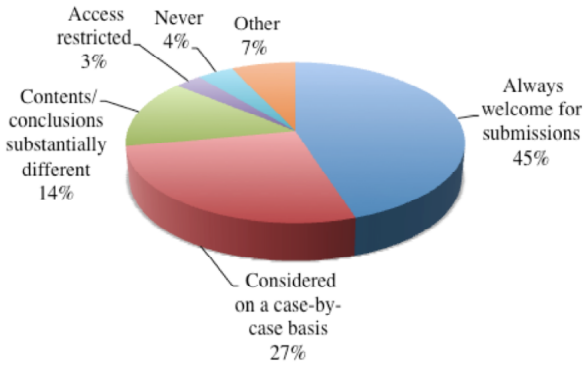
- Always welcome for submission
- Considered on a case-by-case basis
- Considered ONLY IF the contents and conclusions in the manuscript are substantially different from the ETD
- Considered ONLY IF the ETD has access limited to the campus or institution where it was completed
- Not considered under any circumstances
- Other

WHO RESPONDED TO THE SURVEY?

We had a 17% response rate--75 journal editors and 53 university press directors. The most common subjects covered by the university presses included: History, Environmental Studies, Literary Theory & Criticism, Religion, Political Science, Humanities, Multidisciplinary, Anthropology, and Women's Studies. Journal subjects were more scattered, with Interdisciplinary Social Sciences being the most common. This suggests that we reached a broad audience of Humanities/Social Science journal editors and university press directors.

2011 NDLTD PUBLISHERS' SURVEY FINDINGS

The following survey findings--data and comments from 128 survey respondents—reveals the policies and practices among journal editors and university press directors, and their attitudes towards online theses and dissertations.



Nearly three-fourths of the survey respondents said ETDs "are welcome for submission." Almost half "always" welcome them and more than a quarter considered them "on a case-by-case basis."

Limiting access to the host university community does not affect a significant number. Less than 3% of the survey respondents consider ETDs for publication based on this criterion.

A very small number do not consider publishing ETDs under any circumstances.

What is the perspective of university press directors who publish primarily monographs?

Fifty-three AAUP members responded, representing North American academic presses, the majority of which (61%) publish monographs. Of these respondents, 34% indicated that a manuscript derived from a publicly accessible ETD may have barriers to publication, but working through them with the editor could mitigate these impediments. Over half of the respondents indicated that manuscripts derived from online theses and dissertations would either be welcomed for publication or considered on a case-by-case basis.

It was a commonly held expectation among the survey respondents that revisions to the original thesis or dissertation would have been undertaken prior to submission for consideration. Just over half (52.2%) of the directors of university presses comments had to do with their willingness to consider ETDs that had been revised. For example: "We normally consider theses or dissertation for publication only if the author is willing to revise them for a broader audience; this is our practice regardless of the availability of an ETD."

Another commented: "We ask authors to stop distribution of their ETD when we agree to publish their REVISED material." And, "Some manuscripts, even if published electronically as dissertations, are appealing regardless of their electronic availability because the audience for them in print form is substantial enough that it does not matter."

What is the perspective of journal editors?

As expected, more journals have adopted the practice of accepting and publishing ETD-based submissions than monographs, as is reflected in the acceptance level of manuscripts derived from ETDs. Of 128 respondents, 69 indicated "journal" was their enterprise. Of these enterprises, a full 84% indicated that manuscripts derived from openly accessible ETDs would either be welcomed for publication or considered on a case-by-case basis. As with monographs, it was commonly expected that substantial revisions would be undertaken for a journal article submission. "This is not so black and white. These are always welcome for submission but a journal article is not going to take the same form as a thesis or dissertation; if it tries, it won't pass peer review."

Many institutions have provided the option to limit ETD access to the current university community. This was largely provided to appease journal publishers who were opposed to online theses and dissertations. However, the current survey reveals that restricted access is not necessary. To wit, *none* of the journal editor respondents indicated that ETDs could be considered "only if the ETD has access limited to the campus or institution where it was completed."

Only 3% of the journals would not consider such a submission under any circumstances, less than half the number of presses. The results look quite different when we look at overall survey responses and then separately at university press directors' and journal editors' responses.

	All	Uni. Presses	Journals
Always welcome	45%	10%	66%
Case-by-case	27%	44%	18%
If very different	14%	27%	6%
If access restricted	3%	7%	**0%**
Never	4%	7%	3%
Other	7%	5%	6%

Journal editors are more enthusiastic about receiving submissions based on ETDs than are university presses. Two-thirds of the journals "always welcome" submissions from ETDs, while one-tenth of the university presses do.

