Digital Curation and Doctoral Research: Current Practice

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Aims of research project

Expectation from funders and institutions that doctoral supervisors include digital curation in research skills supervision/guidance

- Can supervisors fulfil this expectation?

- Is it a reasonable expectation?

- How can digital curation support be improved within the doctoral student/supervisor relationship?

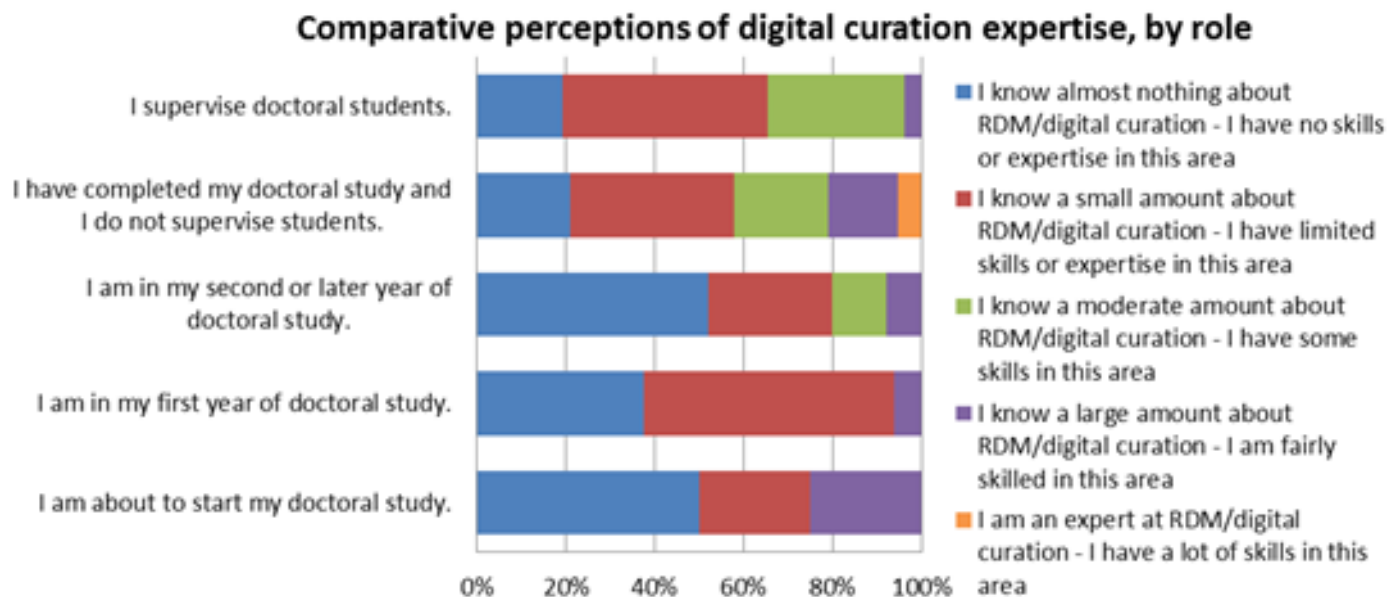# Survey of doctoral students and PhD holders

- N=116
- Completion rate c.75%
- Roughly equal split between
    - Early students
    - Late students
    - Doctorate holders who supervise
    - Doctorate holders who do not supervise
- Slight disciplinary bias towards Arts subjects

Good news!

Perceptions of the importance of long-term preservation, by role
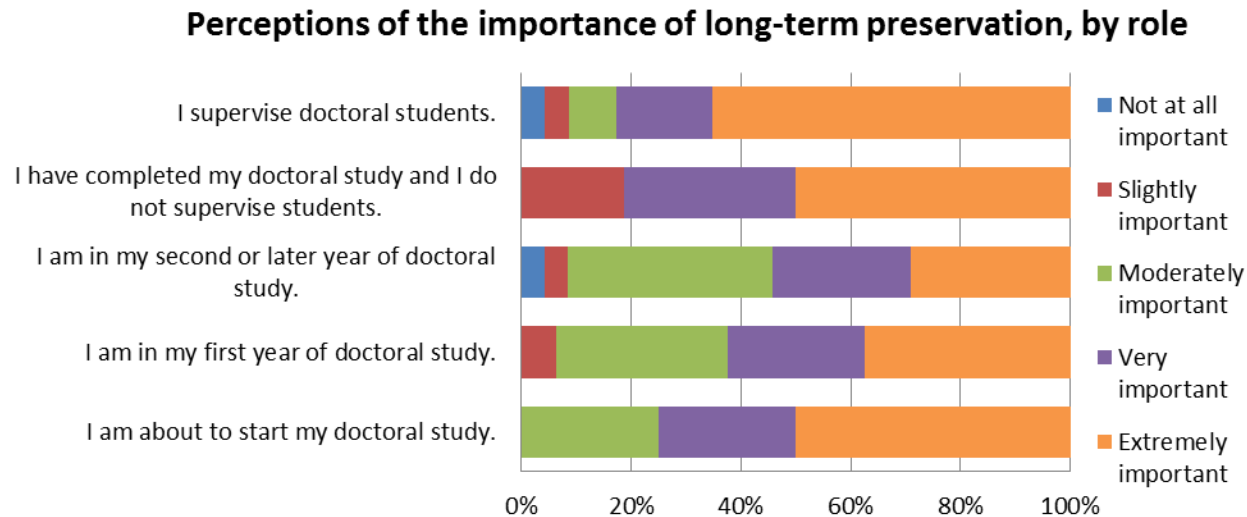
- 90% believe digital curation to be moderately to extremely important

Bad news!

