Running head**:** GIVING PATRONS WHAT THEY WANT

Giving Patrons What They Want: An Analysis of a Thesis and Dissertation

Purchase-on-Demand Project at East Carolina University

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Abstract

Joyner Library's Interlibrary Loan Department has been purchasing theses and dissertations that it could neither borrow from other libraries nor find freely available online to fulfill patron requests. Purchased documents are reviewed by Collection Development for possible accession after the patron has finished consulting the works. The background, interlibrary loan process, collection development process, and technical services process are discussed. Summary data and analysis are presented.

Giving Patrons What They Want: An Analysis of a Thesis and Dissertation Purchase-on-Demand

Project at East Carolina University

To address growing demand by patrons to consult theses and dissertations produced at other universities and colleges, Joyner Library's Interlibrary Loan Department began purchasing on-demand print or electronic copies of theses and dissertations early in the 2000s that it could neither borrow from other libraries nor find freely available online. After purchase, the documents were saved to be accessioned to the collection for other patrons to consult in the future. This article discusses the purchase, patron delivery, collection development, and cataloging processes and analyzes who made the requests and what they requested.

Institutional Profile

Joyner Library serves as the academic library for East Carolina University, an emerging national research institution with an enrollment of nearly 28,000 students in 104 bachelor's degree programs, 73 master's degree programs, 18 doctoral degree programs, and various professional certification programs. ECU's medical, dental, and allied health disciplines are serviced by Laupus Health Sciences Library, which is a separate campus entity.

Literature Review

Purchase-on-demand (POD) projects by libraries and especially by interlibrary loan operations are not new. In the past 30 years, dozens of articles have been published discussing POD programs at nearly 20 libraries (e.g. Anderson, 2002; Perdue, 1999; Zopfi-Jordan, 2008). While these projects varied in scope and methodology, none were found in the literature that specifically discussed purchasing theses and dissertations on-demand on a large scale.

A search of the library literature found little directly related to the collection of other institutions' theses and dissertations. What articles were found had to do with two main themes. Firstly, there has been a lot written recently on the inclusion of electronic theses and dissertations into institutional repositories. These articles tend to focus on metadata concerns. An example of this sort of article is Boock and Kunda's "Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Metadata Workflow at Oregon State University Libraries." (Boock and Kunda, 297-308) Secondly, several articles have been written about using theses and dissertation bibliographies to analyze collections and collection development needs. An example of this sort of article is Feyereisen and Spoiden's "Can Local Citation Analysis of Master's and Doctoral Theses help Decision-Making about the Management of the Collection of Periodicals? A Case Study in Psychology and Education Sciences." (Feyereisen and Spoiden, 512-22)

ILL Process

There was not a specific library initiative at first to purchase theses and dissertations on-demand through interlibrary loan instead of through the normal collection development process. The project simply evolved from the usual practice in interlibrary loan of paying to borrow items and paying for access to electronic articles that could not be borrowed. Subject liaisons and collection development personnel had no objections to items being purchased in their areas from outside of their subject firm order budget lines, as long as they could then decide if the purchases should be added to the collection once the ILL patron had finished consulting them.

Since few print theses and dissertations (PTDs) and electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs) were purchased by interlibrary loan from 2001-2005, no formal procedures or specific tracking methods were created. Purchases, when needed, were charged against the library's

general operating budget, which covers ILL copying/borrowing fees, postage, office supplies,

and assorted other costs. To reflect the changes in collection development desires and patron

preferences, as well as to deliver requested documents more quickly and cheaply, ILL switched

in 2006-2007 from purchasing mainly loose print documents, which often took over a week to

arrive and that later required binding, to preferring electronic documents, which often could be

purchased and delivered to the patron by email within the same day.

The purchasing project was never specifically publicized to the campus community, but

individual patrons who placed requests sometimes were informed of the project and possibly

passed the word along. Also, during the past decade, ECU expanded its offerings of degrees and

majors, increased its admittance requirements, and placed greater emphasis on faculty and

student research. These changes – along, no doubt, with theses/dissertations becoming ever more

easily discoverable thanks to search engines and online databases – led to increasing demands for

theses and dissertations. As a result, it was decided that a better method of accounting for these

expenses and some selection criteria were needed to govern the purchase of theses/dissertations.

