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ETDs and Data, ETDs as Data

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The ETD 2014 conference got underway in Leicester England this week, and the meetings could aptly be subtitled “Data is the new black.” From the opening plenary to the keynote address, in workshop Q&As and around dining hall tables, the conversations center less on the documents prepared by graduate student authors than on the research data supplementing or underlying them. Where discussions do consider the ‘narrative’ portion of the ETD submission, presenters speak of the importance of the textual content contained within, and the value of making the ETD corpus openly available for mining and reuse by researchers worldwide. In sum, the discussions at this year’s ETD meeting reflect a shift in paradigm, a recognition that ETDs are much more than PDF files submitted in partial fulfillment of advanced degree requirements. They are complex and information-rich research contributions comprising, in many cases, a diverse set of outputs. They are defined not by their formats but by the substance of their contents. And perhaps most importantly, they are not only end points for their authors’ student careers but also starting points for new inquiries and data for other investigators.

This holistic view of the ETD as unique research contribution presents ETD professionals with a new set of responsibilities. Treating ETDs as compound research objects, with each part of equal importance and each part a building block for subsequent research, will challenge many status quo practices born of tradition (and, too often, convenience). What will those practices look like? This blog will explore that question in the next few posts.



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