This is not to say the university presses discourage submissions based on ETDs. Nearly half consider ETD-based submissions on a case-by-case basis. Slightly more than one-quarter (26.8%) will consider submissions "ONLY IF the contents and conclusions in the manuscript are substantially different from the ETD." There does not appear to be a significant relationship between the size of the enterprise and its policy or perspective on accepting manuscripts derived from ETDs.

However, university presses are about two-and-a-half times as likely to "never" accept ETD-based submissions, than are journal editors. Only university presses find access restrictions necessary.

How do 2011 findings compare to previous surveys?

	2000 Dalton	2001 Seamans	2011 NDLTD
Welcomed for submission	47%	33%	45%
Case by case basis	19%	29%	27%
Contents substantially revised	6%	6%	13%
ETD had limited access	6%	0%	3%
Under no circumstances	4%	2%	4%
Other	19%	27%	9%

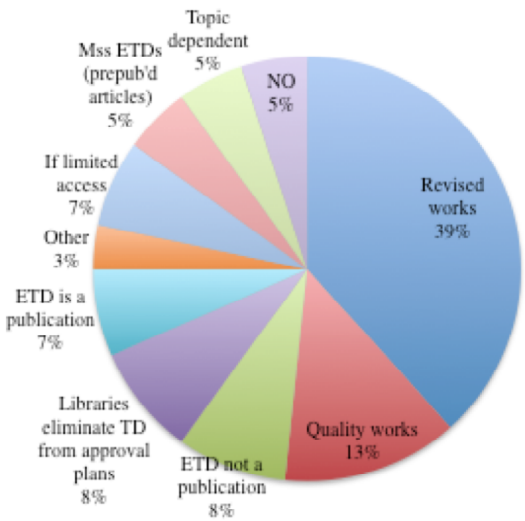
Not a lot of change overall has taken place in publishers' attitudes towards ETDs in 10 years. In addition, this years survey results from Social Science and Humanities publishers align with past surveys of other disciplines including the Sciences. A relative few would not consider an ETD-based submission under any circumstances.

Fewer publishers find access restrictions a determining factor when deciding to publish a book or an article from an ETD. More importantly, twice as many respondents indicated that they require the ETD to be "substantially" different from the original work.

What doesn't the data say? Comments on the Prior Publication Question

In addition to the data, university press directors' comments are very telling. Nearly half of our survey respondents volunteered additional comments and observations with us, and supplied their names and email addresses so that we could follow-up with them.

Comments in favor of ETDs largely represented two categories: (1) Editors and press directors judge the quality of the article or book submitted for publication, and (2) ETDs are *not* considered published works.



Quality is Key

"The American Psychological Association, which publishes over 40 journals across psychology, has an official policy that theses/dissertations, even if archived at a university site, are not counted as prior publication."

"A journal article is qualitatively different from a thesis, and must be structured with the needs of quite different readers in mind. All our submissions are subject to peer review, and frequently papers change in response to reviewer feedback. The fact that a paper grows out from an academic thesis is not a concern for this journal."

"Prior availability through an IR is not usually the deciding factor. We are more interested in the quality of the work, how well it fits with our list, and whether it deserves wider dissemination and promotion."

Not Prior Publication

"We do not consider the dissertation to be the equivalent of a book. It is student work; a book is professional work."

"Dissertations have *never* counted as publications… A pdf of an unpublished work is still an unpublished work."

2009 DATA FROM NORTH AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

There is one additional source of evidence about publishers' attitudes towards ETDs. In Angela McCutcheon's 2010 Ohio University ETD, "Impact of Publishers' Policy on ETD Distribution Options within the United States," she wrote about her survey of graduate school personnel at North American universities. The purpose of this study was to determine if large circulation journal and book publishers were rejecting articles submitted for publication because the submitted articles/books were derived from ETDs. " She surveyed graduate school personnel at hundreds of North American universities and found only a very few (1.8%) publishers had out-right rejected manuscripts on the basis of their being derived from ETDs.

NEW CONCERNS ABOUT ETDS

ETDs make author anonymity difficult. Among the survey respondents' general comments we learned one survey respondent pointed out a previously unconsidered problem.

> The one problem this creates, which I and the editorial board have not resolved, is that this makes anonymity in review difficulty easy to determine who the author is) and thus undermines the strength and reliability of peer review. This could, ultimately, disadvantage young scholars. So we may change our policy and not allow submission of manuscripts based on dissertations that are freely accessible.