So, starting in 2007-2008, the thesis/dissertation purchases were placed under the auspices of and

budget for ILL's monograph purchase-on-demand project, which was entering its second year.

Basic selection criteria were adopted: English-language only, non-fiction, available for delivery

within a week, and for subjects that generally are relevant to the university's programs. For

2009-2010, the criteria were further refined by the collection development department to exclude

requests by undergraduates, to favor documents produced by reputable academic institutions, and

to select topics more closely aligned with the largest majors on campus.

Like other ILL requests, limits were not placed on who could request the documents or

on the number of requests they could make; neither were the patrons required to pay anything

toward the cost for purchasing the theses or dissertations. ILL only purchased a document if the staff were unable to obtain a loan or find an electronic copy for free online. The requests were handled completely by ILL staff and the Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery Librarian, without being routed through collection development, acquisitions, and cataloging until after the patron had returned the print item or had electronic access to the document. Most documents were purchased through Proquest Dissertations and Theses service; some, however, were purchased from other venders, including the self-publishing site Grin.com. Purchases were charged to university credit cards tied to the appropriate library budget funds. The cards had daily and monthly charge limits, required exact documentation, and underwent strict monthly oversight by library and university administration.

Once interlibrary loan purchased an ETD, the document was saved in two folders on the interlibrary loan server: one for collection development review and another for the requesting patron to access. The copy saved for the requesting patron to access was only available for 30 days; after which, the document was automatically deleted by the ILLiad interlibrary loan management software. When purchased PTDs were received by interlibrary loan, the loose leaf document was scanned to PDF as a precaution against pages being lost or soiled by the patron; however, due to copyright concerns, the PDF was not made available to the patron and was not retained by the library. Instead, the loose-leaf paper document was binder-clipped together and lent to the patron. Then, once the patron had returned the document, any missing or soiled pages were replaced from the temporary PDF copy. The temporary PDF file was then deleted and the complete print document was sent to collection development.

Collection Development / Retention Process

Each PTD/ETD was reviewed by a collection development librarian for addition to the collection. The collection development librarians at Joyner Library are part of collection and technical services and, as such, do very little public service work. Their jobs require full-time attention to developing and managing various components of Joyner's collections. PTDs/ETDs were assessed for adding to the collection in much the same manner gift books are assessed: ultimately an informal cost-benefit analysis was performed. If the PTD/ETD was found to be on a topic that fits within ECU's collection parameters, if the storage costs were reasonable for the topic, and if the processing costs were acceptable, the PTD/ETD was added to Joyner's collection.

The process for assessing whether to add a PTD/ETD to the Joyner Library collection was complex. Since no subject areas were excluded by interlibrary loan personnel, the document first had to be reviewed to see if it met the general collection development guidelines. In other words, it must have been on a subject in which the university and library wished to support. While documents have been retained from various subject areas, the majority retained have been from education, which is one of the university's largest graduate degree programs. Theses and dissertations on music topics were forwarded to Joyner's separate Music Library and those in medical fields were sent to the Laupus Health Sciences Library for their individual collection development reviews. For all PTDs/ETDS, one of the most difficult questions posed has been: how likely is it to ever get used again? If the answer were yes, the document was added to the collection; if the answer were no, the print document was recycled or the PDF file was deleted from the server.   Another criteria used for determining retention was age. Older dissertations from the 1970s and 1980s were less likely to be retained than newer ones.

The next criterion considered was format. Although all recent theses and dissertations start out as 'born digital' documents, not all requested documents are recent and not even all recent documents are available as ETDs. For these reasons, PTDs and ETDs were both purchased during the span of this program. In the beginning of the program, patrons tended to specifically desire print versions, even when an ETD was available. As the program progressed, fewer patrons specifically requested the print version, so the ILL staff, upon the recommendation of collection development staff, only began to purchase print versions if an electronic one were not available. Purchased ETDs arrived and were saved as PDF files; the average storage space required was about 5 MB, with a cost of $.15 to store on a server per year. For print copies, the cost for binding was approximately $10.00, which was considerably more than storing ETDs.

