

## The Status of ETDs: Current Practices and Challenges from the 2015 NDLTD Survey [Results of the Second Biennial ETD Survey]

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Though theses and dissertations have been available online for at least 20 years, not until 2013 did anyone attempt to systematically collect general data about ETDs or the graduate schools<sup>1</sup> and libraries that process, provide access, and preserve them. The purpose [slide 2] of the biennial surveys is to identify general practices of academic institutions worldwide, to chart the longitudinal progress of ETD initiatives, and to discover any updates and advances in the field. Today I'll highlight the data gathered last May & June using the Qualtrics software.

Responses for the 2015 survey were solicited through a variety of means, including these listservs [slide 3]

- NDLTD Board, web site, and conference attendance lists for 2015, 2014, and 2012, India, United Kingdom, and Peru respectively
- ETD listserv/Google group
- Council of Graduate Schools newsletter and through each regional Council
- US ETD Association conference participants 2011-2015
- Coalition of Networked Information listserv
- Association of Research Libraries director's listserv
- Association of College and Research Libraries Scholarly Communications listserv

### Demographics

This paper also includes comparisons to the 2013 survey results as well as regional perspectives. The 2013 survey gathered data from 161 institutions. The 2015 survey represents 298 institutions, *after deleting bogus responses and considering 45 institutions that had multiple responses. When all the responses for an institution were the same, only one survey was considered per institution (i.e., 18 surveys). When individuals from both the library and the graduate school completed a survey, one response from each was considered when their responses were dissimilar (i.e., 27 surveys).*

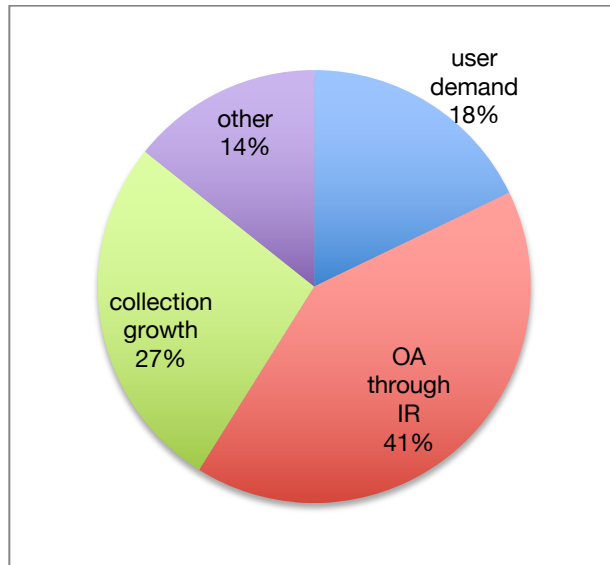
Though the more recent survey reached 85% more institutions, it was not very successful at reaching the ETD community outside of North America. About 75% of the responses reflect ETD programs at North American institutions. In order to provide a broader international perspective, I chose to report almost all of the data by regions and in percentages so that each region's data can be interpreted distinctly yet in comparison with the others. *The regions reflect the continents: Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Europe, and Australasia as defined by Wikipedia.*

### Planning ETD Initiatives

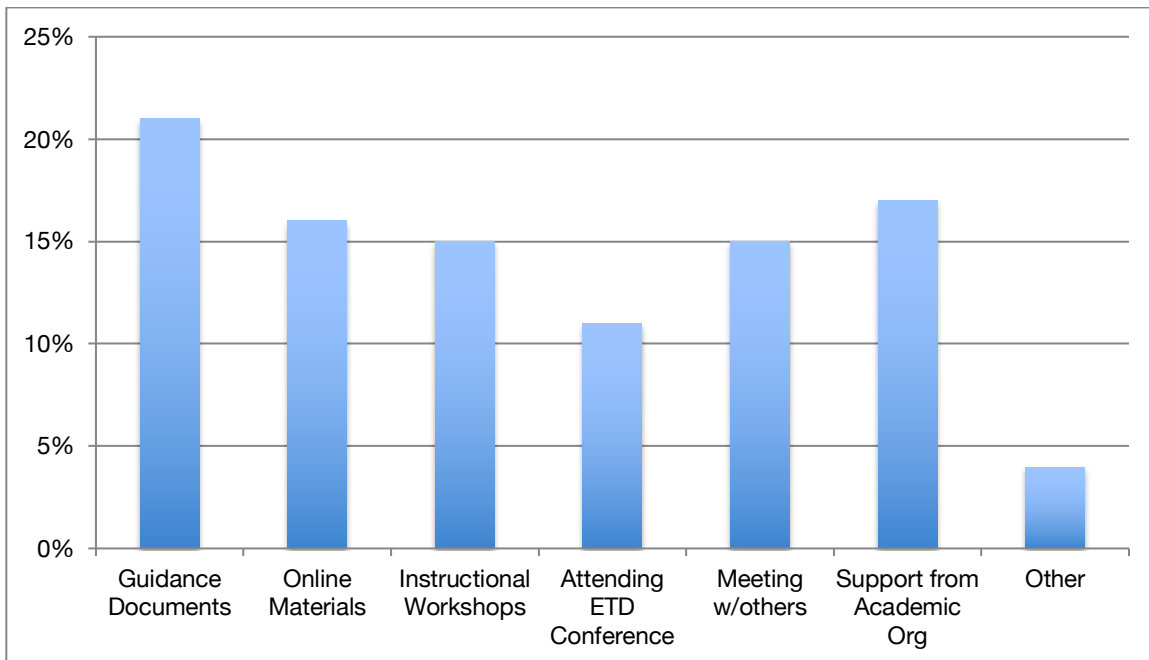
[Q8 slide 4] The number of ETD programs has grown. 12% (36) of the survey respondents reported that their institutions are in the planning stages in 2015 vs. 6% in 2013. Among the factors influencing ETD program planning, was the ability to provide open access through the institutional repository (41%), growth of the ETD collection (27%), and user demand (18%).

