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Unblocking Occluded Genres in Graduate Writing: Thesis and Dissertation Support Services at North Carolina State University



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Abstract: In 2013, the Graduate School at North Carolina State University launched Thesis and Dissertation Support Services, a rhetorical, genre-based approach to assisting students with their graduate writing. Through a description of the program's founding, goals, and first year of services, we summarize this genre-based approach that is informed by the work of Carolyn Miller, John Swales, Charles Bazerman, and Michael Carter. The goal of the program is to offer services to students writing theses and dissertations that will improve the quality of the work, increase degree completion rates, reduce time to degree, and, above all, develop life-long scholarly writers who are prepared to undertake the writing necessary to be successful in their careers. The theoretical concept of genre system provided a conceptual basis for achieving these connected goals, and each of the workshops, seminars, or other events that we host focuses on a single genre, a genre system, or subgenres related to graduate education. This profile describes our approach to the services through a description of our institutional context, core offerings, and a summary of reflections and lessons learned after a year of offering these services, concluding with recommendations for other writing program professionals who may want to establish similar support for graduate students and a summary of changes to our program after one year.

Introduction

The scholarly experiences of many graduate students are linked by one of two common genres: the thesis or dissertation. These are challenging genres for graduate students because they are subject to disciplinary, institutional, and departmental variations; furthermore, they are not genres students have written before, and thus they cannot draw on prior knowledge of those genres. The challenging nature of these genres is often multiplied by faculty members who, despite having written a dissertation, find themselves unable to instruct students in these genres. As Charles Bazerman explains, faculty members do not have the appropriate linguistic or rhetorical knowledge to undertake such instruction (*Writing and Cognitive Development*, 46). Thus, the writing support that graduate students receive can vary widely across a university. On a national level, graduate writing support, and more specifically writing support for theses and dissertations, takes on different forms—and in some places, does not exist at all. A previous *Composition Forum* issue featured the Graduate Writing Program at the University of Kansas, which offers courses for graduate students along with a few workshops (Sundstrom). A similar course-based initiative exists at the University of Utah. The University of Michigan is well known for its eight week-long Dissertation Writing Institute, offered through the Sweetland Writing Center. Many other institutions offer dissertation “bootcamps” that last a few days to one week. Despite these widely varied approaches to supporting graduate student writing, all rely implicitly or explicitly on genre knowledge of the thesis or dissertation, which suggests a foundation for an emerging model of genre-based services for thesis and dissertation students.

In this profile, we describe the development of a new office at North Carolina State University, Thesis and Dissertation Support Services (TDSS). In our work, we endeavor to provide students with an understanding of both the formal and informal genres of graduate study, thus emphasizing the larger genre system of graduate education at our institution. In what follows, we describe the first year of the services, our preliminary conclusions about their

reception on campus, and suggestions for other university and colleges seeking to address similar concerns as we have in developing such an office.

Institutional Context

TDSS is located in the Graduate School at NC State, a public, land-grant institution located in Raleigh, North Carolina, with extension centers all over the state. Classified as a university with very high research activity, we have more than 34,000 students and 8,000 faculty and staff. The Graduate School oversees 105 master's and 62 doctoral programs and nearly 9,000 graduate students from application through graduation.

TDSS was developed in the context of NC State's institutional strategic planning from 2011, which included an enrollment plan to increase substantially the number of graduate students in proportion to undergraduates and the proportion of doctoral students to master's students. As a complement to this increase in enrollment of Ph.D. students, NC State also established the goals of increasing completion rates and decreasing time to degree of those students. To aid in achieving these goals, the Graduate School was given continuing funding by the Provost to run a Dissertation Completion Grant Program that selects doctoral students engaged in promising research but whose difficulty finishing their dissertations made it unlikely that they would complete their degrees. Eight students are awarded a stipend for six months in order to focus only on writing their dissertations. For support, the students work closely with a writing coach both individually and in small groups, and they also participate in a support group that is run by our Counseling Center.