Processing cost was the next factor taken into account when considering format. It took 10-15 minutes for a collection development librarian to review PTD/ETD for inclusion in the collection. Once the decision had been made to add the title to the collection, it was sent to a cataloging assistant. The method used for cataloging depends greatly on the presence of an existing WorldCat record. If there were a WorldCat record, copy cataloging occured, which took about 10 minutes per item. If there were no WorldCat record, a complete original cataloging record had to be created; due to the complexities of assigning subject headings for works with narrow scopes that were probably not familiar to the cataloging assistant, original cataloging easily required up to 25 minutes per title. If an PTD/ETD were not added to the collection, it was simply deleted or recycled.

One complication in the cataloging processing was that purchased PTDs/ETDs were sometimes later found freely available online through the degree granting institution's institutional repository. Since interlibrary loan staff searches the internet and the degree granting

institutions' catalogs and IRs, this scenario only occurred a small percentage of the time, most likely due to the lag time between publication of the thesis or dissertation, its installation into the IR, and its indexing by search engines. It was decided that if WorldCat shows a link to an institutional repository copy that is freely available, Joyner's catalogers will add the record to our catalog and discard our print copy or delete our electronic file.

After cataloging, PTDs were sent to binding. The binding process usually took four weeks. Once received back from the bindery, bound PTDs were sent to circulation for placement in the general circulating stacks. At this point, these documents became available for circulation to anyone with a valid library patron account. Bound theses and dissertations were added to Joyner Library's WorldCat holdings and became available for lending to other libraries through interlibrary loan.

ETDs were handled differently than PTDs after cataloging. The PDF files were moved from their temporary storage space with other interlibrary loan files on one server to a permanent storage space on another library server. Because of concerns of violating vender license agreements and copyright, access to ETDs was only made available to ECU affiliates. This level of security was achieved by placing the documents on a server that requires proxy authentication or to be on campus for access. Since interlibrary loan was not permitted to grant access to purchased ETDs, Joyner's catalog records and holdings for these documents were not added to WorldCat.

Results/Request Data

The project has been a success by every measure. 138 patrons from 35 majors/departments have had free access to 345 theses and dissertations that they would have

had to travel to far away libraries to consult, pay $29.00-$50.00 or more each to purchase on

their own, or forgo otherwise. During the same period, 838 dissertations were borrowed from

other libraries or found online for free for our patrons by the ILL office; an additional 258

requests for theses or dissertations had to be cancelled because the documents could not be

located, borrowed, duplicated, or purchased.

As one might expect, graduate students requested the vast majority of requests – over

four times the number of purchased titles as faculty members (See Table 1 and Figure 1). While

the distribution of patrons requesting purchased titles was heavily tilted toward Education (45),

disciplines were represented from throughout the university, from the social sciences and

humanities to the hard sciences (see Table 2).

By far, the largest number of purchased titles was for Education (172) (See Figure 2).The

other 32 majors/departments shared the remaining 99 titles. Since ECU's College of Education is

one of the largest on campus, with about 1,500 graduate students and 1,300 undergraduates in

2007-2008, it is not surprising that most requests for theses and dissertations came from this

college (ECU, 2009). Figure 3 demonstrates the coorelation of number of requests to number of

patrons making requests in the diciplines with the most documents purchased.

What was surprising was the frequency that some patrons requested theses and

dissertations (see Table 3). One patron requested 23 that had to be purchased, while another

requested 13 and yet another requested 11. The majority (73) only requested one document,

though. If the library decides to continue purchasing theses and dissertations, we will likely

discuss placing a per-patron limit on the number that can be purchased; this would not be done

so much as a cost-constraint, but as a collection development method to ensure that not too many items on a narrowly focused topic will be purchased for the collection.

