Introduction

The academic library has long served its institution by housing print dissertations in its archives. Until recently, once a student submitted her final, approved dissertation to the library, it would rarely again see the light of day. Although researchers might learn of a dissertation through the library’s catalog or through an index, accessing it was difficult. A university’s collection of its students’ dissertations was a walled garden, in many ways. But with the advent of electronic thesis and dissertation (ETD) programs, a more appropriate analogy would be to a public park – a place where researchers from all over the world can freely access dissertations and master’s theses via the library’s institutional repository.

Of course, this expanded access to dissertations and theses has come with challenges as well as rewards. Some students have difficulty accepting that once their dissertation is made publicly available, they no longer have control over how it is used—although the majority of such uses will be positive (enhancing scholarly communication, advancing understanding of their field, and so on), the negative possibilities such as plagiarism concern them. Students, also, are very susceptible to the perception that their openly accessible dissertations will not be acceptable as book manuscripts because there will be no market for their work if it is already available online.
How does the library gracefully maintain its traditional role as the steward of graduate student research, while pushing against the resistance it may encounter to openness? This chapter will examine the development of ETD programs and the library’s role in managing the need for greater access to graduate student research while tempering concerns about the consequences of openness.

A Brief History of the Dissertation

The oldest dissertations archived at Harvard University, the oldest institution of higher education in the United States, date from the end of the eighteenth century (Harvard University, 2015). While earlier dissertations may have been written, they were perhaps lost in the fire that destroyed the Harvard library in 1764 (Tommase, 2007). In Europe, the dissertation has a much longer history: a 2005 exhibition at Leiden University showcased dissertations dating back to 1575. The catalogue for that exhibition describes the scholastic disputatio, or disputation, a debate that was an essential educational and research method in medieval and early modern universities, serving as both a test of student knowledge and an exercise in logical thought (Weijers, 2005). Both students and teachers attended these events, during which other instructional activity halted. Beginning in the mid-1500s, the disputatio (by this time also called dissertatio) sometimes also took written form. A written disputatio or dissertatio could be brief—a single-page list of questions or theses to be addressed in an oral conversation—or could include lengthier commentaries and discussions of topics stretching to one hundred pages or more (Freedman, 2005).

Authorship of these early written dissertations was not always clear. In some cases, the presider over the disputatio (the closest equivalent to the modern dissertation
advisor) was identified as the author, particularly in cases where the *disputatio* involved multiple students; in others, a student was named as author. In most cases, however, no record of authorship was made at all. During the course of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries in Europe, two trends emerged: students began to be named as authors more frequently, and their dissertations grew in length (doubtless aided by advances in printing technology). J.S. Freedman notes that, beginning in the mid-1600s, the dissertation became a place to communicate new ideas, as well as to demonstrate knowledge of established topics.

We know so much about these early dissertations because they were exchanged among an informal network of European universities whose libraries collected them—a practice of scholarly communication that ensured both dissemination and preservation of knowledge. It was only in 2004 that Dutch universities ceased to participate in this exchange, at which point the Leiden University library contained an estimated 600,000 dissertations—roughly twenty percent of their total print collection. The majority have remained uncataloged, probably because at the outset it was easy enough to locate a particular dissertation if it was shelved by institution; over the centuries, as the collection grew, this prospect became more difficult, but the practice was too entrenched and the volume of material certainly too enormous to catalog retrospectively (Damen, 2005). Despite their lack of discoverability, to use a contemporary library buzzword, the existence of these early printed dissertations in modern European libraries serves as a signal of the dissertation’s long-standing importance as part of the university’s intellectual record and underscores the library’s role in preserving and disseminating that record.
From Print to Electronic: The Rise of the ETD

While American institutions haven’t had the time to produce as many dissertations as have those in Europe, they have also endeavored to collect and preserve their students’ work. In the late 1930s, a new company called University Microfilms International (UMI) expanded its original mission of working with the British Library, and began creating preservation copies of dissertations on microfilm for research libraries. In 1951, UMI began publishing *Dissertation Abstracts* as a service to the Association of Research Libraries. *Dissertation Abstracts* became an indispensible resource, found in almost every academic library—a necessary tool for researchers to discover the dissertation holdings of distant libraries. University Microfilms also sold copies of dissertations in microform or print to libraries and individuals—often this was the only way to read a dissertation not held locally, libraries being understandably hesitant to send out their archival copies on interlibrary loan (ProQuest, 2015; Thistlethwaite, 2012, p. 2).