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<sup>1</sup> Graduate school is used to refer to the unit of a university that offers or oversees advanced program beyond the bachelor's degree.

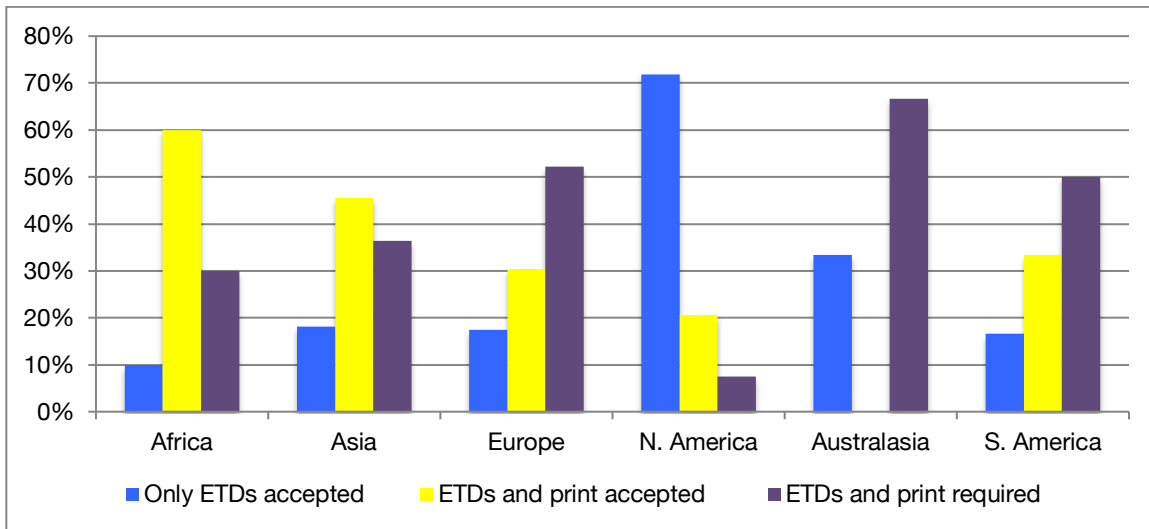


[Q9 slide 5] One question in particular should be important to administrators at institutions that are beginning their ETD initiatives. What would help institutions implement an ETD program? Among the options offered, guidance documents was the most popular selection. Hopefully the survey respondents are aware of the online [“Guidance Documents for Lifecycle Management of ETDs,”](http://www.educopia.org/publications/gdlmet) which became publicly available at <http://www.educopia.org/publications/gdlmet> in March 2014 as a result of a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Science. This was followed by those seeking support from an academic organization like the NDLTD. I think it is surprising that attending an ETD conference did not get a larger percentage of responses. Those of us who have participated in these meetings come away with a clear sense of the support that is available from our colleagues attending from other institutions.



Help for Institutions Planning ETD Programs

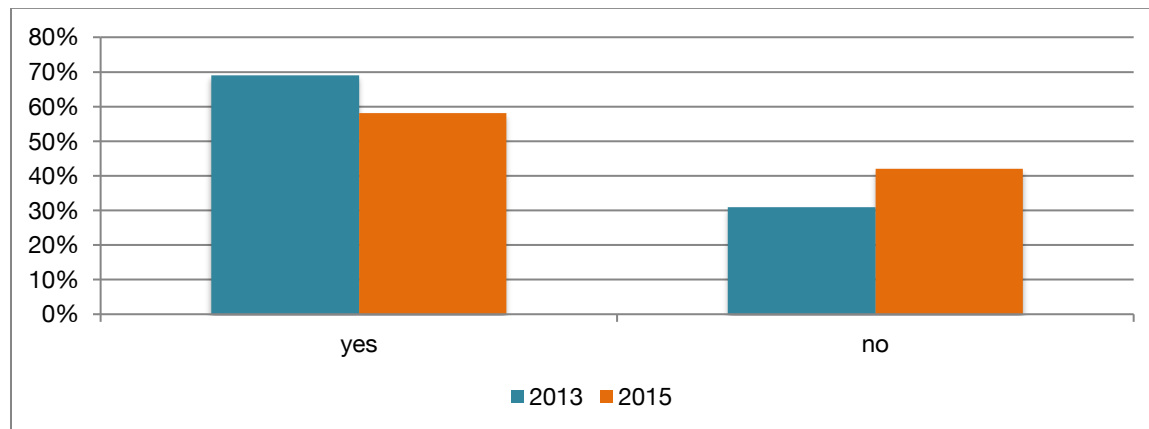
[slide 6]