We found in working with these students that though some of them were stymied by personal problems with writing, all of them benefited greatly from instruction and textual guidance in the rhetorical constructs of the subgenres of the dissertation. For example, we use John Swales' research for a workshop on introductions, which has the effect of demystifying that subgenre and giving the students the confidence they badly need to write viable introductions (*Genre Analysis*). The success of our ongoing Dissertation Completion Grant Program inspired administrators in our Graduate School to seek a way to offer similar benefits to all students writing dissertations and theses at NC State. What we learned had convinced us not only of the effectiveness of a genre approach but also of the need to expand our focus beyond the genres of the thesis and dissertation to include the broader writing and speaking acts that define the experience of being a graduate student researcher.

Being situated in the Graduate School has provided advantages for TDSS. Because the Graduate School is the administrative unit responsible for all graduate education and graduate students, it lends its authority and credibility to TDSS in its work with those students. If it were located in another unit, such as the Department of English, our campus Tutorial Center, or a particular college, the dynamic would be different, perhaps not carrying the same weight among students and faculty. TDSS has also benefited from the enormous success of Preparing Future Leaders (PFL), a professional development program in the Graduate School that began offering a wide range of workshops and other activities several years before the inauguration of TDSS, whose director works closely with PFL staff. This relationship has enabled the director to take full advantage of a pre-existing logistical structure and the good will that the PFL program has generated among both our students and faculty. One challenge with being located in the Graduate School, however, is that the director is not readily apparent to academic departments on campus because the office location is separated from them physically. We think that a more immediate presence "on the ground" would lend to greater visibility, but this is not an insurmountable obstacle for TDSS.

Administrative Structure

TDSS has a relatively simple administrative structure. There is just one employee, the Director and main author of this profile, who has a PhD in rhetorical studies and writing in the disciplines with a research focus on the sciences and engineering. The director has full responsibility for all of the office tasks, including developing the plan for the office; determining, creating, and teaching the workshop and seminar offerings; planning and executing larger events like Dissertation Institutes; publicizing the office and events; building relationships with faculty and departments; collaborating with other appropriate groups on campus; writing and administering awarded grants to support project development; and responding to student queries. This position is a non-tenure track administrative role, or what is increasingly being known as an "alt-ac" position within the university. The director may also consult on planned initiatives with the associate dean of the Graduate School, the secondary author of this profile, who has a similar scholarly background and expertise in graduate student writing. The associate dean continues to run the previously mentioned Dissertation Completion Grant Program and was responsible for the successful proposal of this new office to the Provost.

Theoretical Context: Genre

We noted above that we have taken a genre-based approach to working with students in our Dissertation Completion Grant and applied a broadened version of that approach to TDSS. Genre theory, specifically what is called North American or rhetorical genre theory, provided a foundation for conceptualizing TDSS and a structure for building a set of practices. We began, as so many others have, with Miller's *Genre as Social Action*, an understanding of genre as typified responses to often-repeated social situations. In *Rhetorical Community: The Cultural Basis of Genre*, Miller examines the broader connection between particular social actions and culture. She describes genre as located between micro- and macro-levels of analysis, that is, between the individual response to a situation and the culture that both defines and is defined by the relationship between the response and the situation. Genre, then, provides a way of analyzing both the individual response and culture, i.e., "systems of value and signification" (70) comprised of networks of situations and responses. As an illustration, Miller points out that the forensic rhetoric of ancient Greece could be understood as a set of genres consisting of various related judicial genres.

The idea of interrelated genres as a unit of analysis has been described by Bazerman as a system of genres, in this case the pattern of typified responses to repeatable situations to accomplish a broader social action in a patent office (*Systems of Genres*). David Russell incorporates activity theory to show how an associated collection of individual genres can be "used to operationalize the same recurring, typified actions of an activity system" (518). And Carter uses the term *metagenres* to indicate groups of individual genres related to each other as similar kinds of responses to similar social situations. Each of these concepts—set of genres, system of genres, activity system, and metagenre—points to a way of understanding certain interrelated genres as comprising and contributing to a broader social function.