Despite the increased discoverability of dissertations made possible by centralized microfilming and indexing, the copies of dissertations held in library archives are rarely accessed, compared to dissertations available online. At Northeastern University, print dissertations in the Archives were accessed seventeen times during a two-year period. In the same time period, Northeastern’s electronic dissertations in its institutional repository were accessed over 57,000 times. On average, the electronic dissertations were accessed 7,847 percent more than the print, despite the print collection being more than twice as large as the electronic collection.
Table 1. Access of print vs. electronic dissertations at Northeastern University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Number of dissertations in collection</th>
<th>Number of times accessed, July 2013-June 2015</th>
<th>Accesses per dissertation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Print</td>
<td>2039</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic</td>
<td>916</td>
<td>57501</td>
<td>62.774</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Print usage statistics recorded by Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections. Electronic access statistics recorded by Northeastern’s institutional repository platform (Digital Commons).

As enormous as that percentage is, it seems minute compared to that at another institution. In 2009, as West Virginia University transitioned from collecting print dissertations to an ETD program, the library reported that electronic theses and dissertations were accessed a whopping 145,000 percent more than items in the print collection (McCutcheon, 2010, p. 23). While reporting differences may not permit a direct comparison between these statistics, they nevertheless indicate a massive increase in visibility and usage when dissertations are made openly available online.

Virginia Tech was the first institution of higher education to begin requiring electronic deposit of theses and dissertations in 1997. Also in that year, UMI began to create PDFs of all the dissertations they received, in addition to microfilming them (Fox, McMillan, & Eaton, 1999, p. 1). During the late 1990s, improvements in Internet connectivity speeds and networking capabilities meant library databases were transforming beyond locally mounted CD-ROMs and early online resources that responded to text commands. Library users began to expect immediate online access to the full text of whatever they had located in their database searches; while text rendered in HTML still downloaded more quickly over slow Internet connections, as speeds improved and broadband Ethernet replaced dialup in many libraries, PDFs became more
desirable. The PDF, or portable document format, was becoming the standard for representing word processor–generated documents as attractive digital simulacra, and there was significant uptake of this format in the development of next-generation article databases (Tenopir, 1998; Wusteman, 1997). UMI, which had already expanded its offerings to include online resources under the ProQuest Direct name in 1996 (ProQuest, 2015), doubtless saw the business advantage of creating PDFs of dissertations while it had them under the camera for microfilming. In 2003, ProQuest began accepting electronic submissions of dissertations, with a few early adopters taking advantage of the service; by 2007, the company was actively marketing the service and encouraging institutions to transition away from sending print dissertations for filming (ProQuest, 2007).

The Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD) was developed in 1996 to begin serving the same role online that Dissertation Abstracts served for physical collections. Virginia Tech, as an early adopter of ETDs, was a key developer. A 2002 article from the Virginia Tech team in the Journal of Computing in Higher Education stated that NDLTD included federated results from over 120 universities worldwide (Fox et al.). Unlike Dissertation Abstracts, however, NDLTD was created with no commercial interests behind it; rather, its stated mission is “promoting the adoption, creation, use, dissemination, and preservation of electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs) [and] support[ing] electronic publishing and open access to scholarship in order to enhance the sharing of knowledge worldwide.” NDLTD was incorporated as a registered nonprofit organization in 2003, and later transitioned to a membership-supported business model (NDLTD, "Mission, goals, and history"). As of
this writing, NDLTD is supported by over one hundred institutional, consortial, and individual members (NDLTD, "List of members"). Any institution, regardless of membership status, may have its ETD metadata harvested for inclusion in the NDLTD database, which currently includes over four million records. More recently, another online index, Open Access Theses and Dissertations (OATD), was launched to provide an alternative to NDLTD (Dowling, 2013). While OATD contains fewer records than NDLTD (over 2.4 million at the time of this writing), its initial advantage when it was launched by Wake Forest University in 2013 was a more user-friendly interface. Previously, NDLTD had been hampered by a restrictive architecture that has since been updated. NDLTD and OATD continue to run in parallel, providing different access points to ETDs held worldwide.