Another surprise was the distribution of universities and colleges whose theses and dissertations we purchased (see Table 4). The largest number of documents purchased was from Capella University, which is a distributed, adult-focused university owned by a publicly traded corporation (Capella, 2010). Given the interest of ECU in various education fields (e.g. distance, continuing, K-12, and higher education), and Capella's graduate degree offerings in the same, it is understandable that our patrons would desire some of their research. Since Capella lacks a physical library collection of print theses and dissertations and does not have an institutional repository of those items available online to the public, we could not borrow or download any requested documents from Capella, as we often could from other older, more traditional universities and colleges.

As for the actual purchased documents, 295 of them were purchased as electronic files and 50 as print documents (see Figure 5). Only 14 of the purchased documents were master's theses; as Figure 6 shows, the remaining 331 were doctoral theses, with the majority of those being Ph.D.s (210) and Ed.D.s (98).

We were somewhat disappointed to discover that the majority of theses and dissertations that we purchased were published within the past five years (181) – a period when many universities began placing their new theses and dissertations online in institutional repositories (see Figure 6). We hypothesize that newer titles are having to be purchased instead of borrowed or found online for five reasons: 1) libraries are less commonly producing print copies of their university's and college's theses and dissertations that can be loaned, 2) there is a lag in placing

recent ETDs in institutional repositories, 3) IRs may not be fully searchable by search engines, 4) IRs may not be prominent on university and library webpage, and 5) ETD holdings may not be made available to the public in IRs, catalogs, and WorldCat because of license deals with ProQuest or other venders. Regardless of the reasons why recent theses/dissertations are not available to borrow or freely download, our data shows that researchers place high importance on gaining access to recent theses and dissertations. If this trend continues, our library and likely other libraries will have to set aside larger budgets for purchasing theses and dissertations for their patrons or will have to cancel their requests in greatly numbers. It is also interesting to note that older PTDs are easier to borrow and therefore aren't bought as frequently as ETDs.

After collection development review, less than 20% of all PTDs/ETDs purchased were not added to the collection; nearly 90% of the ETDs and nearly 80% of the PTDs were kept. Of those added, 88.7% were ETDs and 11.3% were PTDs.

Prior to the addition of purchasing theses/dissertations through the ILL monograph POD project, the ILL monograph POD budget was $5,000 in 2006/07; once added, the budget grew to $7,500 in 2007/08, $10,000 in 2008/09, and $15,000 in 2009/2010 with an extra $5,000 for the purchase of standards documents. While this increase largely reflects the desire of the library to support an additional collection development method, it also recognizes the growing costs of providing theses and dissertations for patrons.

Unfortunately, the library's systems team has not devised a method to track the number or frequency of ETDs accessed by patrons. This remains a desire of collection development so that it can use such data in future collection decisions. Circulation data is also not available for many of the PTDs because they were set aside by previous technical services employees until a

full staffing compliment was in place and until decisions could be made for the review, binding, and accession of these documents. As a result of these delays, many print titles purchased in previous years were not available to patrons until the 2008/09 academic year.

Conclusion / Future

While we have been pleased with the success of purchasing print and electronic theses and dissertations for our patrons, we are not sure that we will be able to continue doing so at the current level. North Carolina's government and university system are experiencing a budget crisis, which is forcing large budget cuts across the board. Joyner Library suffered an 18% budget reduction for 2009/2010, which included a 75% reduction to our monographic and media purchases. If such cuts continue, the purchasing of theses/dissertations on-demand might have to be suspended in the future. If that is the case, the ILL department will direct patrons to ProQuest and other venders where they can purchase the documents directly.

References

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Perdue, J. & Van Fleet, J. (1999). Borrow or Buy? Cost-effective delivery of monographs. *Journal of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery, and Information Supply,* 9(4), 19-28.

Zopfi-Jordan, D. (2008). Purchasing or Borrowing: Making Interlibrary Loan Decisions That Enhance Patron Satisfaction. *Journal of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery & Electronic Reserve,* 18(3), 387-394.