Genre systems provide a framework for a productive understanding of dissertations. A student writing a dissertation is performing an individual act undertaken, as Miller puts it, at a micro-level (*Rhetorical Community*). We can conceive of and analyze that act intermediately as an instance of the genre of the dissertation, or what it has in common as a social act with other dissertations. We can also use genre to conceive of and analyze the broader system of genres that the dissertation stands for. For example, a proposal or prospectus is a related genre that may be required in advance of writing a dissertation. At the other end chronologically of the system of genres is the final oral defense. We argue that envisioning the dissertation in terms of a genre system can expose genres that may be otherwise overlooked. For example, one such overlooked element is that of forming an advisory committee, which could be understood as a genre system in itself consisting of multiple oral and written social acts. Looked at this way, the dissertation is a genre but it is also a marker for a system of interconnected genres. As we describe below, we have designed TDSS according to this system of genres.

Another concept related to genre that plays a key role in TDSS is Swales' occluded genres, that is, genres that are "out of sight" (*Genre Analysis* 18; literally a blocked opening or passage) for people who must communicate effectively in an unfamiliar field. This concept is important because most students are encountering the genre system of the dissertation for the first time and are often simply expected to master its various genres with little or no explicit instruction. They often do not understand how the responses to the rhetorical situations they face are typified. The passage to writing is blocked because the opening, the genre, is out of sight. The proposal, mentioned above, is an example of what is sometimes an occluded genre. Students are frequently asked to write a proposal with no guidance of what is expected and therefore struggle to work it out on their own. They may be able to find clues to the genre in a proposal written by another student. But even that may not enable the student to meet the implicit, but unspoken, genre expectations of the committee members. Other occluded genres would seem to us to be very much in sight. The dissertation subgenre of the introduction is an example. Students have read many introductions as they review literature in their fields, but when it comes to writing an introduction, the way is blocked because the rhetorical structure common to introductions remains out of sight. As Goethe said, "We only see what we know." Students become frustrated because that structure is typically also out of sight for their advisors, who understand it implicitly and thus are not able to explain it to their students. Finally, following Loudermilk's research on another graduate-level genre, the MBA thought essay, we also recognize that there are various degrees of occlusion for the genres our students must engage with in completing their degrees. For instance, though there may be many examples of dissertations within their field available to students, it is important to recognize that the dissertation is still an occluded genre because each project is negotiated between the student and committee, giving it distinct qualities while still fitting with the typified rhetorical situation of a dissertation. A student's dissertation is defined as he or she works on it, making it perhaps the most occluded of all the genres encountered in graduate school.

Thus, one of the guiding principles of TDSS is to make the genres of the dissertation visible to students. That means, as Barbara Lovitts advocates, "making the implicit explicit" (12), helping students understand what is

generic about a rhetorical situation and what is typified about the response to it. Overall, our approach to these genre-based services follows Amy Devitt's recommendation for a combination of three pedagogical approaches: teaching specific genres explicitly, teaching antecedent genres, and teaching critical genre awareness (342).

TDSS Program Goals and Description

As mentioned above, TDSS is linked to the broader aims of the university to increase doctoral completion rates and reduce time to degree. These are worthwhile institutional aims, but from our perspective they are incidental to the goals of TDSS. The near-term goals are to improve the quality of students' work and to provide support and guidance to students at a time when many of them may feel isolated as they try to determine how to write their dissertations. We believe that achieving these qualitative goals could have the effect of meeting the university's quantitative aims. The first of our two longer-term goals is to develop life-long scholarly writers who are prepared to undertake the writing necessary to be successful in their careers, whether they will work in academia, industry, government, or other areas of employment. The second is to improve the quality of mentoring of writers of theses and dissertations by the next generation of scholars in the academy. Our expectation is that students who have developed an awareness of the genres of the dissertation and applied that explicit awareness consciously to their dissertations will be better able to guide their own graduate students.

