

To Embargo or Not to Embargo?: The Impact of Updating Embargo Options for Undergraduate Theses

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Sarah A. Norris, University of Central Florida

Abstract

Embargo is often applied to thesis work that contains proprietary or sensitive material and, in some cases, also extends to works creative in nature. Many institutions use embargo with the intent to release the work for access worldwide after the embargo period has lapsed, which has its own set of unique challenges. At New College of Florida, an undergraduate liberal arts college, previous ETD embargo policies allowed for indefinite embargo of undergraduate thesis work, without the ability to remove such embargo after a designated period of time. In 2013, the library began examining the digital repository's digital submission form and the indefinite embargo option. In consultation with institutional constituents, the library updated the digital submission form to include various embargo options, ranging from six months to two years, with the option to embargo indefinitely in special circumstances. By updating the embargo options, the library and librarians have been able to engage faculty and students on issues concerning embargo, including misconceptions about the efficacy of embargo for future publishing. Additionally, students and faculty are able to have in-depth discussions about various publishing options, open access, and the appropriateness of embargo for theses. These conversations amongst faculty, students, and librarians are playing an important role in this institution in educating faculty and undergraduate institution about the consequences of indefinite embargoes and embargo, in general, and also broadening knowledge about open access and scholarly publishing issues.

Image 1. 2014-2015 Embargo Policy Example

CONDITIONS FOR ELECTRONIC AVAILABILITY
By not selecting an option, you are waiving your ability to limit electronic distribution of your thesis by New College of Florida

Release the entire work immediately for access worldwide.

Restrict access to the entire work

for (circle one): SIX MONTHS ONE YEAR TWO YEARS
Following this restricted time period, the work will be released for worldwide access unless I send a request in writing to the New College of Florida Library, indicating that the restriction be continued for another specific period of time.

My thesis should not be accessible electronically.

If you opt to restrict access to your thesis, temporarily or indefinitely, discuss with your sponsor and have them sign below.

Policy Copyright New College of Florida

Table 1. Number of ETDs Embargo Types By Year

	6 Month Embargo	1 Year Embargo	2 Years Embargo	Indefinite Embargo
2015	2	2	4	6
2014	1	-	1	3
2013	-	-	-	7
2012	-	-	-	6
2011	-	-	-	3
2010	-	-	-	2
2009	-	-	-	2