Comparative perceptions of digital curation expertise, by role
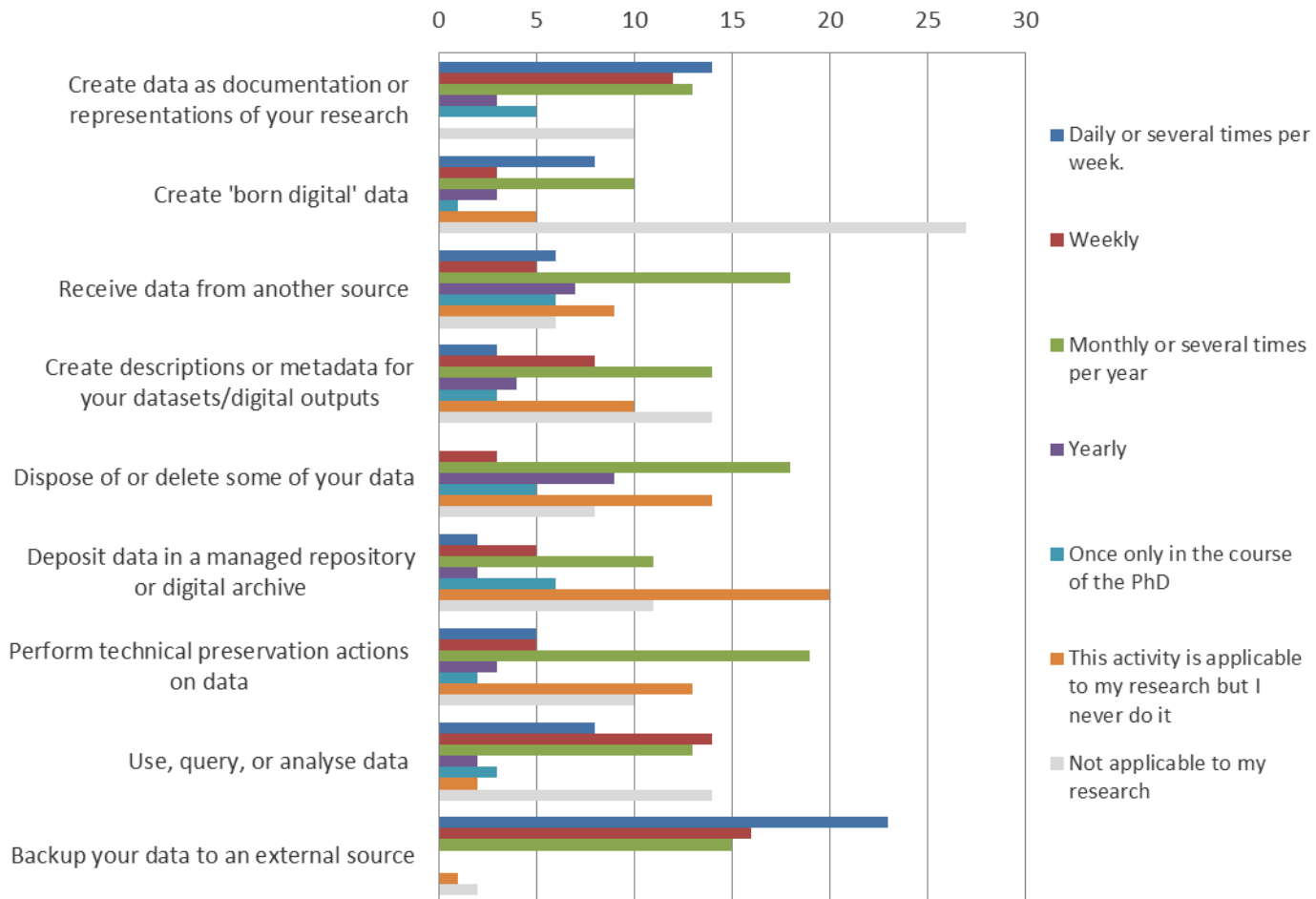

- 60% of PhD holders and 80% of students report **little or no** expertise
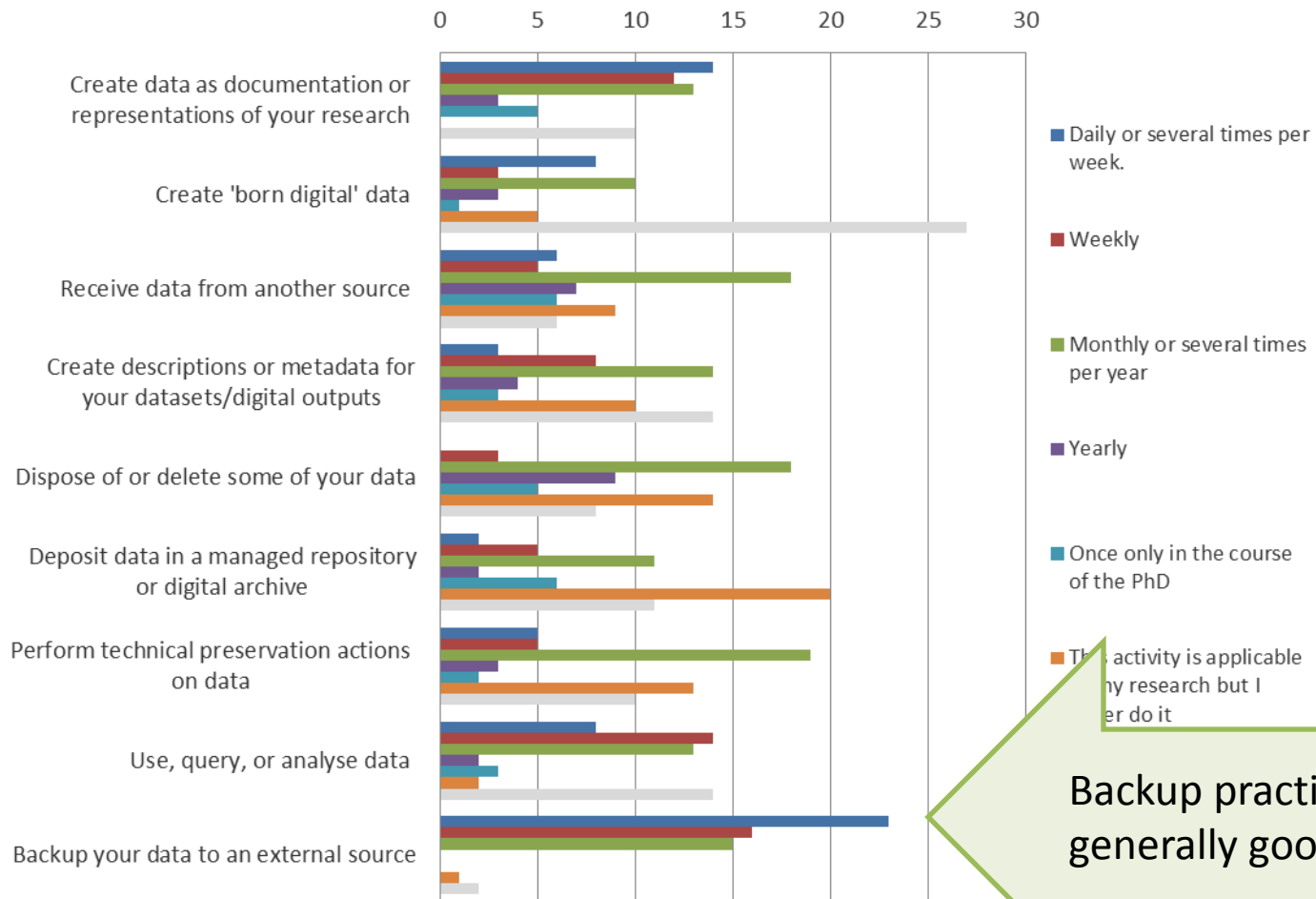- Overall, 74% know little or nothing about digital curation

