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.

Table 1. Number of ETDs Embargo Types By Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>6 Month Embargo</th>
<th>1 Year Embargo</th>
<th>2 Years Embargo</th>
<th>Indefinite Embargo</th>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 1. Embargoes By Year and Division

Chart 2. Total Embargoes By Year

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