The theoretical concept of genre systems provided a conceptual basis for achieving these connected goals. Our initial challenge was to identify the various genres that comprise the genre system of the thesis and dissertation. Following Bazerman's approach, we decided to conceive of these genres in a generally chronological order. We believed that this approach would not only provide a means for us to structure our process of identifying genres but also give students a pattern they could easily apply to their own experience. The Timeline for Doctoral Student Success (see Figure 1) shows the results of this approach, identifying for students the resources available from the beginning of their graduate careers to their dissertation defenses. We have charted for them major milestones in their doctoral careers and helped them see how to be the "CEO" of their own degrees and dissertations. The timeline has resources broken down into three categories: TDSS events, student actions, and other on-campus resources students can use. Overall, the timeline highlights the idea that students can successfully complete their dissertations by being proactive and seeking out resources from their first semester at NC State along with support our office provides them throughout the entire scholarly process.

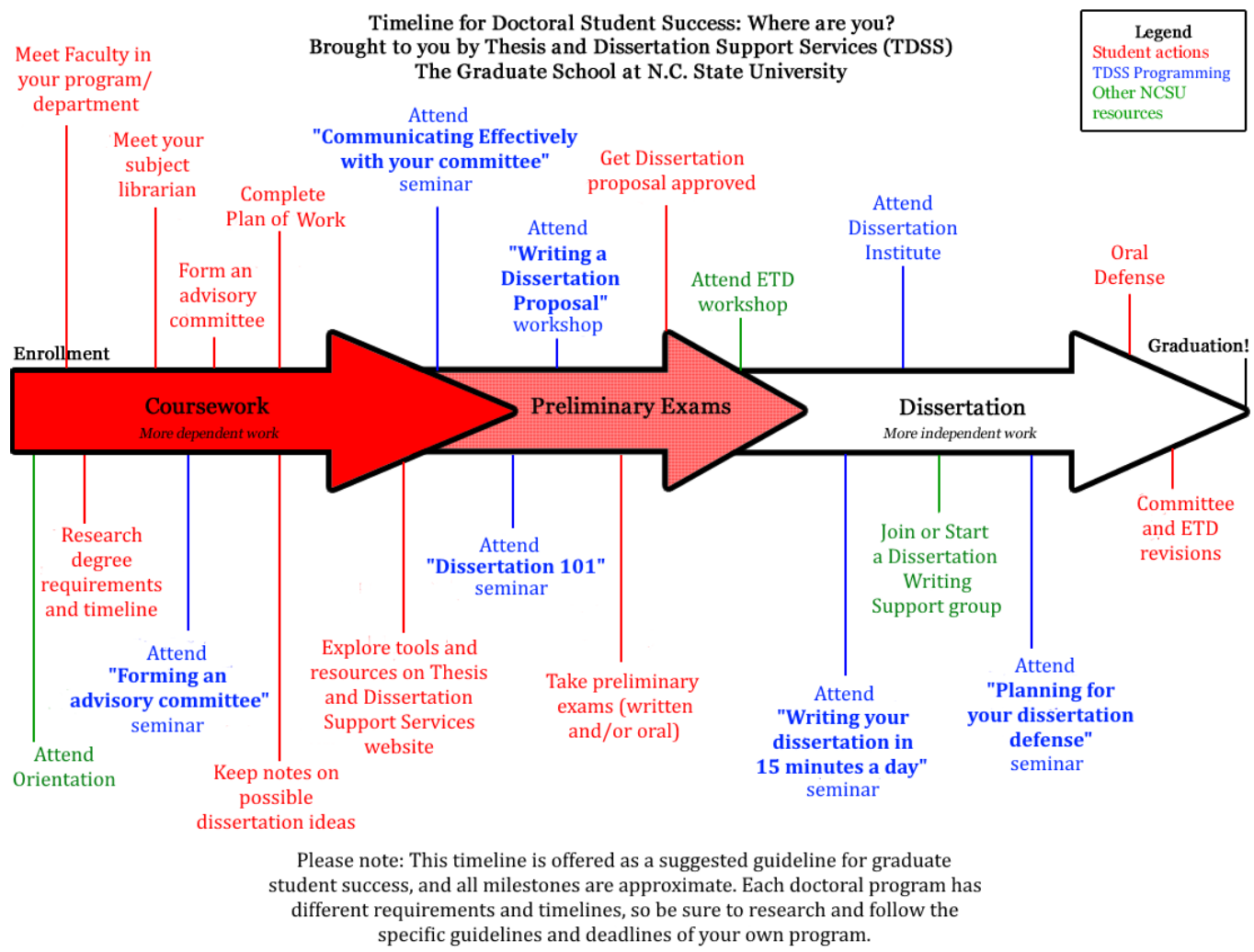


Figure 1. The TDSS “Timeline for Doctoral Student Success” that we developed to help students visualize our genre-based services.

Workshops and Seminars

Our seminars and workshops take the approach of focusing on a single genre, a genre system, or subgenres within the larger genre system of the thesis or dissertation (see Table 1 for a sample listing of workshops and the genres or genre systems that are featured in them). These one- to two-hour events provide instruction and guidance, hands-on workshopping time, and opportunities for students to ask questions. Students are encouraged to take the workshops in the general chronological order that we have set out in our timeline, though of course this does not always happen. Events for students in their first and second years include “Writing in Graduate School,” “Forming an Advisory Committee,” and “Communicating with Your Advisory Committee.” Students further in their programs would attend “Dissertation 101” and then “Writing Your Dissertation Proposal,” and, once they become doctoral candidates, “Writing Your Dissertation in 15 Minutes a Day” and “Planning for Your Dissertation Defense.” In these events, we focus on genre features, learning to identify writing practices within their disciplines, and application of these concepts to other genres related to graduate writing and research. We also spend time talking about expectations that their various audiences have for these genres. For example, in one section of “Dissertation 101,” we walk students through the exigence for a dissertation and what it means to make an original contribution, a standard requirement for dissertations.