NDLTD and OATD aggregate metadata from institutional repositories, where the majority of North American ETDs are found. (Institutions in other countries sometimes make use of national-level ETD repositories, like the British Library’s ETHoS service.) Because of the increased visibility of ETDs in discovery services like these, as well as their inclusion in search engine results, some institutions are now choosing to make the ETD deposited in their repository--rather than the one that is submitted to ProQuest--the copy of record. While many institutions still require their students to submit a copy of their thesis or dissertation to ProQuest for inclusion in the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (PQDT) database, some schools make this submission optional, or don’t participate in the PQDT database at all. This latter practice is sometimes referred to colloquially as “NoQuest.”
There are two central rationales for not participating in the ProQuest submission service. One is that libraries have traditionally held the copies of record of dissertations in their physical archives, so the transition from print to electronic should not mark a shift away from library custody of the copies of record. When ETD programs were initially implemented, many schools perhaps took advantage of the ProQuest service because their institutional repository infrastructure was in its early stages of development and not yet established enough for administrators to entrust it with the long-term preservation of such unique and valuable documents; in addition, most schools already had a well-established relationship with ProQuest as a partner in the preservation of dissertations on microfilm. But the institutional repository is now considered an essential, supported service at most of these institutions, and outsourcing preservation to a commercial entity seems less necessary or desirable. Indeed, the second rationale for turning away from ProQuest is the commercial nature of its service; while the company has long maintained that students retain their copyright and only grant a nonexclusive distribution license, institutions who choose to opt out of the ProQuest service sometimes do so because they want to distance themselves from the commercialization of their students’ work through inclusion in a subscription database. Gail Clement and Fred Rascoe sum up this movement succinctly in their excellent and thorough article on changing practices in ETD management:

The growing trend in questioning a publishing and archiving policy devised in the age of microfilm should come as no surprise. As many universities succeed in establishing their own campus-based Internet publishing systems, and as an increasing number of reputable scholarly sharing sites proliferate across the
World Wide Web, the practice of outsourcing academic publishing and archiving to a commercial, third-party distributor may no longer be as compelling as it was before the Internet. Increasing awareness of, and support for, Open Access, Open Education, and Open Science across American campuses is heightening demand for open access to scholarship in all its forms, from textbooks to the literature of peer-reviewed articles. In this context, ETD management and publishing systems that impede open access to graduate works may appear counter to stakeholder values. (2013)

New Roles for the Library in the ETD Environment: Supporting the Graduate School

At universities that have transitioned from accepting print dissertations and theses to accepting electronic-only submissions, the library’s traditional role as the cataloger and archiver of student research output has expanded. As illustrated in the previous section, once print dissertations and theses were shelved in the closed stacks of the Archives, there was little more for the library to do except retrieve them for interested readers on a very infrequent basis. ETD programs, by contrast, involve the library more substantially, for several reasons. Libraries find themselves fielding questions from students and graduate school staff regarding the submission process, the need for embargoes, and especially the impact that open access will have on their work. This process is often cyclical, with upticks in queries coming as each graduation date approaches. But as the conversations on the ETD-L electronic discussion list show, new questions and concerns arise throughout the year. In an environment where graduate students are essentially
releasing the fruits of their labors to the world, rather than consigning them to the shelves of the Archives, issues of copyright and fair use, plagiarism, and the publishing pressures on newly minted academics take on much greater significance.