Figure 1: Distribution of purchased PTDs/ETDs by patron status in per cents
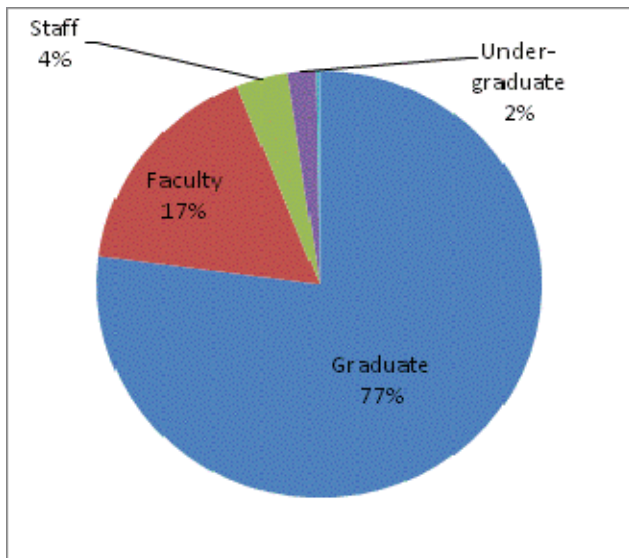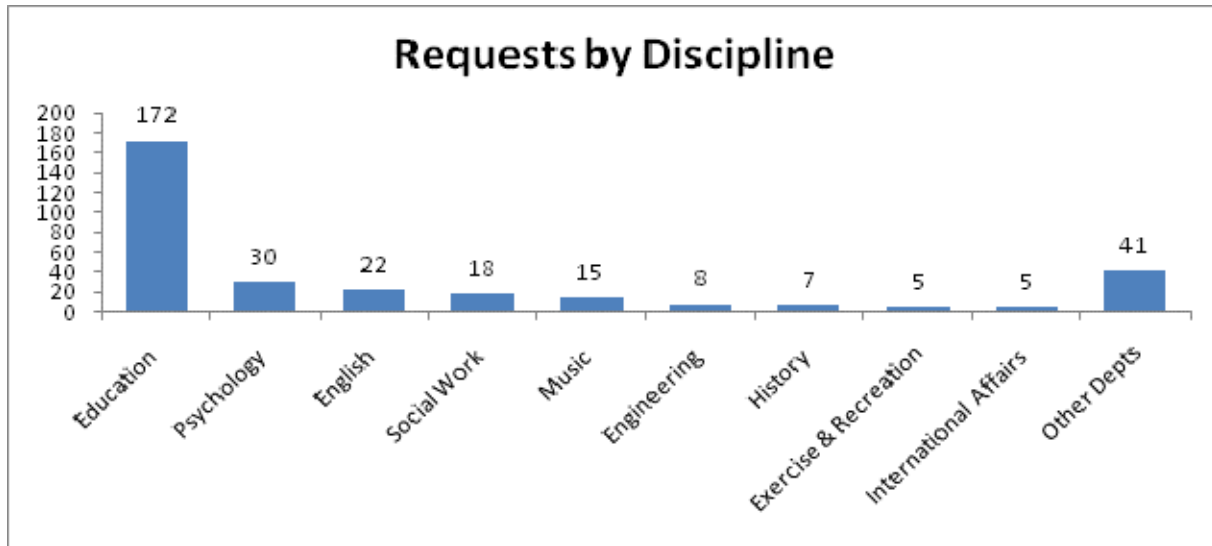
Figure 2: Purchased PTDs/ETDs by Department/Major

Requests by Discipline

Education	Psychology	English	Social Work	Music	Engineering	History	Exercise & Recreation	International Affairs	Other Depts
172	30	22	18	15	8	7	5	5	41