Chart 1. Embargoes By Year and Division

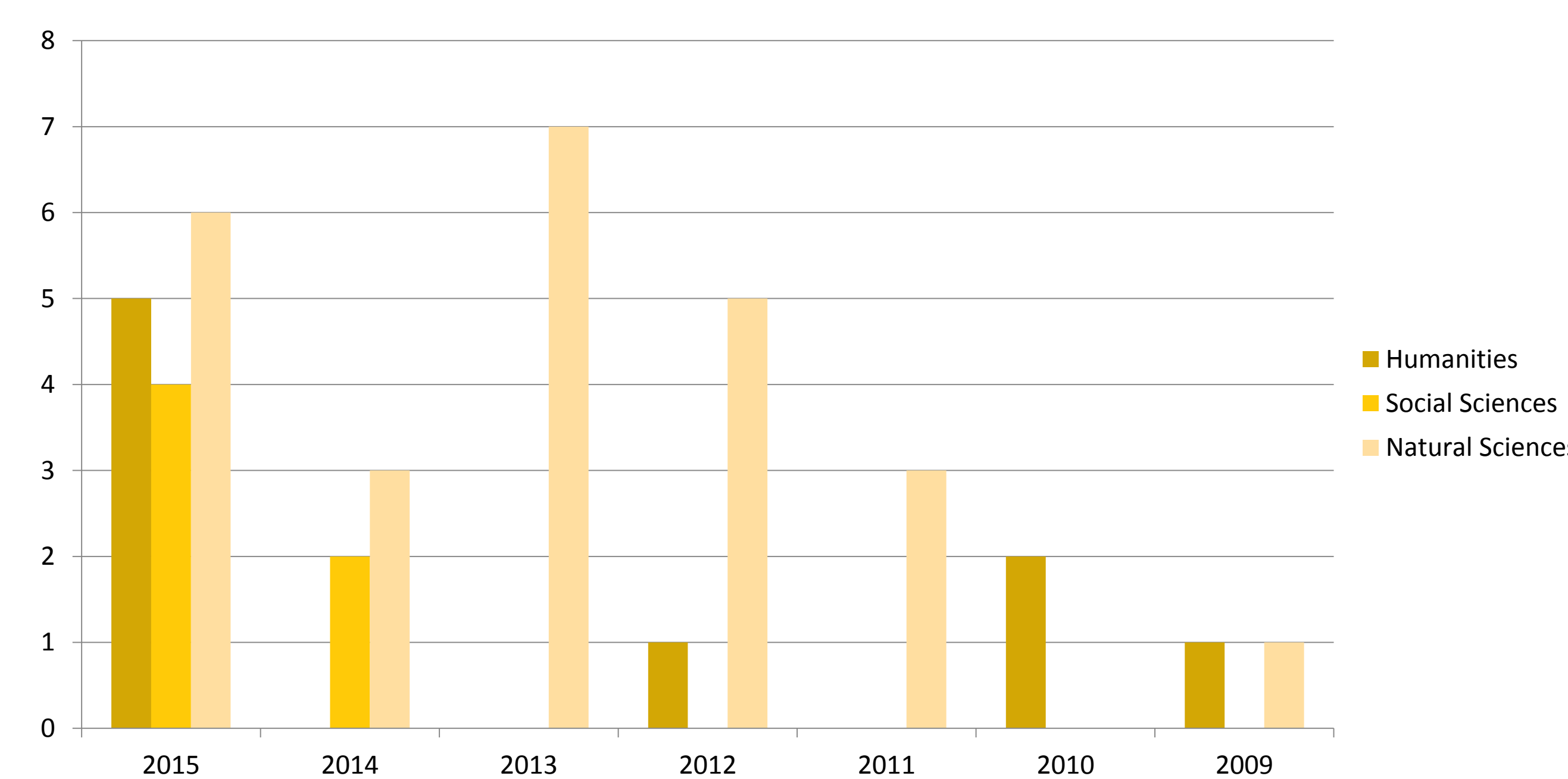
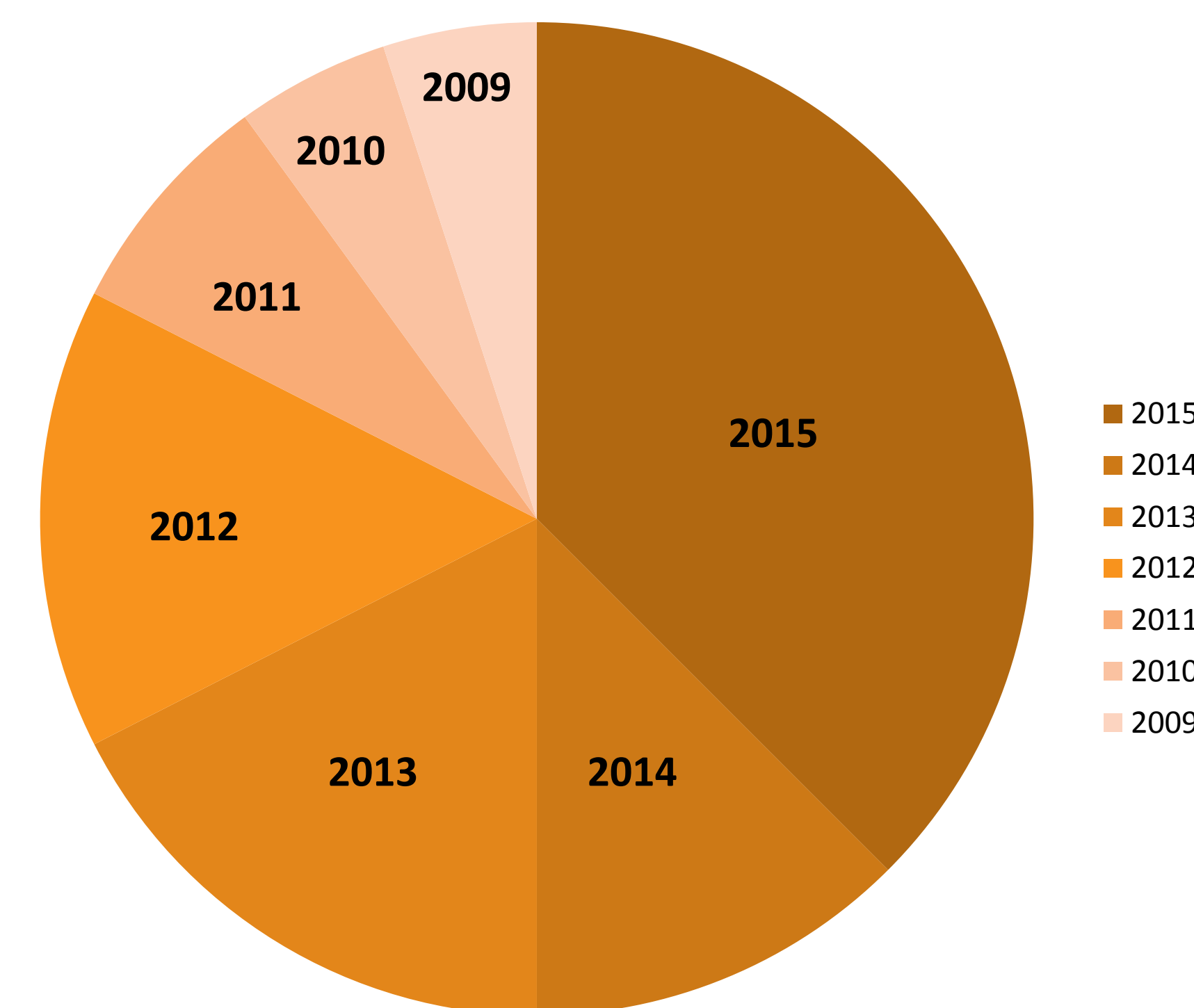