Institutions accept print theses and dissertations

[Q10] Among the 262 institutions with ETD programs, 25% of the responding institutions accept print and electronic formats while another 16% require graduate students to submit both print and electronic formats. *[This questions was not asked in 2013.]* 59% of the responding institutions accept only ETDs, i.e., nothing in print.

However, looking at responses by region reveals how divergent are the practices of accepting print and electronic theses and dissertations. For example, in Africa 60% of the institutions reported that they accept both formats, while in Europe and South America, about 50% of the reporting institutions require print. But in North America 72% only accept ETDs.

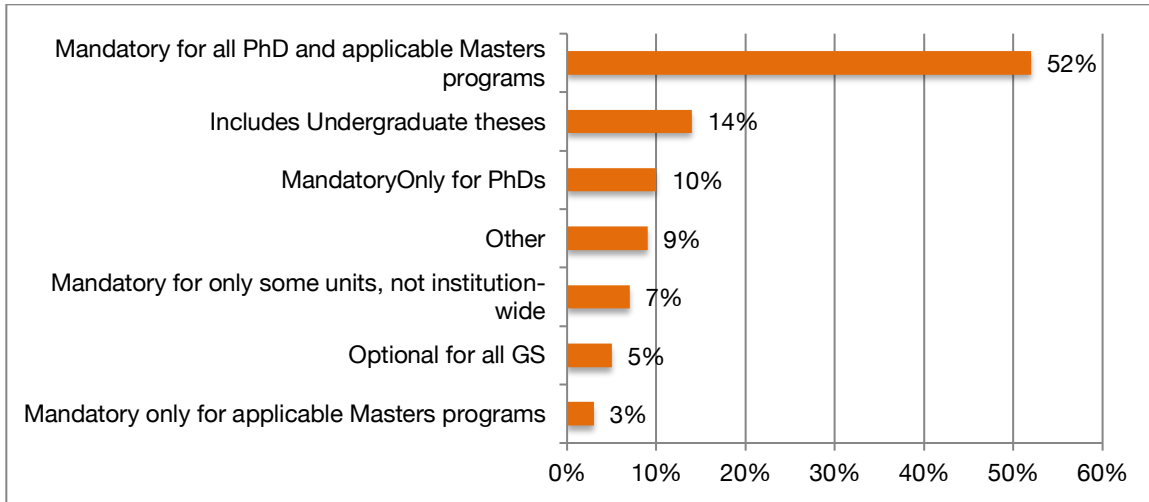


Institutions with preservation plans declined

[Q17 slide 7] **Preservation** means consciously and systematically managing digital works over an indefinite period of time. Backups are tactical measures; preservation is strategic. We must implement pragmatic and affordable preservation strategies that exist today in order to protect our ETD Collections

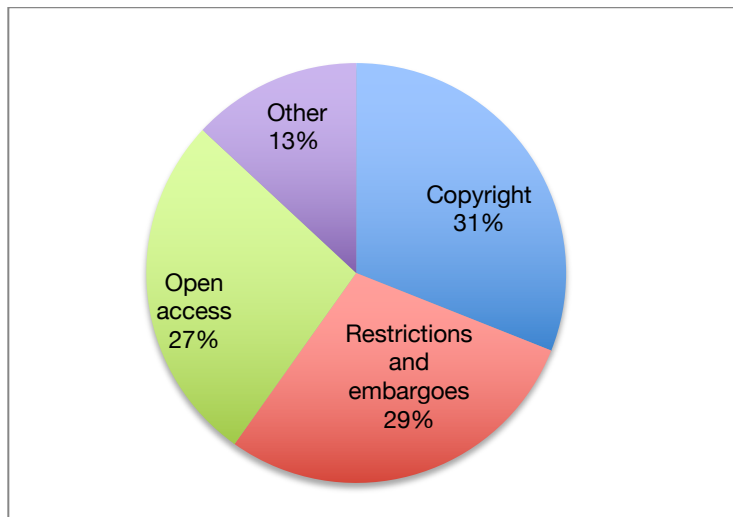
from neglect, from catastrophic events like fires and hurricanes, or hardware and software failures, or simple human error.

Unfortunately, preservation of ETDs took a considerable downturn, 11%, since 2013 when 69% of the institutions reported having a preservation plan. In 2015 only 58% have such a plan, leaving 42% of the ETD programs unprotected by a preservation strategy.