The changing nature of ETDs themselves also prompts input and assistance from the library. Change in academe is often slow, but some libraries are now seeing dissertations and theses that diverge from the traditional PDF format, especially from programs, such as the digital humanities, that do not lend themselves well to research output in that limiting format. The library can support this change by providing a digital environment that permits the inclusion of supplemental files and multimodal display of information in a manner that might better represent the nature of a student’s work. While it is ultimately the graduate school that will decide what form or forms an ETD may take, the library’s advocacy and demonstration of technical capabilities can effect change that will further the transformation of the ETD beyond the PDF, and lead to greater innovation in the presentation of research output.

The library has an essential role to play as communicator and coordinator in an ETD environment. In institutions where the graduate school or individual colleges are working directly with ProQuest to manage the submission process, the library can serve as a facilitator. Librarians are experts at working with vendors in general, and most likely already have a well-established working relationship with ProQuest that dates back to the days of shipping unbound dissertations to UMI to be microfilmed, and maintaining a standing order to Dissertation Abstracts. The library can help graduate school staff who may be uncertain about whom they should contact to make changes to their submission interface, for example, or who have billing questions. The library may also want to serve
more generally as a conduit of information between the graduate school and ProQuest, especially if there are multiple people on campus involved with approving ETD submissions. The workability of this arrangement will probably depend on campus organizational culture, but at Northeastern University we have found that it is effective for the library to serve as a main point of communication with ProQuest for resolving questions and concerns.

In a large institution, where each school or college may have its own requirements for formatting and submission, there is a higher likelihood that graduate students in different departments may receive information about the ETD program that is presented to them either differently or at different points in their studies. A student who hears about the university’s ETD program only as part of the graduate student handbook she receives on the first day of her degree program will almost certainly have forgotten all about it by the time she is ready to submit her dissertation, and may not understand why, after graduation, her dissertation comes up in a Google search for her name. “Why is my dissertation in Google?” is probably the most common question received from Northeastern University graduates about the ETD program. Since the library isn’t able to forcibly insert itself into the internal operations of the graduate school or schools, it must be vocal about the requirements and implications of the ETD program where it does have that opportunity. At Northeastern, we found that there was much less confusion from students about finding their dissertations on the open web once we inserted a page of information about our ETD program into the ProQuest submission interface, where they were required to check a box indicating that they had read it before completing the submission process. This page includes an explanation of what an ETD program is, why
Northeastern has one, and what its advantages are. The library also provides this information to each graduate school for distribution to students as part of the ETD formatting guidelines, if they want to include it there, and it is available on the library’s website. Even just reassuring students that ETD programs are now very common across the world can help alleviate concerns that open access to theses and dissertations isn’t some harebrained scheme cooked up by their particular library.

**New Roles for the Library in the ETD Environment: Supporting Students**

Most current graduate students are digital natives—they grew up in an era saturated with digital technologies, and are accustomed to finding the vast majority of the information they need online. Yet they still express anxieties over allowing the information they created—their thesis or dissertation—to exist on the open web. Sometimes these anxieties can be exacerbated by negative statements they may hear from their advisors (“Isn’t someone in China going to plagiarize my dissertation and pass it off as his own?”) or from professional societies or disciplinary associations. In 2013, the American Historical Association issued a highly debated statement that students should embargo their dissertations for six years, because otherwise no publisher would want to work with them (American Historical Association). Many commentators pointed out that a dissertation is usually so far removed from being an accepted book manuscript that it is essentially a different publication. Indeed, a study found that the majority of journal editors and university press directors in the humanities and social sciences either welcomed or were willing to consider manuscripts based on openly accessible ETDs (Ramirez, Dalton, McMillan, Read, & Seamans, 2012). Master of Fine Arts students,
who do generally produce a publishable work as their thesis, perhaps have a valid concern here and have argued for the ability to embargo their work until their manuscript has been formally published.