Digital curation activity within PhDs

Type and frequency of digital curation activities for doctoral students
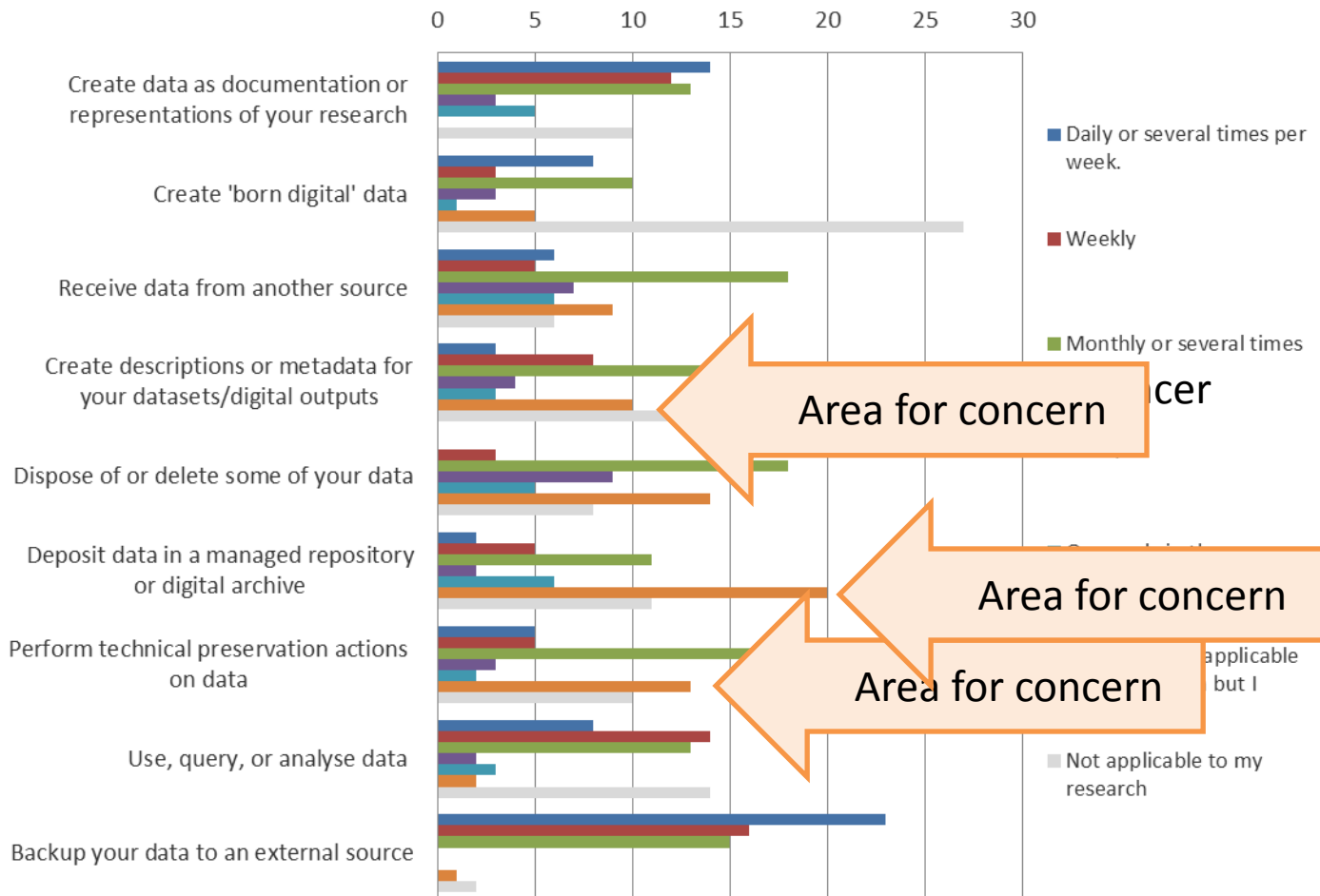
Digital curation activity within PhDs

Type and frequency of digital curation activities for doctoral students

Backup practice generally good

Digital curation activity within PhDs

Type and frequency of digital curation activities for doctoral students

Summary of digital curation activity

- Despite low levels of expertise, students are engaging in digital curation activities (at various points on curation lifecycle)

- Respondents show awareness that some tasks are necessary but are not doing them

- Respondents may be undertaking some tasks without the necessary skills, with implications for
  - Data quality
  - Student effort
  - Chance of completion of PhD

Perceptions of responsibility

My prediction?

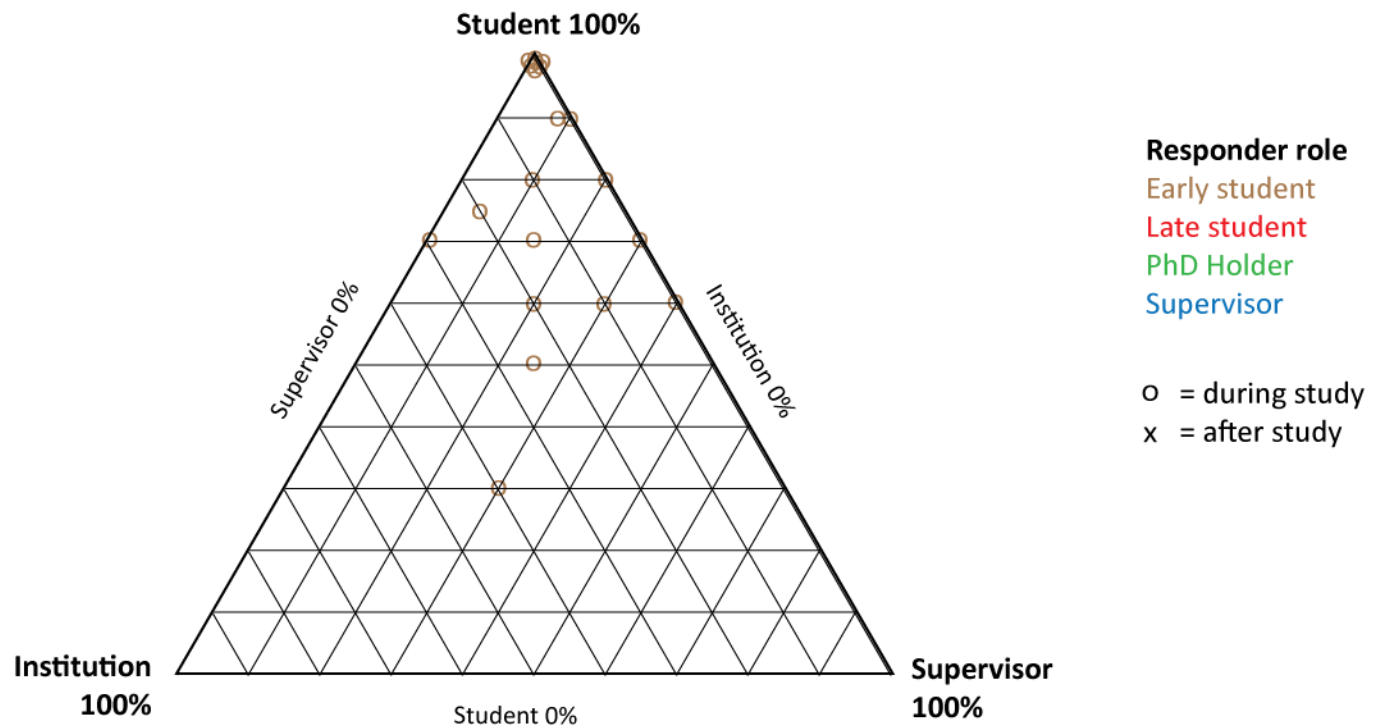# Perceptions of responsibility

My prediction?