Composition of ETD Programs

[Q14 **slide 8**] There has been little change in ETD requirements since 2013 (1-5%). There was a slight decrease in the percentage of institutions where ETDs are mandatory for all PhD students and applicable Masters programs.

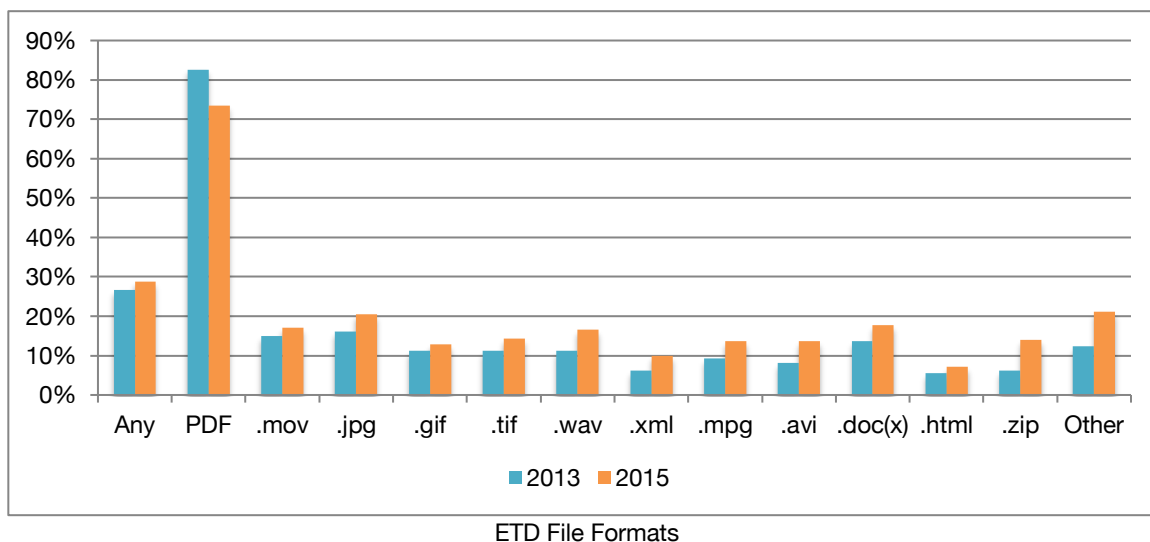


Topics covered in training sessions and materials for preparing ETDs

[Q15 **slide 9**] In order to help graduate students prepare their ETDs, institutions provided training sessions and materials. At 29% these covered restrictions and embargoes, 27% covered open access, and 31% covered copyright. Over one-fourth of the respondents provided comments about training; 40% of these remarked that they covered formatting and 15% cover the submission process, among a variety of other topics.

[Q16 read w/slide 9] Who provided training and information regarding technical preparation of theses and dissertations differed across the continents. In North America 54% of the graduate schools provided these training sessions and materials, while the library provided 36% of them. However, looking at the survey responses without North America (i.e., Africa, Asia, Europe, Australasia, South America), graduate schools provided only 25%, libraries 57%, while others, including individual departments and central IT<sup>2</sup> provided 18% of the training and information.

## ETD Formats



[slide 10] What form an ETD takes has often been a topic of interest on the ETD listserv. [Q23] While PDF is still the predominant file format for ETDs worldwide, it declined 9% from 2013 to 2015. Other formats gained acceptance; .zip, for example grew by 8%.

There are perhaps several measures of the evolution of ETDs, including changing file formats. These include the number of files that comprise an ETD, what is included in an ETD, and whether supplemental files enhance the main body of the ETD. However, [Q20 no slide] at 60% of the institutions represented in the 2015 survey, authors continued to submit their ETDs in a single file. But 40% accept ETDs whether in multiple or single files.

[Q21] Just over half of the institutions reported accepting ETDs that contain published articles, conference papers and the like (55%). At least one-third of the institutions reporting in all the regions except Asia accept publications within their ETDs. According to the survey results, nearly 90% of the institutions in Asia and 67% in South America reported that authors are not submitting ETDs containing publications.