In other cases, such as patent applications, embargo periods are also appropriate, and in such situations most institutions permit ETDs to be embargoed for set time periods such as six months or one year. Indefinite embargoes, however, while they may seem desirable to the student who is fearful of diminished publishing opportunities, are rarely necessary. Situations that might require an indefinite or permanent embargo, such as the inclusion of privileged corporate or government information, should be avoided. The goal of ETD programs, after all, is to expand readership of theses and dissertations rather than create access barriers. The library has an important role to play here in guiding students and advisors to consider what goes into an ETD before it has been completed and approved, when substantive changes become more difficult. After all, the ETD is intended as a public and final record of a student’s work, a tradition dating back to the medieval disputatio. Students are already taught how to report on research in a way that does not reveal identifying information about subjects; the library can enhance this standard component of graduate education by offering advice on how to produce an ETD that can be released to a worldwide audience without permanent restriction. Permanent or indefinite embargoes should be reserved for rare situations, such as a threat to the student author’s personal safety, and should be considered by the graduate school carefully, on a case-by-case basis.

Librarians who have experience advocating for open access to research output can play an important role in debunking certain concerns outright and providing good reasons
why the advantages of openness far outweigh the potential for harm. As part of Open Access Week programming in 2013, the Boston College Libraries facilitated a panel discussion in response to the American Historical Association statement; the panel included an executive editor from Harvard University Press as well as faculty members and a current Ph.D. student (Boston College Libraries). Harvard University Press had responded in favor of immediate open access after the AHA statement was issued, and this opinion was represented by the editor on the panel. Jane Morris, Boston College’s Scholarly Communications Librarian, reported that the panel was successful in addressing the concerns AHA had raised about open access to dissertations. Regularizing this type of outreach to graduate students, faculty, and administrators will ensure that stakeholders are well informed about the true implications of open access to theses and dissertations. Indeed, the ETD program, with its impressive access statistics, serves as an important illustrative example in the library’s open-access advocacy. Not only is it obvious that these works receive much more readership than their closed-access counterparts, they also directly increase the institution’s academic impact.

Library or graduate school websites often address student concerns about potential plagiarism or copyright infringement, assuring them that there is no difference in their intellectual property rights when their dissertation or thesis is made available online as opposed to existing only in print. However, all authors, not just graduate students, must accept that once their work is released to the world, plagiarism is a possibility regardless of format. And plagiarism, after all, does not reflect poorly on the creator of the original work, but on the plagiarist and whoever vets the plagiarist’s work. Expressions of fear about plagiarism often specifically mention China and India as
hotbeds for this kind of activity, where young researchers are pressured to publish in English despite limited proficiency, in order to attain academic prestige, and where unethical publishers aid and abet plagiarism and other forms of research deception. Those with something to gain may be playing up these concerns; see, for example, a 2011 white paper from a company that produces plagiarism detection software (iThenticate). In truth, there is no proof that wholesale plagiarism of ETDs is taking place in these countries or elsewhere. Jeffrey Beall, a prominent critic of open access publishing, asserts that ETDs are “increasingly used as a source for plagiarized journal articles,” but provides only one example, of an American dissertation that had been plagiarized by Indian scholars, to back up this claim (2014). If anything, it is easier to prove original authorship when a work is publicly posted, with its date of deposit clearly stated. So, a savvy plagiarist who did not want to be discovered would be wise to choose a less visible source to copy!

In an ETD environment, intellectual property issues can also seem more critical, although as with plagiarism the rules are not any different than in a print environment. Students must still determine that their usage of others’ intellectual property falls within fair use, or else seek permission. However, the increased visibility of ETDs over print theses and dissertations creates heightened anxiety about “doing the right thing,” since rightsholders’ awareness of students’ usage of their work is just a Google search away. The ETD can actually serve as an instructional tool in providing more general copyright advice to graduate students. After all, the thesis or dissertation will be the last thing they create in their graduate education, but it exists on a spectrum of authorship that will include journal articles co-authored with lab supervisors, critical response papers in their coursework, project-based websites, and all the work they will produce after graduating,
if they go on to an academic career. On day one of graduate school, they may not know what other types of work they’ll be producing, but they all know they’ll be writing a thesis or dissertation at the end, if their program requires it. Getting students to think about writing for a public audience through the medium of the ETD can also help them think about how their other academic writing should conform to best practices regarding copyright and fair use.