Figure 3: Top five disciplines by both numbers of patrons and requests

Top 5 Disciplines by Patrons and Requests

	Education	Psychology	English	Music	Social Work
Patrons	45	16	13	9	5
Requests	172	30	22	15	18
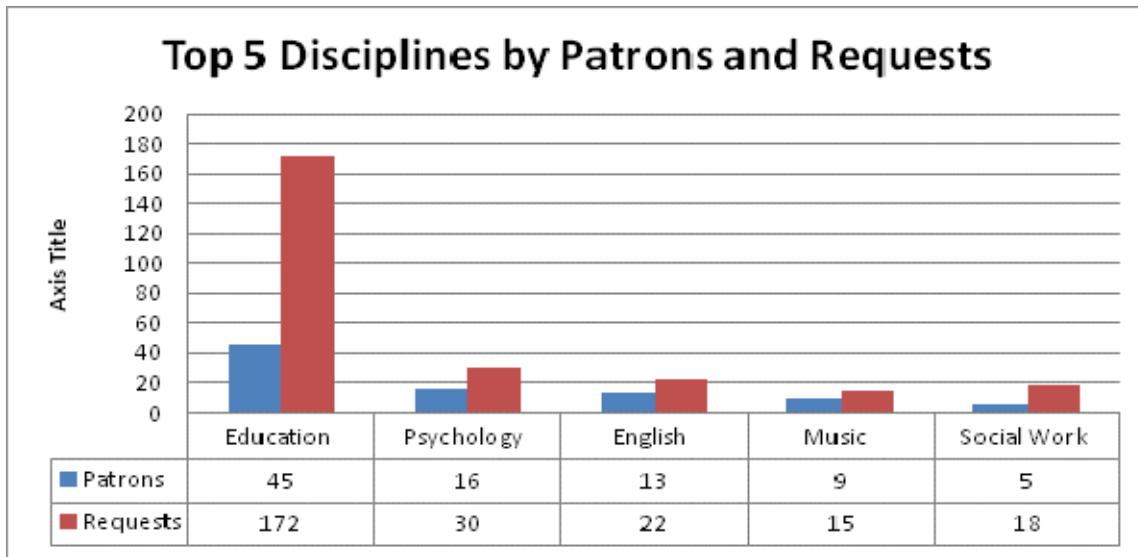
Figure 4: Format of Purchased Documents, in per cents

Requests

Print
14%

Electronic
86%
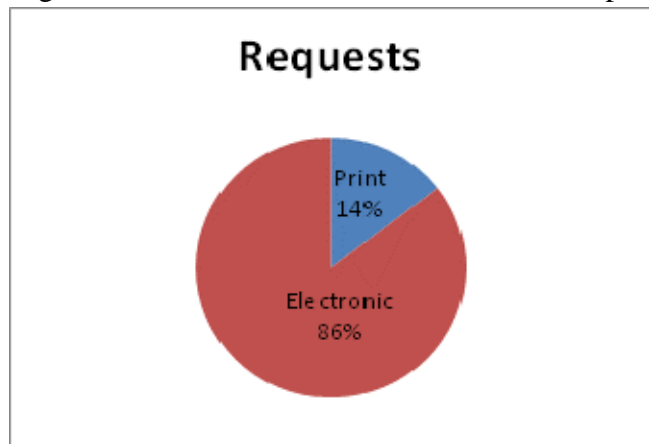
Figure 5: Purchased PTDs/ETDs by Degree Type

