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2022-05-13

## University Archives and ETDs: Exploring Best Practices

Cory L. Nimer

Brigham Young University - Provo, [cory\\_nimer@byu.edu](mailto:cory_nimer@byu.edu)

Rebecca A. Wiederhold

Brigham Young University - Provo, [rebecca\\_wiederhold@byu.edu](mailto:rebecca_wiederhold@byu.edu)

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### Original Publication Citation

Nimer, Cory L., Rebecca A. Wiederhold. "University Archives and ETDs: Exploring Best Practices." Presented at the annual meeting of the Conference of Inter-Mountain Archivists, Salt Lake City, Utah, May 13, 2022.

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### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Nimer, Cory L. and Wiederhold, Rebecca A., "University Archives and ETDs: Exploring Best Practices" (2022). *Faculty Publications*. 5862.

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# University Archives and ETDs: Exploring Best Practices

Cory Nimer and Becca Wiederhold, Brigham Young University

## Introduction

Over the past few years, the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University has begun planning for the retrospective digitization of theses and dissertations (TD). The collection, managed by the University Archives since 1965, includes approximately 28,000 bound, paper titles. Electronic versions are also placed in our institutional repository (IR), ScholarsArchive.

In order to prepare for this project, the researchers first sought to identify best practices related to the management and preservation of TDs and electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs) in other academic libraries in the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). This included a literature review and an analysis of online document about the retention and storage of print copies, digital preservation, microfilming, and participation in external databases of TDs. The study also explored the relationships between university archives programs and institutional repositories in ETD submission/management, and the status of theses/dissertations as student records.

## Literature Review

Historically, the management of TDs has been split between university libraries and university archives. Recent archival literature remains split on whether they belong in the archives.

With the implementation of ETD mandates in the late 1990s, the maintenance and preservation of these born-digital documents has further complicated discussions between university libraries and archives. ETDs and retrospective digitization allow for wider access to TD content, while IRs may also hold university publications.

## Methodology

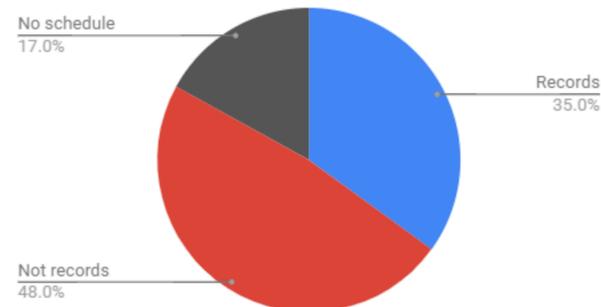
In order to gather information available on library websites, a list of ARL library websites was compiled, then narrowed to 100 sites, excluding both Canadian libraries and non-academic institutions. Information was collected from special collections and archives websites, IR websites, and from records retention schedules and collection development policies that were available online. Library catalogs were also searched to determine the location of physical TDs within libraries.

## Results

### Retention schedule

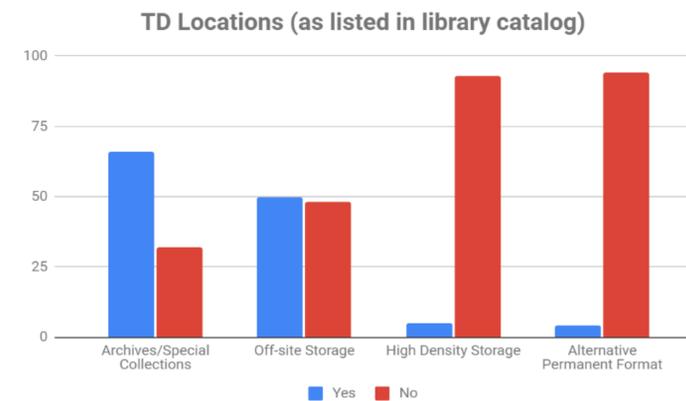
- Most ARL institutions (83 percent) have public retention schedules
- 42 percent of these (or 35 percent of the total institutions) specifically listed TDs as records
- In the cases they were records, the retention schedule had TDs placed in a university archives unit in 10 instances

### Theses/Dissertations in Retention Schedule



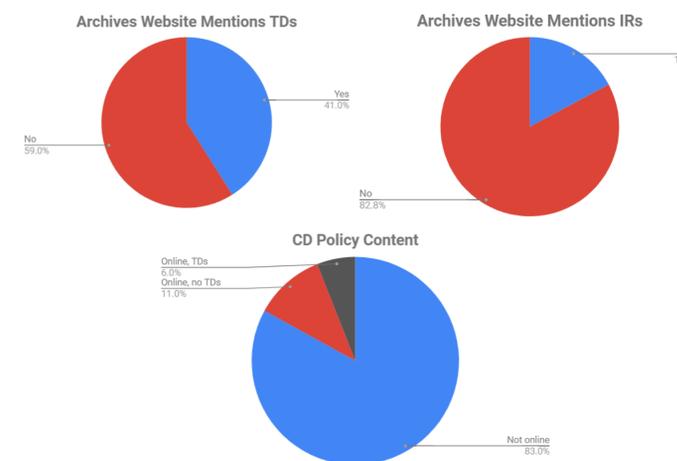
### Print theses administration

- Most institutions (67 percent) placed archival copies of TDs in special collections or university archives
- 56 percent of paper TDs were in offsite or high-density storage
- Most libraries (96 percent) have print archives



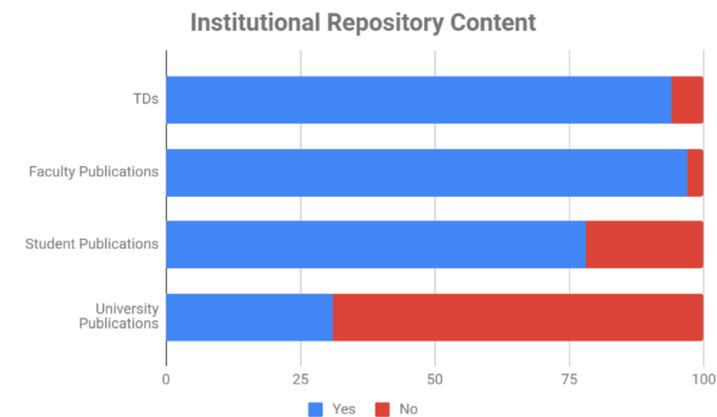
### Website analysis

- Less than half (41 percent) of university archives websites mention TDs
- Only 17 percent of university archives websites mention IRs, with an additional 7 percent providing an uncontextualized link
- Most do not include a collection development policy (CDP); even fewer CDPs with TDs



### IR content analysis

- Most IR implementations focus on scholarly communications
- Only 31 percent of IRs included university publications (i.e., yearbooks, newspapers, etc.)
- 92 percent of IRs did not include any references to the university archives program



## Findings

Our initial research confirmed that the management of physical copies of TDs remains split between university archives and libraries. Few ARL libraries have engaged in retrospective conversion of "archival" collections of TDs, and most appear to rely on print copies for preservation purposes. With the introduction of ETDs, however, responsibility for the research output of university programs has shifted to IRs that are largely the domain of university libraries. As this transition takes place, it remains to be seen what role university archives will have in managing and preserving these materials.

## Future Research

Recognizing that the data collected from this study is incomplete due to the inconsistent type and depth of content publicly available on library websites, the researchers are developing a survey instrument, which is intended to gather more comprehensive information through a Qualtrics survey which we will e-mail to university archivists. Questions will center on the university archives' role relative to their IR platform, long-term preservation practices for TDs, and the status of retrospective digitization efforts for print TDs.