As anyone who has offered copyright education in an academic setting knows, there is a range of misconceptions held by scholars at all levels. A grad student may say, “My advisor told me anything used for academic purposes doesn’t require permission, but I thought I should check with you.” Or, “If I got these images from the Internet, it’s okay to include them in my dissertation, right?” Uncertainty is understandable—copyright law can be confusing to the layperson—but ideally students shouldn’t get to the point of putting the finishing touches on their thesis or dissertation before they start thinking about these questions. Copyright advisory to grad students is essential throughout their time at the institution. ETDs already deposited in the institutional repository can serve as excellent examples to illustrate when permission is needed for reuse of others’ work and when a determination of fair use may be made. Librarians who offer instruction and outreach to grad students should always include copyright and fair use as part of their sessions, so that students have a good handle on when they might need to seek permission by the time they get to the stage of writing their thesis or dissertation. Such instruction will give them a higher level of confidence that they have nothing to fear regarding the public release of their ETD on the open web.
While the risk of being plagiarized by others is not the student’s responsibility, the risk of infringing on the intellectual property rights of others is. The responsibility for performing a fair use analysis and seeking permission if necessary ultimately rests with the student author. Neither graduate schools nor libraries have the time to review every page of every ETD when submitted; ProQuest reviews appendices for copyrighted survey instruments and the like, but they do not review the full texts of ETDs either. This understanding may bring about a change in perspective for students who have grown up in a culture where “everything on the Internet is free.” Libraries already do their best to disabuse students of this notion through copyright outreach as well as open-access advocacy that highlights, for example, how much e-journal subscriptions actually cost, but such a distinction may only become personally relevant when they themselves are publishing their scholarship on the Internet via their ETD.

Libraries may already be receiving queries from graduate students in the social sciences and humanities who are seeking advice on where to publish articles. (In the sciences, students more frequently serve as primary authors on articles co-authored by their faculty advisors or lab supervisors; in those cases, the senior authors likely determine where articles are submitted.) A search for this topic across the LibGuides platform shows dozens of guides created by libraries to help answer the question of where to publish. Some address topics like journal impact factor or acceptance rate, while others emphasize the importance of being aware of predatory publishers. This latter point has particular relevance to the ETD program. While vanity publishers have been contacting students for decades about having their dissertations published for a fee, the increase in online availability of ETDs has likely resulted in a corresponding increase in
these solicitations—after all, improved discoverability makes everyone’s work easier, even the vanity publishers.

Libraries and graduate schools can help students avoid falling prey to vanity presses and other predatory publishers whose primary interest is in making money rather than advancing scholarship. Highlighting the problem in student-facing materials related to the ETD program is certainly a good idea.6 Establishing a policy of not displaying students’ e-mail addresses publicly with their ETDs, and advising students not to include their contact information in their PDFs, will make it more difficult for predatory publishers to contact students. And creating a feedback loop between the library and the graduate school about student queries regarding suspect publishers will permit both parties to be better informed and able to track trends in publisher contacts. Naturally, some publisher outreach to students may be completely legitimate. The library, especially its scholarly communication librarians and subject specialists, is well positioned to offer advice on whether a publisher’s solicitation is aboveboard or suspect, and it should promote this service to the graduate school and its students. While open access to a student’s dissertation or thesis will not damage her academic reputation, publishing it for a fee with a vanity press may have negative consequences, and the library can help ensure she does not fall prey to such a solicitation.