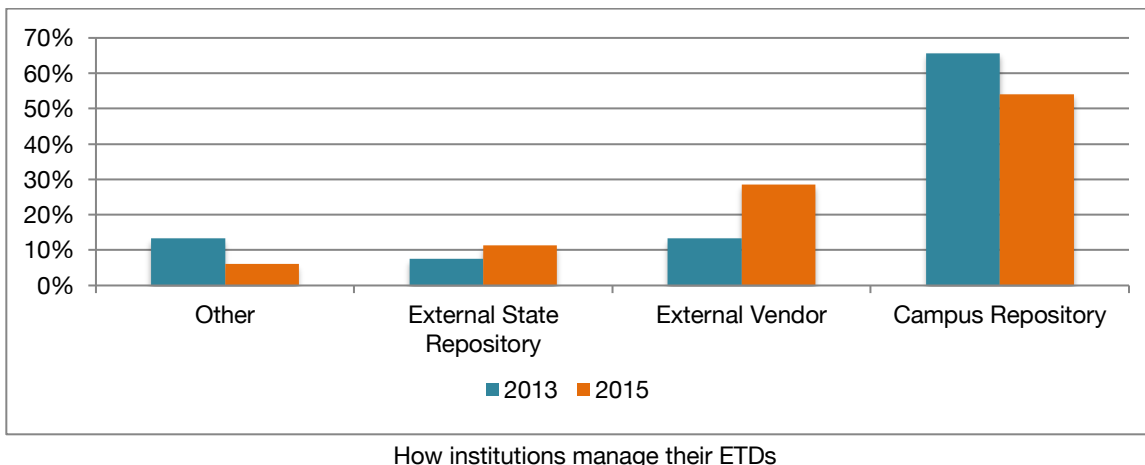
[Q22] 66% of the institutions reported that authors submit “supplemental files such as the data upon which their research was based.” At least one-fifth of the institutions in each region accepted supplemental files with the main ETDs files.

<sup>2</sup> IT refers to an institution’s central office of information technology or computing.

**From the survey's open, final comments:** Re innovation, one comment included mention of authors including a “video introduction/summary” and the “Three Minute Thesis completion program.” Another mentioned allowing web-native, linked-data ETDs, “We’re not [there] yet, but it’s a goal.”

### ETD Management

[Q24 **slide 11**] Who manages these ETDs files, and how? ETDs were predominantly managed in locally hosted institution repositories (IRs), this was down 12% to 54% in 2015. On the rise, however, were vendor hosted ETDs, up from 13% in 2013 to 29% in 2015. *The increase in statewide repositories hosting ETDs was negligible (3%).*



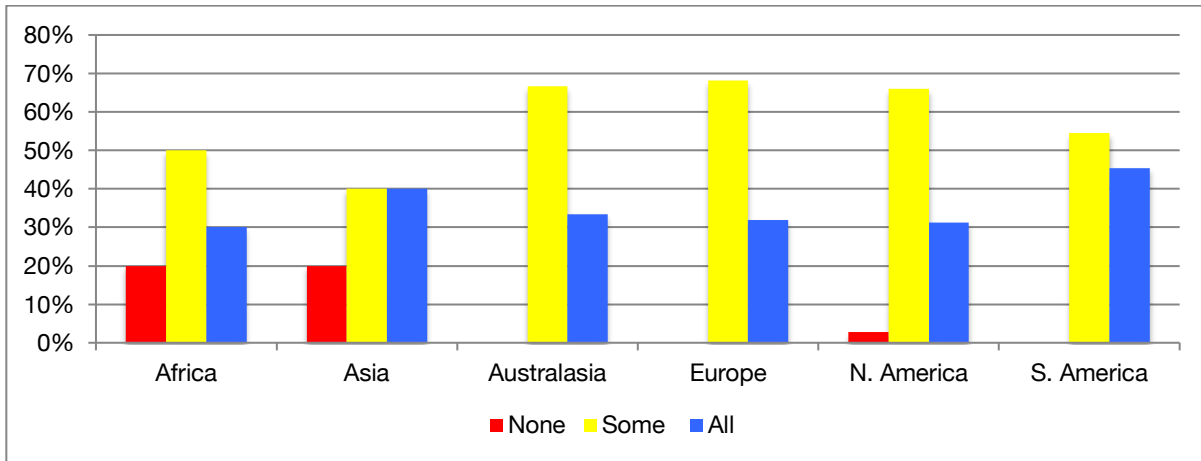
[Q25] From a global perspective, many of those local IRs were using DSpace software, though usage dropped to 36% from 43% in 2013. Bepress’s Digital Commons had the second largest reported user base at 23% of the institutions reporting in 2015, up from 12% in 2013.

Taking a regional perspective, 80% of the African institutions reported using DSpace, 64% in Asia, 48% in Europe and 67% in South America. In North America, DSpace shares top billing with Digital Commons, each reporting 33%. In Europe 48% of the institutions reported using DSpace and 26% Eprints.

### Availability of ETDs

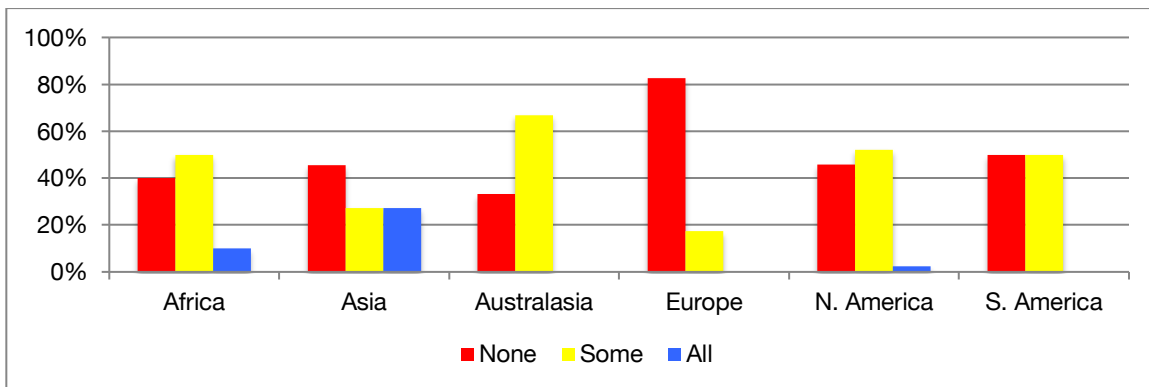
[Q31 **slide 12**] A source of general curiosity is the level of access institutions give their ETDs. The survey responses showed that nearly one-third of the institutions make all of their ETDs publicly available while 64% make only some publicly available. Only 4% reported that none of their ETDs are publicly available.