Workshops and Seminars	Key Genres/Social Actions
Forming an Advisory Committee	Documents for potential committee members; request emails; committee meetings
Dissertation 101 or	Dissertation or thesis

Thesis 101	
Writing a Dissertation Proposal	Dissertation proposal; literature review; preliminary oral exam
Writing Your Dissertation in 15 Minutes a Day	Dissertation; writing task lists; committee feedback; revisions
Planning for Your Dissertation Defense	Dissertation defense, including candidate presentation, committee question and answer session, audience question and answer session, and revision requests

Table 1. List of selected sample workshops and seminars offered by TDSS and the corresponding genres focused on in each.

Furthermore, we have found that the genres we provide students support for can be broken down into a two key categories. The first includes social actions that have broadly recognized labels, such as the proposal, the literature review, the introduction, the dissertation defense, and the research article. Though the names of such genres are typically well known to graduate students, they are still “out of sight” for many of them, who would therefore benefit from workshops to illuminate these genres.

For example, one of our workshops is “Writing Research Article Introductions,” based on Swales’ “Create a Research Space” model (the research article dissertation is the most common type of dissertation written by our students at NC State). Students attend this workshop because scholarly introductions are difficult for most writers but particularly for apprentices in a field. Students’ faculty advisors know a good introduction when they read one but generally cannot instruct the students in how to write one and *why* an introduction is written as it is. Our event directly addresses the occlusion students face by describing the rhetorical situation for a published research article. We explain the goals of journal editors and reviewers who are looking for work that is both new and significant for a field. We then describe how it is necessary to explicitly address originality and significance in their own introductions so it is clear for editors and reviewers that the work meets these criteria. Incorporating Swales’ framework gives students a model to learn, to identify in previously published work, and to emulate in their own writing. Discussing the entire social act of the introduction turns this critical subgenre from a mystery to a manageable writing task that graduate students understand not only for their dissertations but also for other scholarly work they do in the future.