We were also reminded that not all publishers are familiar with the issues surrounding publications derived from ETDs.

> My first thought on this matter, and I never thought about it until just now, was "why should anything derived from a dissertation be excluded?"—but thinking further—if dissertations can be as readily accessed by computer as is becoming the case with journals—then perhaps I need to consider some form of restriction. The purpose of a journal is to present original information and knowledge—or as near original as possible. If dissertations become as accessible as journal articles, than [sic] perhaps I should adopt a policy that precludes articles drawn from dissertations.

This comment may well indicate that either the publishers are out of touch with authors' concerns, or it hasn't been brought up as an issue by their authors or editors.

Very few editors or directors seem to be aware that ETDs are also beginning to include published articles.

> We would prefer that students work with their major advisors to design thesis [sic] chapters for submission as research articles and review papers as part of the dissertation process to ensure a good fit with the journal. Ideally, the dissertation when completed will contain chapters that have already been published or accepted for publication so that the journal does not have to compete with content that is already freely available.

ADVICE TO GRADUATE STUDENTS BASED ON THE 2011 PUBLISHERS' SURVEY

Other than the surveys reported here and those conducted a decade ago by Dalton, Seamans, and Holt, here is very little data on the topic of publishers' attitudes about ETDs. Most of the information on this topic relies on *perceptions* of publishers' attitudes. The contemporary data as well as that from a decade ago contradict these perceptions.

Graduate students should not hesitate to submit works (e.g., journal articles and monographs) based their ETDs to the top journals and academic presses. Ninety-six percent of the publishers will consider them. Quality is the publishers' main concern. They are looking for authors who will adapt their ETDs for new audiences including peer reviewers. Based on the survey responses, ETDs are unsuitable in their original formats, e.g., too long. Instead, the ideas can be reused, but

they need to be reformatted to fit the publishers' guidelines and target audience.

Two key insights can be gleaned from the 2011 NDLTD survey of journal editors and university press directors. Based on their responses, (1) it is absolutely necessary to revise an ETD, in whole or in parts, in order to be considered for publication. (2) Quality was a common concern by respondents, not public accessibility to online theses or dissertations. An overwhelming majority, 96%, of the university press and journal respondents indicated that ETD-based works would be eligible for consideration in their publications.

REFERENCES

1. Dalton, Joan. 2000. ETDs: A Survey of Editors and Publishers. 3rd *International Symposium on Electronic Theses and Dissertations,* University of South Florida. Available http://docs.ndltd.org:8081/dspace/handle/2340/169
2. McMillan, Gail. 2001. Do ETDs Deter Publishers? *College and Research Libraries News,* 62, no. 6: 620-621. Available http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/staff/gailmac/publications/pubrsETD2001.html
3. Seamans, Nancy. 2003. "ETDs as Prior Publication: What the Editors Say." *Library Hi Tech,* 21, no. 1: 56-61. Available http://works.bepress.com/nancy_seamans/6/
4. Dalton, J. T., Seamans, N. H. 2004. "ETDs: Two Surveys of Editors and Publishers" in *ETD: A Sourcebook for Educators, Students, and Librarians.* NY: Marcel Dekker, 247-281. Available http://works.bepress.com/nancy_seamans/5/
5. Holt, Bobby. 2002. "Facilitator or Deterrent? Electronic Theses & Dissertations and Publishing: A Survey of Humanities Editors and Publishers." Digital Library and Archives, Virginia Tech.
6. Digital Library and Archives (DLA), Virginia Tech. Survey Database. Available http://lumiere.lib.vt.edu/surveys/results/
7. Board of Directors, Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations. Minutes, June 14, 2010.
8. McCutcheon, Angela M. 2010. "Impact of Publishers' Policy on Electronic Thesis and Dissertation (ETD) Distribution Options within the United States." PhD diss., Ohio University. Available http://etd.ohiolink.edu/view.cgi?acc_num=ohiou1273584209
9. Goldsmith, Ursula. 2002. "Perceptions of Active Graduate Faculty at a Research Extensive University Regarding Electronic Submission of Theses and Dissertations (ETDS)." PhD diss., Louisiana State University. Available http://etd.lsu.edu/docs/available/etd-0709102-111850/
10. DLA Survey Database. Available http://lumiere.lib.vt.edu/surveys/results/
11. AAUP. Available http://www.aaupnet.org/about-aaup/about-university-presses