However, a look at regional responses to this question depicts the variety of policies regarding public access to ETDs. For example, 40% of the Asian institutions surveyed reported making all their ETDs publicly available. But, Asian institutions also reported the largest percentage of institutions where no ETDs are publicly available (20%). Similarly, 20% of the African institutions reported that none of their ETDs were publicly available.



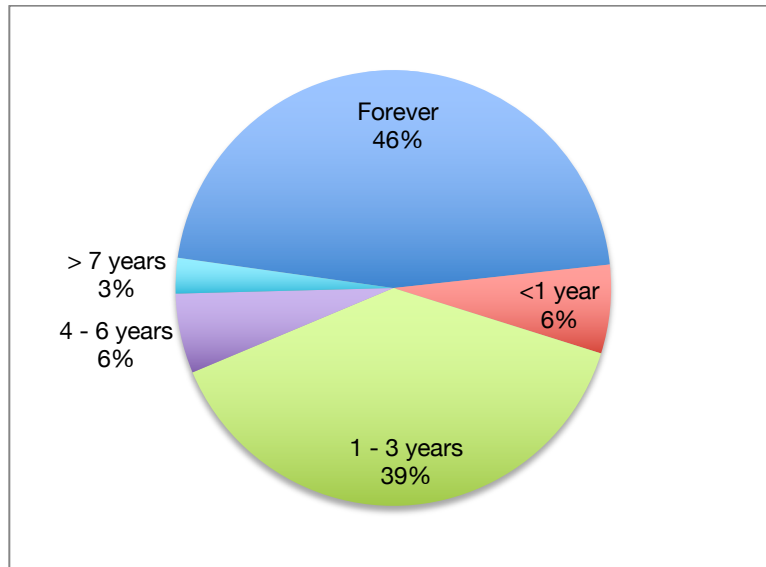
Regional Perspective on Publicly Available ETDs

[Q32 **slide 13**] The percentage of institutions making some or all of their ETDs available only to their local communities grew slightly to 51% in 2015 *from 46% in 2013*. Europe had the largest number of institutions reporting that none of their ETDs have access restricted to the author's institution, 83%. Asian institutions have the largest percentage of institutions reporting that all ETDs are limited to university-only access, 27%.



ETDs Limited to University-only Access

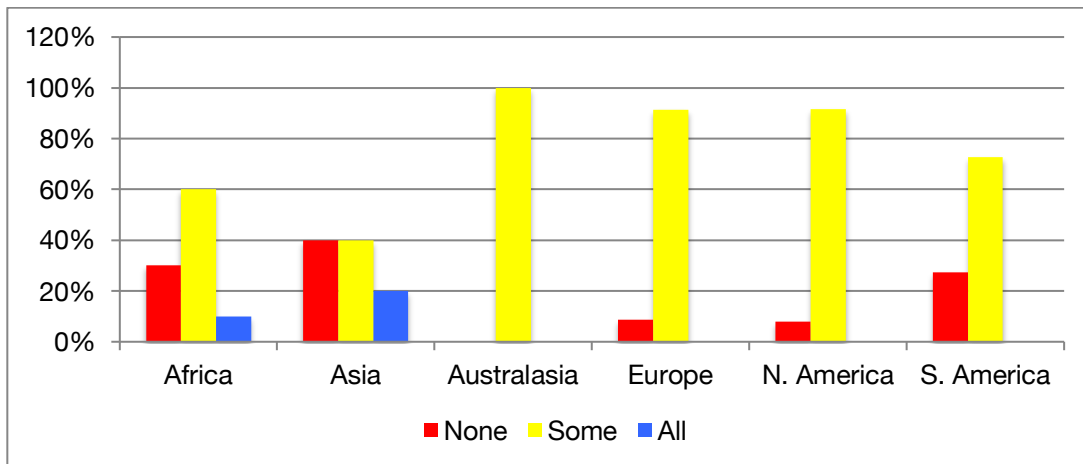
[Q33 **slide 14**] The duration of these restrictions vary. A surprisingly large percentage of institutions reported permanent restriction to university-only access--46%, followed by restrictions of one to three years by 39%. Only 3% of the institutions report university-only restrictions of longer than seven years.