"It's someone else's job"
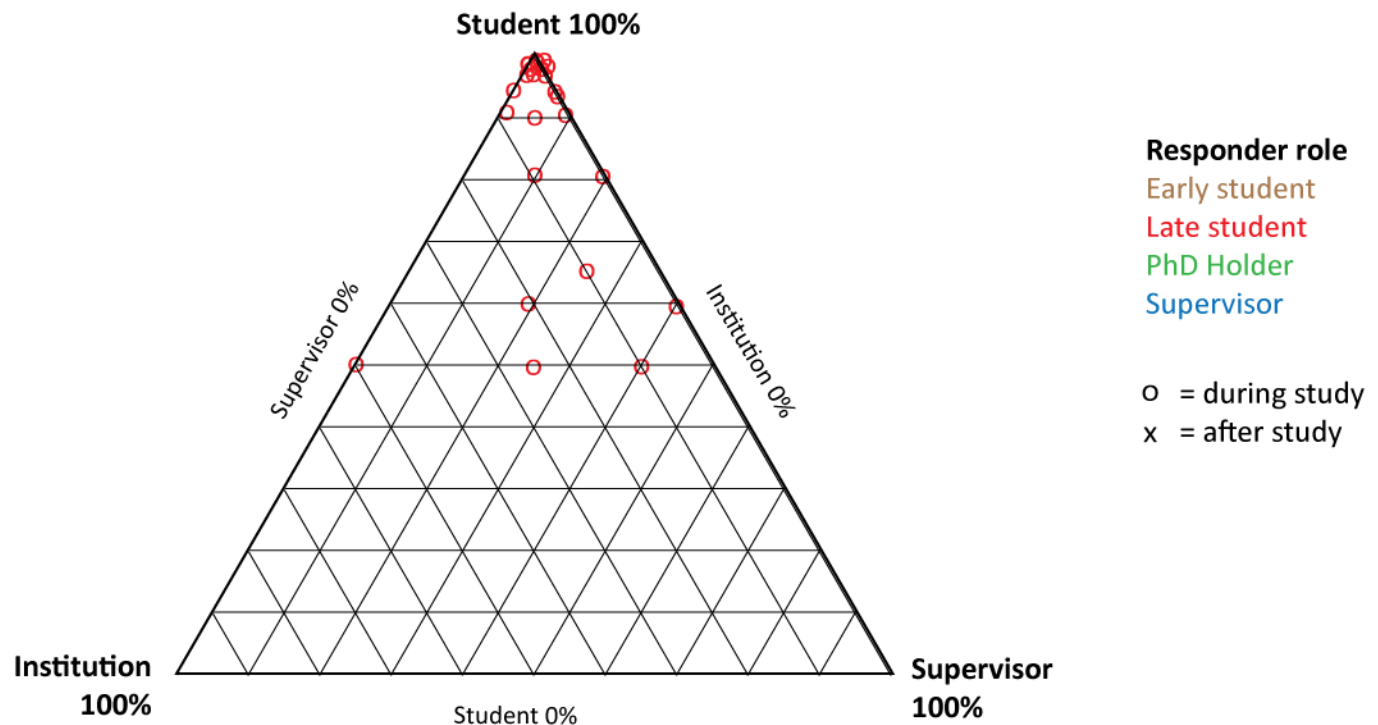
Perceptions of responsibility
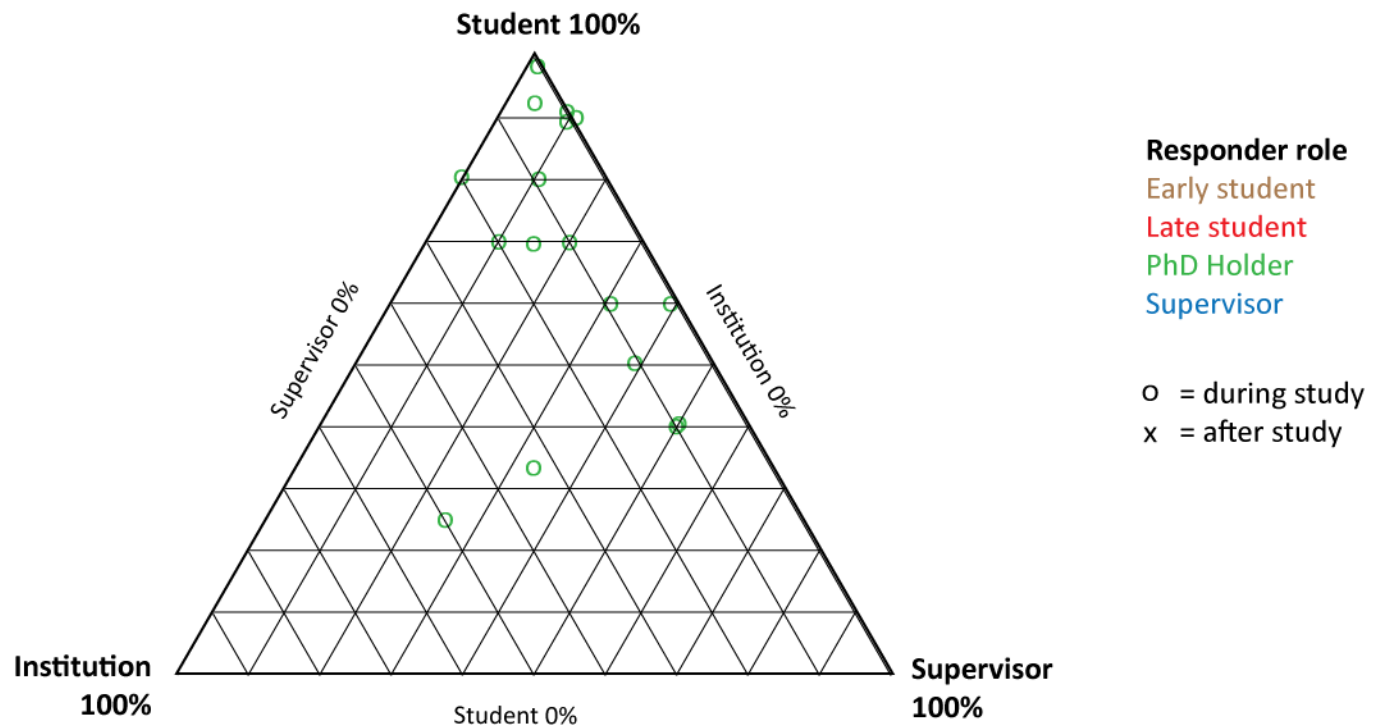
The reality:

Individual responses showing division of responsibility during doctoral study

Perceptions of responsibility

The reality:

Individual responses showing division of responsibility during doctoral study

Responder role
Early student
Late student
PhD Holder
Supervisor

o = during study
x = after study

Perceptions of responsibility

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Perceptions of responsibility

The reality:

- tight cluster (A) shows that c.75% believe curation responsibility lies almost entirely with the student
- Remainder mostly within cluster B
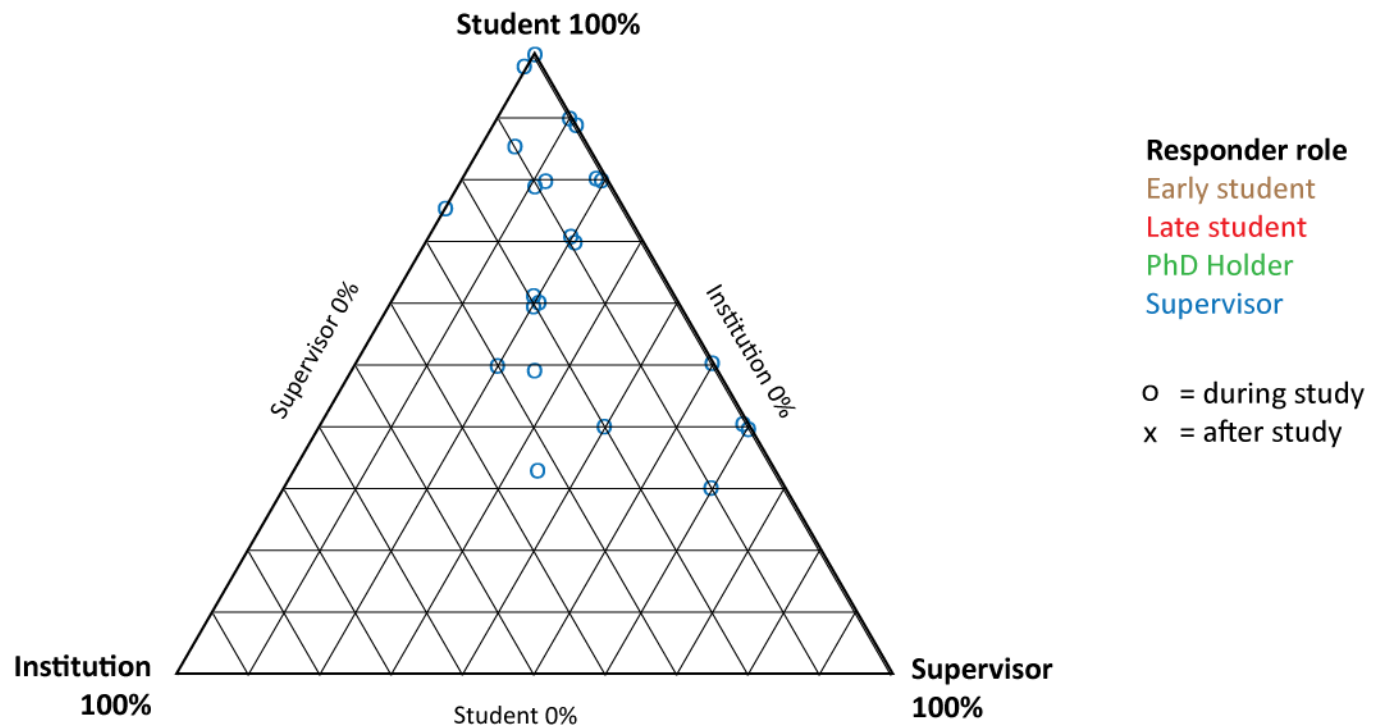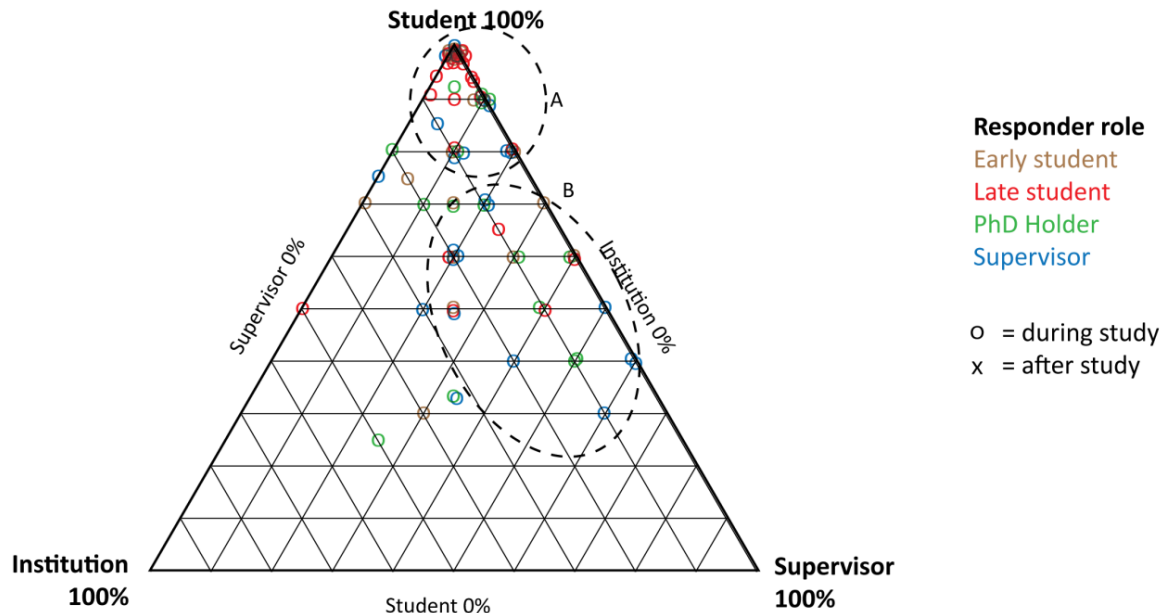- Most student responses fall into cluster A

Individual responses showing division of responsibility during doctoral study

Perceptions of responsibility

The reality:

Individual responses showing division of responsibility after doctoral study

Responder role
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Late student
PhD Holder
Supervisor
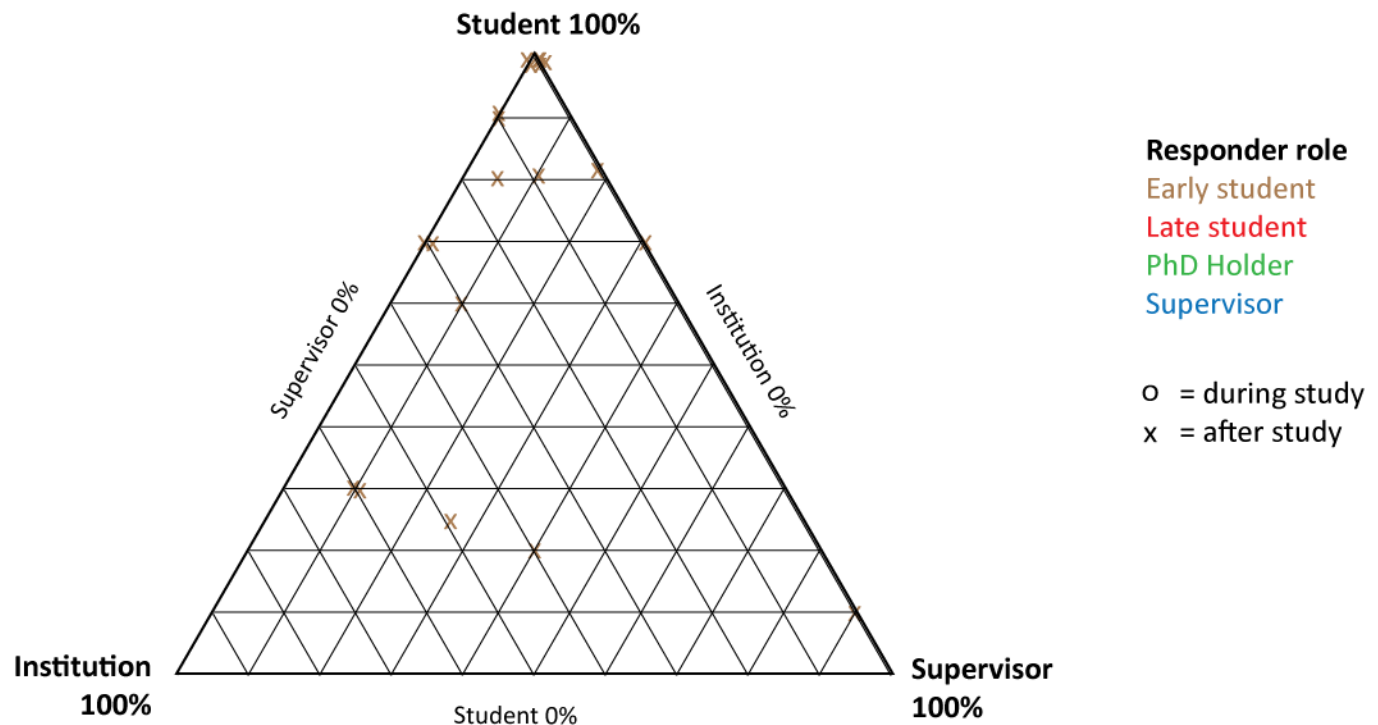
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x = after study
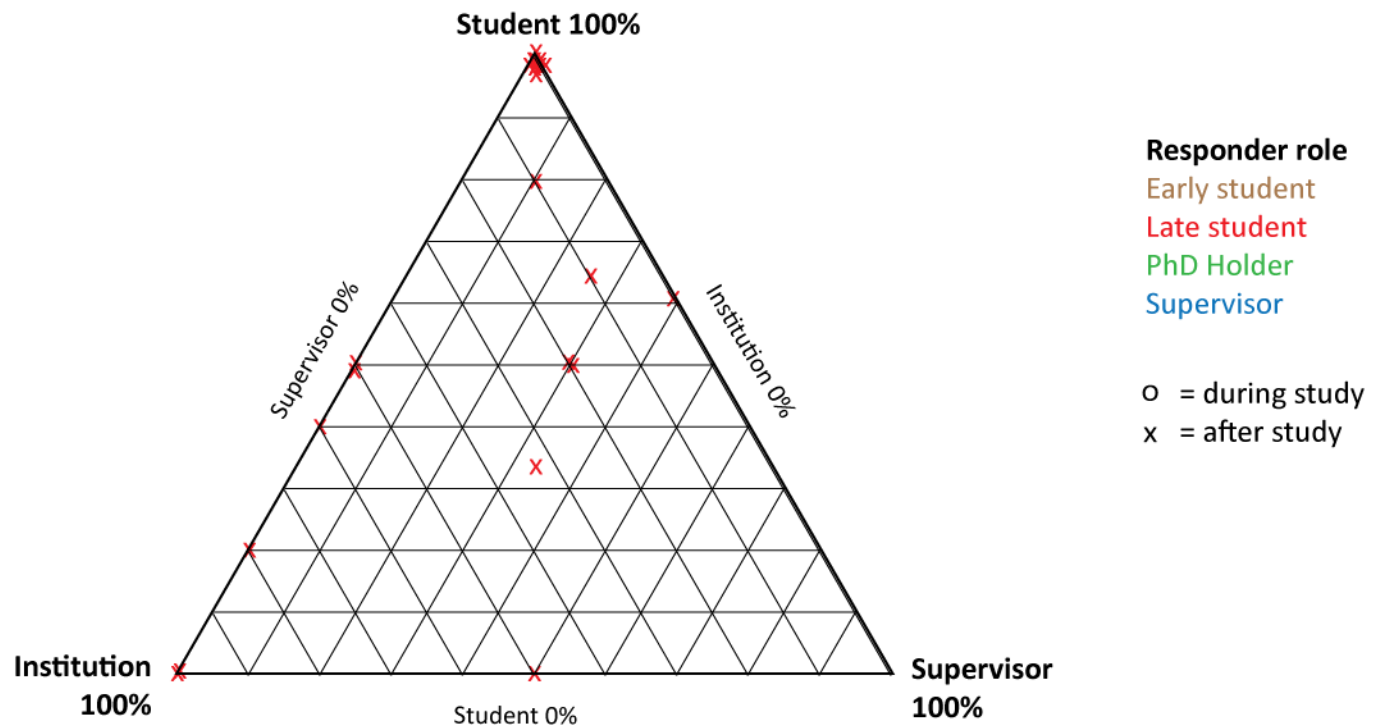
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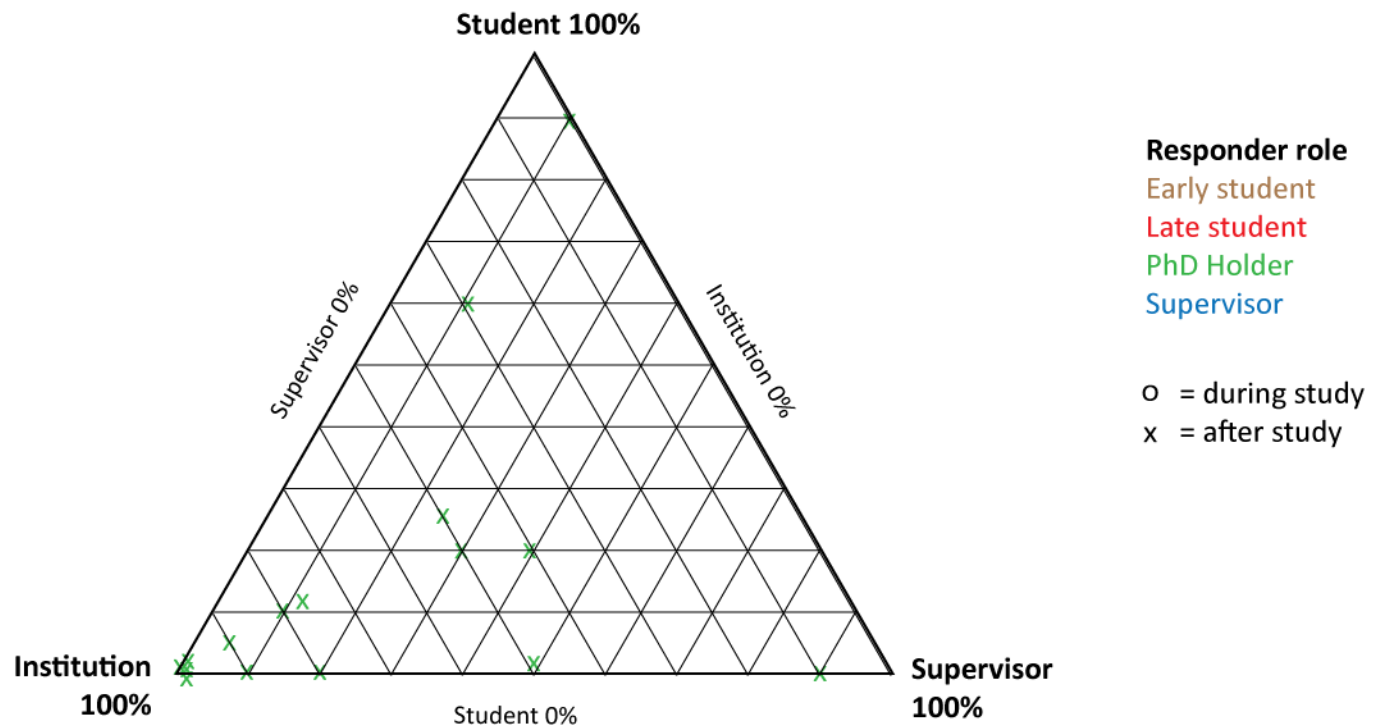
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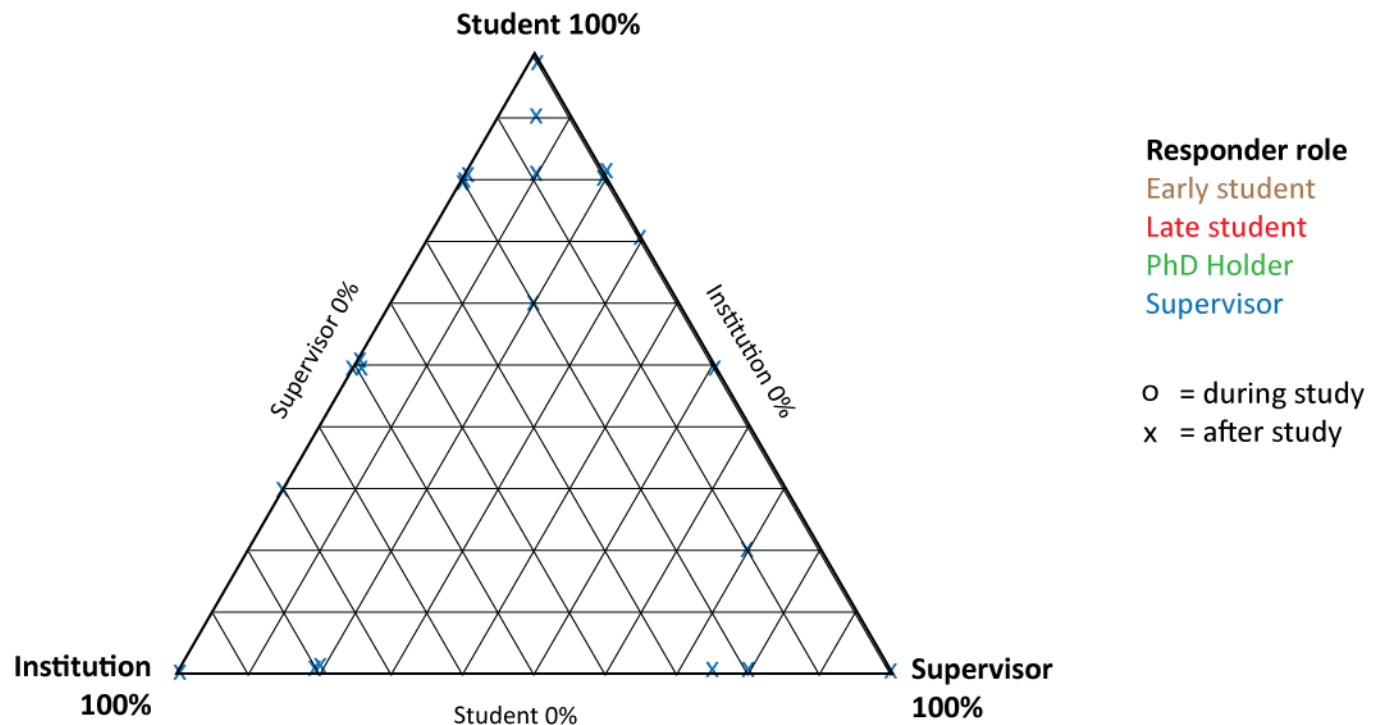PhD Holder
Supervisor

