

Looking at ETD's from Different Points of View

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Abstract

A first idea about ETDs is that they are items to be made available from a digital library for students and researchers to find, browse and read. This seems to be a quite reasonable view of ETDs since theses and dissertations hold innovations, research results and bibliographic reviews. This first idea is not to be dismissed but it yields additional ways of looking at ETDs.

ETDs can be one type of item on an institutional digital collection. This is the case in our university – ETDs were added to the digital library when there were over 900 other items. Currently, they account for a little over 40% of the titles. All digital contents are predominantly from the same community, so they share authors, contributors, subjects and departments. Data on the digital library can be used to combine information and generate statistics on scholarly communication.

Theses and dissertations are a part of the institutional history and can be viewed not as library items, but as archival collections. Thus, the introduction of ETDs has brought to universities the challenge of preservation of digital archives, specially when no printed copies are required.

A consequence of the first idea about ETDs is accessibility. If works are to be read, they must be accessible – they must be found and be suitable to potential readers. For ETDs to be found a lot of effort has been devoted to defining metadata sets and to creating union catalogs. A point to be addressed is making works available to readers who are visually impaired. Language problems are to be considered too.

A second consequence is an assessment of how visible graduate programs are by measuring accesses to their ETDs – this can be done in many different ways (regions, language groups, etc.). Characteristics of each program can be inferred from the results.

These different points of view, if considered by the universities, may impact on metadata models and digital library systems.

This work addresses some possible issues concerning looking at ETDs with such a broader vision.