Duration of university-only access

[Q34] In response to why institutions limit some or all of their ETDs to university-only access, 42% of the institutions reported it was due to student requests. 19% reported that they lacked permission, 13% selected the reason “faculty preference,” and 8% reported it was university policy.

[Q35 **slide 15**] Another form of restriction is the embargo, or withholding all access from an ETD. There was little or no change in institutions embargoing some ETDs, about 90% (2015—88%, than in 2013—91%.) At 11% of the reporting institutions no ETDs are embargoed, very slightly up from 8% reported in 2013. Looking at the regional reports, 10% of the institutions in Africa and 20% in Asia embargo all their ETDs.



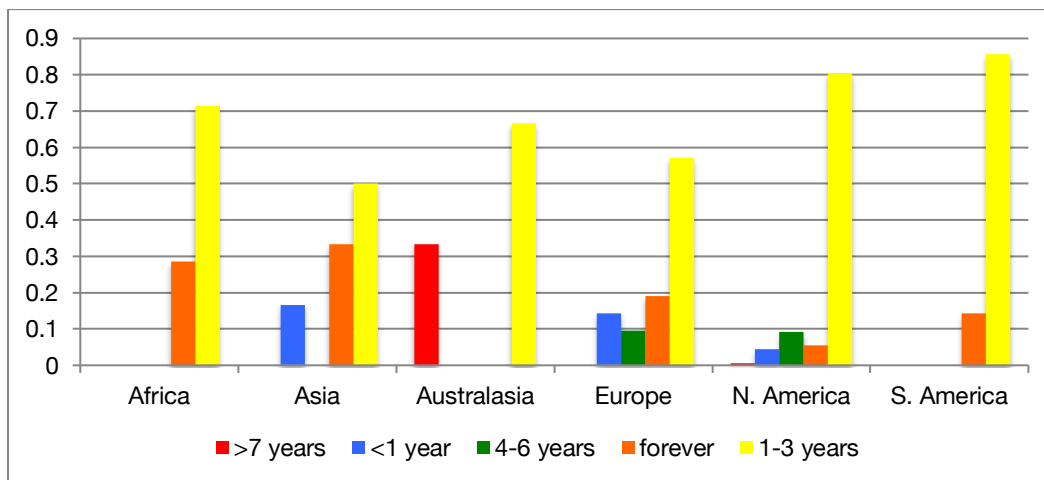
Every Region Embargoes Some ETDs

[Q36 **slide 16**] Looking at the duration of the embargoes, there was no change from 2013 to 2015 in the percentage of institutional embargoes reported of less than one year--86%. [To come to this conclusion, meant aggregating the 2015 responses for more than one year but less that forever, which was how this question was asked in 2013.] Unfortunately, in 2015 the percentage of institutions that reported



embargoing ETDs permanently quadrupled, growing to 8%. The percentage of ETDs embargoed for less than one year dropped from 12% to 6% in 2015.

The variations within as well as among regions are often considerable. Only Asian, European, and a small percentage of North American institutions reported embargoes of less than one year. Every region reported institutional embargoes of one to three years, ranging from a high of 86% at South American institutions to 50% at Asian institutions. *[The dichotomy of embargo periods in Australasian institutions may not be as considerable as it may appear, because only three institutions are represented. In Africa and South America, the extremes of forever and one-to-three years, represent 10 and 12 institutions respectively.]*



The duration of embargoes varies across and within regions.

[Q37] The leading reason for ETD embargoes at four out of six regions was due to “student/author requests pending publication.” This demonstrates that we haven’t gotten the word out about the data from the 2011-2012 surveys of publishers and journal editors and their policies regarding publicly accessible ETDs. These documented that over 80% would consider manuscripts based on available ETDs.<sup>3</sup>