o = during study
x = after study

Perceptions of responsibility

The reality:
- Much wider spread of responses
- Tight cluster (D) shows that c.60% believe curation responsibility **remains** almost entirely with the student
- Tight cluster (C) shows alternate viewpoint (c.30% of respondents) giving institution most responsibility

Individual responses showing division of responsibility after doctoral study

Responder role
Early student
Late student
PhD Holder
Supervisor
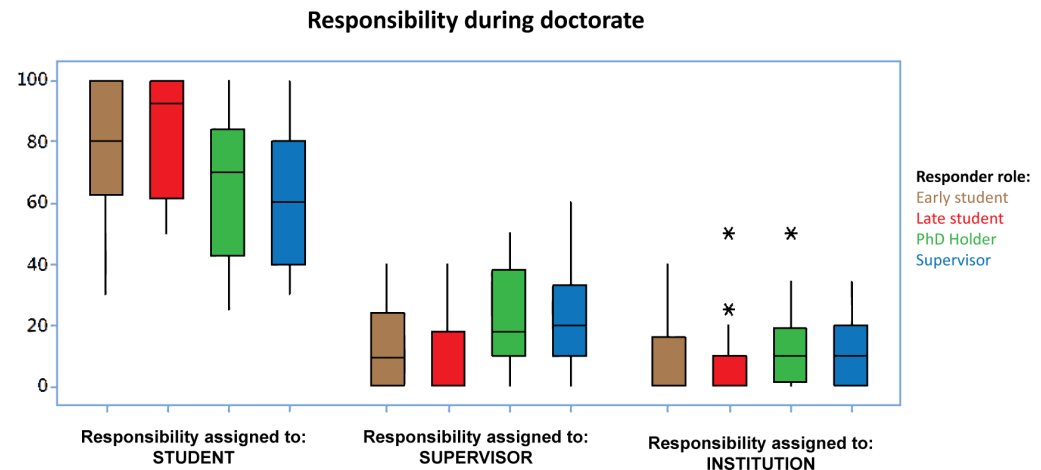
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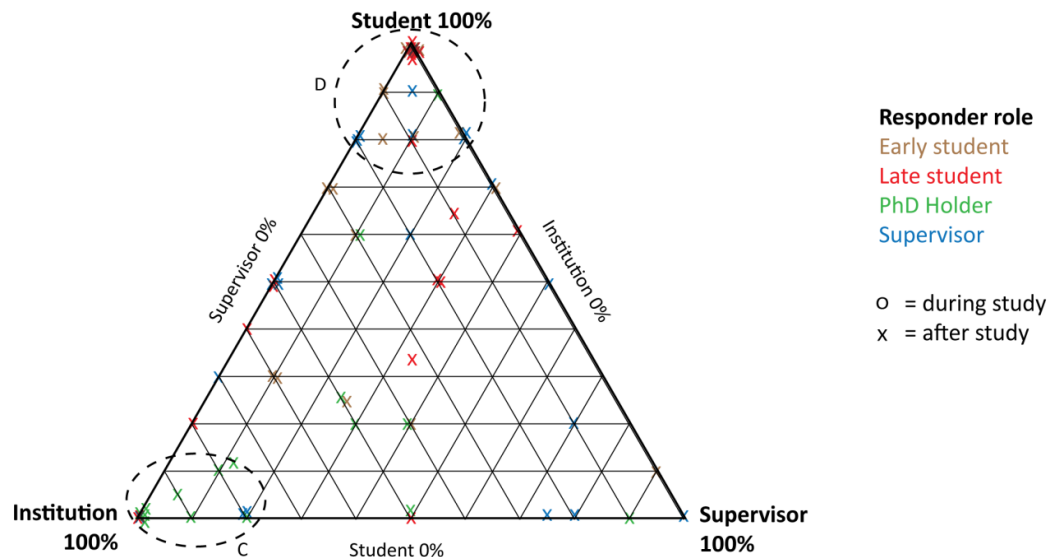
Perceptions of responsibility