Chart 2. Total Embargoes By Year



New College of Florida Embargo Policies

Fast Facts:

- NCF is a public undergraduate liberal arts college
- All seniors must submit an honors thesis as a requirement for graduation
- In 2009, faculty voted to approve electronic submissions (in addition to print submissions) of honors theses to be housed in the library's digital repository
- The only embargo option was indefinite embargo, which required the signature of a faculty member
- In 2013, the library examined embargo policy and in consultation with the institution's general counsel, updated the policy to include varying embargo options that included 6 months, 1 year, 2 year, and indefinite embargo; faculty signature was still required
- In 2015, the embargo options no longer required a faculty signature

University of Central Florida Embargo Policies

Based on 2007-2008 ETD Dissemination Policy:

- Immediate worldwide ETD dissemination with no restrictions
- Embargo 6 months (with an additional six months extension) for patent and other proprietary issues, then release work for worldwide dissemination
- Embargo 6 months (with an additional six months extension) for patent and other proprietary issues, then release with limited access to UCF community for a period of one year, two years, or five years
- Limited access to the UCF community for a period of one year, three years, five years (this does not require thesis and dissertation adviser signature and approval)

Conclusions

- Embargo policy development is an iterative process
- Development should include various constituents including graduate schools and honors colleges, general counsel, faculty, librarians, and academic departments
- Requiring faculty or departmental signatures can deter author(s) from exploring embargo options
- Offering varying types of embargoes and embargo scenarios allows for greater flexibility for the author(s)
- Embargo options provide opportunity to have dialogue about publishing options, open access, and appropriateness of embargo for ETDs

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Special Thanks to New College of Florida