New Roles for the Library in the ETD Environment: Marketing and Advocacy

In the print environment, dissertations and master’s theses were not a focal point of the library’s marketing efforts. Perhaps the collection in the Archives might have been mentioned if it happened to contain works by prominent alumni—Nobel Prize winners,
Presidential candidates, and the like—but it was otherwise largely relegated to the background. By contrast, the library’s collection of ETDs is highly promotable. Not only does it represent a significant library investment in terms of infrastructure, it also illustrates the institution’s commitment to making its research output more accessible and the value it places on graduate research in particular. In the broadest sense, as mentioned earlier, ETDs can serve as a cornerstone of the library’s advocacy for open access. ETDs have local relevance, and their usage statistics are a compelling argument for the advantages of wider availability of research.

While the actual content of most dissertations and theses might be too specialized for a general audience, such as the recipients of a library supporters’ newsletter, interest in reading the ETDs themselves is not necessary for understanding the significance of making this kind of research output more accessible worldwide. Impressive download statistics should certainly be promoted, as they reflect positively on the library’s hard work in developing and maintaining the repository. It is also worth noting to university-level marketing staff that open access increases citation rates by 50% or more, a phenomenon first reported in 2006 (Eysenbach). Thus the ETD program also becomes an important tool for the university to market its graduate programs to prospective students who are keen to make their scholarly mark on the world. The success of the ETD program may be used for internal advocacy purposes as well, for example to help convince university administrators to provide financial support for an open access publishing fund, or encourage faculty to consider adopting an open access policy.

The ETD program’s achievements in expanding access to dissertations and theses can also be used to market a retrospective digitization program to alumni. Some
institutions have either undertaken or are planning digitization of their print dissertation holdings, in order to provide greater access as well as a more complete picture of their graduate research output over time. Librarians who advocate for open access are well versed in explaining how the advantages of increased accessibility outweigh any perceived disadvantages, and they can put this expertise to good use in outreach to alumni about digitization projects. Some alumni may balk at having their theses or dissertations retrospectively digitized and made available, because of fears that their early, less-polished writing might detract from their scholarly reputation or perhaps reveal youthful opinions or outdated theories they would prefer to keep in seclusion on the Archives shelf. But feedback from institutions that have undertaken retrospective digitization indicates that the majority of alumni are quite pleased to have their dusty old dissertations revived on the web. While Northeastern University has not yet embarked on a comprehensive digitization project, we have digitized older dissertations upon author request, and these authors have provided positive feedback on the outcome. Those who went on to establish academic careers have been pleased to be able to simply point prospective readers to their dissertations in our repository, as opposed to having to send photocopies or scans upon request. And they are interested in and surprised at the attention their digitized dissertations get, as evidenced in the download reports they receive. These success stories are marketing gold to library communications staff.

Conclusion

The library’s role as the steward of graduate student research output has expanded significantly since the days of print archives. In addition to continuing its primary
mission of safeguarding dissertations and theses in order to preserve the institutional record, something it has been doing for centuries, the library has now taken on additional roles as coordinator, advisor, and champion. Regular assessment of the services the library provides in support of the ETD program is essential, as is regular communication with the graduate school, students, and other stakeholders. With greater accessibility comes increased need for management and cultivation—to return to the metaphor introduced at the beginning of this chapter, a public park serves everyone, and their needs and uses will sometimes be unanticipated. But it is clear that the consequences of openness in an ETD environment are overwhelmingly positive for student authors and their institutions.

1 Although the PDF standard was first released by Adobe in 1993, it wasn’t until 1996, when the more functional version 2.0 was released (accompanied by the free release of Acrobat Reader software), that it saw wide uptake. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portable_Document_Format.

2 Northeastern University is an NDLTD member.

3 See http://listserv.vt.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A0=ETD-L.

4 See http://library.northeastern.edu/get-help/theses-dissertations.

5 See http://libguides.com/community.php?m=s&it=0&search=where+to+publish.

6 For an example, see the University of Massachusetts at Amherst’s LibGuide for ETD authors: http://guides.library.umass.edu/content.php?pid=110362&sid=832620.
References