The reality:

During the doctorate

- Students assign >80% responsibility to themselves
- Supervisors assign more of the responsibility to themselves than students do
- Institutions considered to have a very low responsibility by all

Responsibility during doctorate

Responder role:
Early student
Late student
PhD Holder
Supervisor

Responsibility assigned to: STUDENT

Responsibility assigned to: SUPERVISOR

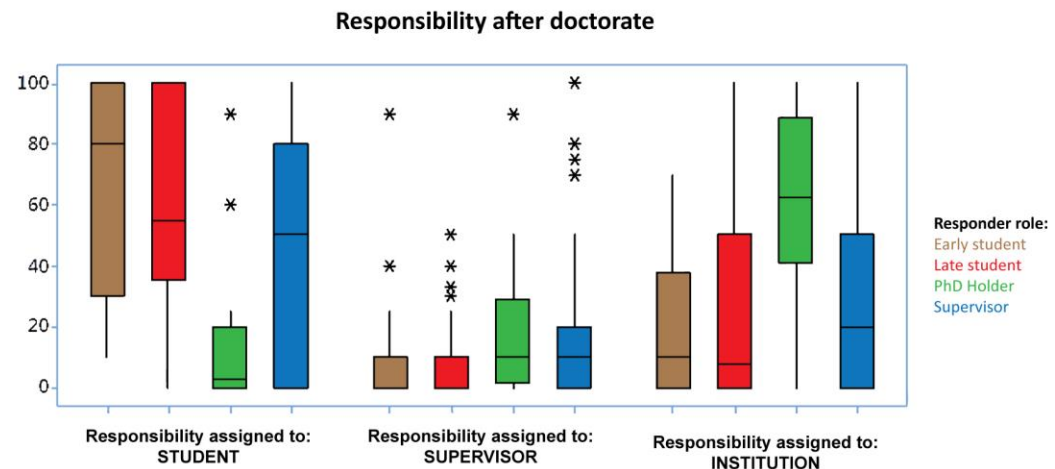Responsibility assigned to: INSTITUTION

Perceptions of responsibility

The reality:

After the doctorate

- Much wider spread of responses
- Responsibility generally thought to remain with the student
- Supervisors' role diminishes
- Role for institution in one clear respondent group

Responsibility after doctorate
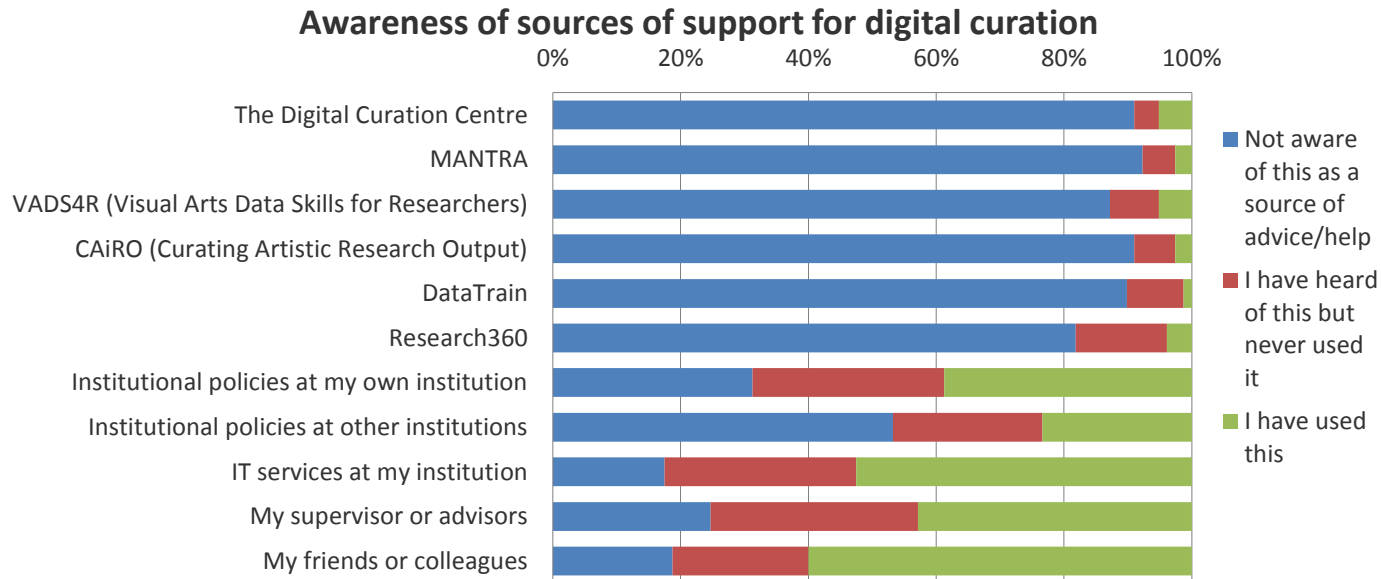
Responsibility assigned to: STUDENT
Responsibility assigned to: SUPERVISOR
Responsibility assigned to: INSTITUTION

Responder role:
Early student
Late student
PhD Holder
Supervisor

Perceptions of responsibility

The reality:

"It's my job"

Awareness and use of digital curation support

Awareness of sources of support for digital curation

- Low general awareness and use of **external** sources
- Much higher awareness and use of local sources
- Awareness and use correlates with 'distance' from student/supervisor
- Backup is an embedded service

Summary

BOTH students and supervisors think:
- Digital curation is important
- It's my job
- BUT I don't know how to do it

- Understanding of the digital curation lifecycle and risks to PhD completion likely to improve engagement
- Using sources of support likely to reduce pressure on individuals (but evidence to suggest bottom-up approach might work better than top-down due to 'nearness')
- Supervisors are an excellent liaison to doctoral students – but they need more support for digital curation
- Can we learn from activities that are already embedded?