Purchases by Degree Types

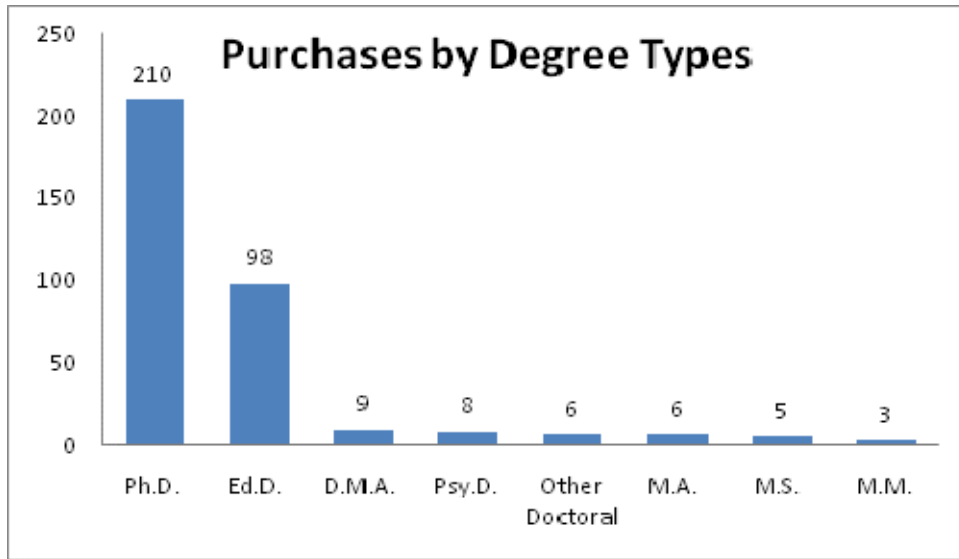| Degree Type	Value
Ph.D.	210
Ed.D.	98
D.M.A.	9
Psy.D.	8
Other Doctoral	6
M.A.	6
M.S.	5
M.M.	3

Figure 6: Distribution of Purchased PTDs/ETDs by Year Range
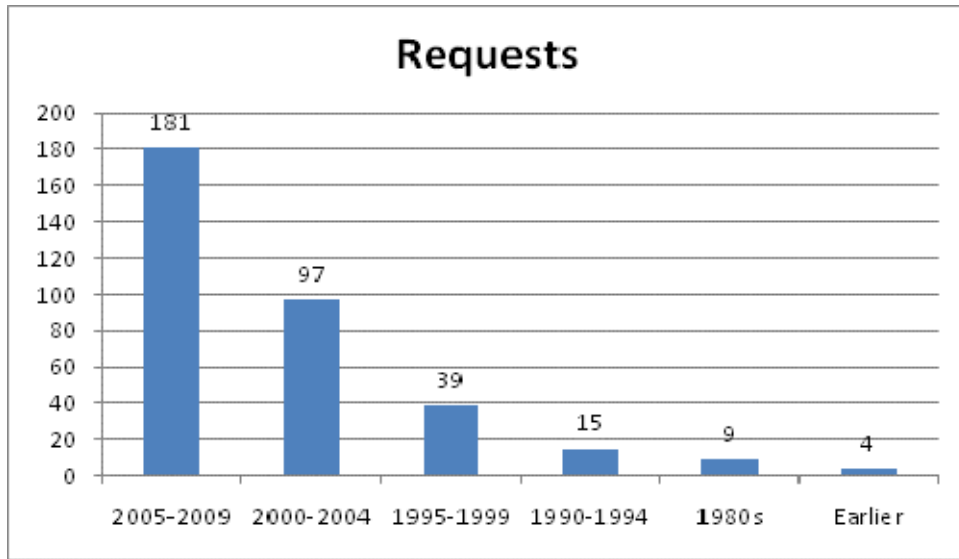
Table 4: Top 10 Universities where Purchased PTDs/ETDs were Produced

Universities	Requests
Capella University	19
University of North Texas	7
Wilmington College (Delaware)	5
University of Texas at Austin	5
University of Central Florida	5
State University of New York at Buffalo	5
New York University	5
Fielding Graduate University	5
Harvard University	4
University of Southern California	4

Table 1: Distribution of purchased PTDs/ETDs by patron status

Status	Requests
Graduate	266
Faculty	58
Staff	13
Undergraduate	7
Other	1

Table 2: Number of patrons for whom PTDs/ETDs were purchased by their department/major

Department/Major	Patrons
Education	45
Psychology	16
English	13
Music	9
Social Work	5
Foreign Languages & Literatures	3
Geography	3
Communications (Non-Medical)	3
Library Science & Instructional Technology	3
26 Other Disciplines	38

Table 3: Requests made by each number of patrons

Number of Patrons	Requests Made by Each Patron
1	23
1	13
1	11
4	8
7	2
6	6
3	5
10	4
14	3
23	2
73	1