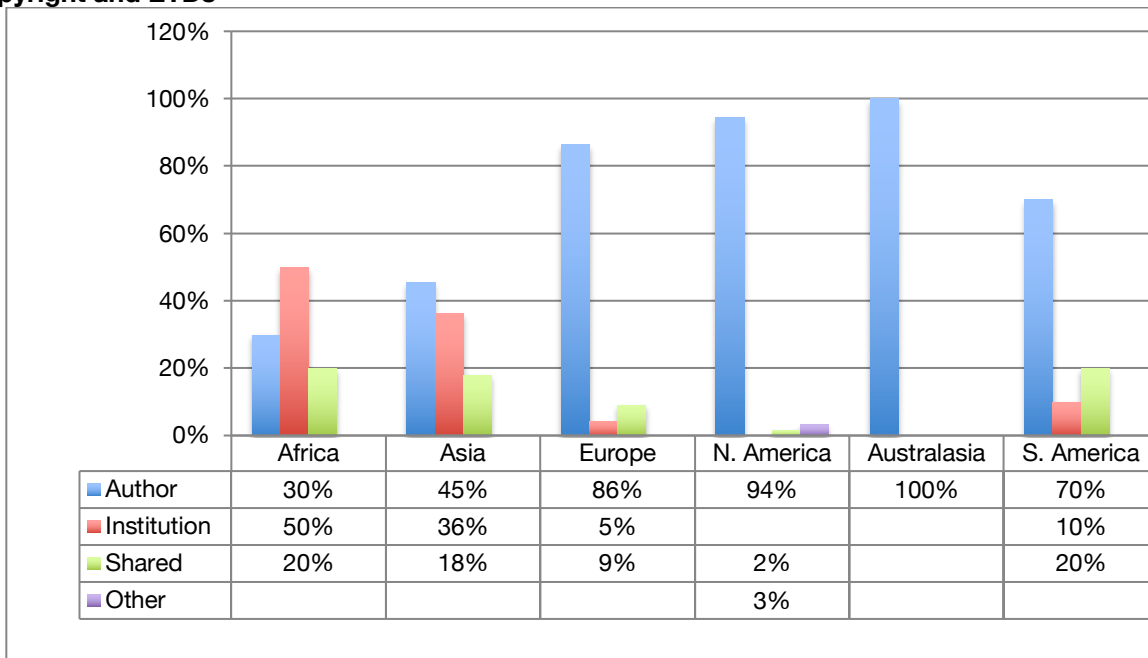
The aggregated response was 40% of the institutions reporting embargo ETDs due to “student/author requests pending publication,” followed by 33% who reported “student/author requests pending patent application.” Faculty preferences accounted for 10% of the responses. In the aggregate, only 4% of the reporting institutions had a university policy on embargoing ETDs. However, 27%-29% of the institutions in Asia and Australasia, respectively, have embargoed ETDs due to university policies.

Given the option to provide a comment about the reasons behind embargoes, *according to the library and graduate school personnel responding to the 2015 survey, 64 institutions expanded on their multiple choice options.* Nearly one-third of the explanations (31%) reported embargoes were due to the sensitive information (e.g., privacy, security, confidentiality) contained in the ETD. Nearly 20% mentioned that the durations of the embargoes varied from the options provided. More than 15% of the comments mentioned permissions and approvals. *No explanation was required according to 10% of the comments and another 10% mentioned copyright issues.*

<sup>3</sup> “Do Open Access Electronic Theses and Dissertations Diminish Publishing Opportunities in the Sciences?” Ramirez, McMillan, Dalton, Hanlon, Smith, Kern. *College & Research Libraries*, Nov. 2014, vol. 75 no. 6 808-821. <http://crl.acrl.org/content/75/6/808>  
 “Do Open Access Electronic Theses and Dissertations Diminish Publishing Opportunities in the Social Sciences and Humanities? Findings from a 2011 Survey of Academic Publishers.” Ramirez, Dalton, McMillan, Read, Seamans. *College & Research Libraries*, July 2013 vol. 74 no. 4 368-380. <http://crl.acrl.org/content/74/4/368>

[Q38] At many institutions with embargoed ETDs, there is no metadata at all available. However, 79% of the survey responses said that their institutions do make them available in their library catalogs or institutional repositories.

### Copyright and ETDs



[Q44 slide 11] Another topic of interest, is who owns the copyright to an ETD. At 89% of the institutions responding, authors own the copyright. Authors share copyright at 4% of the reporting institutions and at an equal percentage, the copyright belongs to the institution. Nearly 29% of the comments reported that copyright was shared between the author and the institution.

But looking at the aggregated responses is quite different that looking across the regions. For example, African and Asian institutions were the least likely to report authors holding the copyright to their ETDs, 30% and 45% respectively. South American Institutions reported authors hold the copyright at 70%, European 86%, North American 96%, and Australasia 100%. Half of the African institutions reported owning the copyright, and 36% of the Asian institutions reporting.

### Concluding

Based on what you've heard, I'd like to ask you to predict the future.

- Will the percentage of institutions accepting or requiring print and electronic theses and dissertations decline?
- Will the formats of ETDs change?
  - Will PDF continue to decline? If so, what formats will become more widely used?
  - Will more institutions allow publications in ETDs?
  - Will more ETDs be submitted with supplemental files, including the data upon which their research was based?
- Will the percentage of locally hosted repositories continue to decline?
  - Will vendor hosted repositories grow?
- What about availability of ETDs?
  - Will more institutions make theirs all publicly available (up from 33% in 2015)?

- Will the percentage of embargoed ETDs stay steady or increase/decrease? (some = ~90%)
- How can we spread the word that publishers and editors are very much in favor of receiving manuscripts based on available ETDs?

The 2015 survey reached more institutions. Responses from graduate school personnel also grew by 8% and “other” responses were reduced by 18%. From this perspective, the second biennial ETD survey was more successful in garnering responses outside the library communities.

However, the 2015 survey was not very successful at reaching the ETD community outside of North America. The main outlets used to reach the international communities were through the NDLTD Board, the ETD Google Group, and the ETD conference attendance lists from the UK, Peru, and early registrants for this, the India, conference. What suggestions do you have for reaching more institutions in the broader ETD community?