The second category of genres is social actions that are covert to most people, i.e., without the recognizable labels of overt genres. An example is the system of often-repeated social situations related to forming an advisory committee and the written and oral responses to those situations. The challenge with such genres goes beyond their being occluded; they are generally not recognized as genres at all. To address this particular set of situations, we offer the event “Forming an Advisory Committee,” which addresses the various covert genres that comprise this important action for both master’s and doctoral students, such as meetings with the chair of the committee and prospective advisors, conversations with a graduate program assistant and other students, forms to be filled out, and often the recognizable genre of the proposal abstract. These situations are repeated over and over in universities as students seek to constitute their committees, yet they are rarely addressed explicitly in terms of their various exigencies, audiences, and purposes. Students are typically not aware of what those situations entail nor of what their responses to those situations should be, though these responses could be critical to students’ success. At our “Forming an Advisory Committee” panel event, three experienced and respected graduate faculty members offer their ideas of how students should proceed in performing this social act and answer the many questions students bring to the seminar, an inductive approach to mastering this complex rhetorical situation incorporating both formal and informal genres.

A follow-up panel for another of these covert genres, “Communicating Effectively with Your Advisory Committee,” considers the variety of social actions involved in working with a committee to accomplish a thesis or dissertation. Again, experienced faculty members identify best practices and help to demystify how faculty members approach this type of working relationship. Students respond very positively to learning about the informal genres in this system, often expressing concern about seemingly minor details such as how often they could email their chair. We had not anticipated how keen students were to hear about best practices for selecting chairs and committee members or discover how frequently they might be able to meet with these people. Students also learn about oral composition and the important intellectual work of a dissertation that happens in advising meeting, where they negotiate content, argument, and other rhetorical concerns with their advisors and possibly other committee members. Overall, by listening to students in these events, we have seen how important the covert genres of the

thesis and dissertation are and how much confidence it gives students to make them overt.

Other Program Offerings and Initiatives

Beyond workshops and seminars, TDSS is engaged in some longer-term and more departmentally embedded initiatives. We recognize the importance of sustained support for student writing. The first of these is our Dissertation Institute, which is a week-long “bootcamp” for doctoral candidates. The goal of this week is to provide students with a supportive writing environment that connects them with fellow dissertation writers, giving them tools to make progress and motivation to continue working on their projects following this week. Sessions include extended blocks of writing time, group goal-setting, one-on-one time with writing consultants, and short instructional sessions on topics like “finding your scholarly voice” and NC State’s Electronic Thesis and Dissertation (ETD) system. Following a model used at other institutions such as Stanford, Georgetown, and Boston College, students must submit an application that includes motivational deposits to hold their seats.

Our second concept for moving beyond workshops and seminars was to launch “Thesis and Dissertation Writing Days” in the spring semester of the first year. These three- to four-hour writing periods were held nearly every Friday afternoon in a computer lab in our main university library. The idea was for students to have a quiet location to work on their theses or dissertations, giving them a change of scenery and a place to connect with other graduate students in the same situation. One of us staffed these hours as a writing consultant. As this was the first time NC State had hosted events like this, these days were moderately well-attended. The majority of students who came were doctoral candidates. While most came seeking to work with the consultant on various issues, almost like a Writing Center appointment, a few students sought formatting advice for our ETD system. This latter request represents one challenge we have had this year: differentiating ourselves from the ETD office, which is also located in the Graduate School. Many students thought that we could also help them with formatting issues, even editing their documents for them, which is not the case. Like Writing Centers, our office has had to work on reframing perceptions of graduate writing assistance.

The third initiative is joining forces with the English department to teach a graduate writing course. Beginning in the Fall 2014 semester, the director teaches the department’s graduate-level course on empirical research writing, a course that is open to students across the university. This represents the first formal relationship the office has with a course-granting department on campus. Historically, this course was typically offered once each fall semester by the English department as a service to the campus, but staffing could be a challenge with the myriad of faculty responsibilities. The course covers a variety of scientific research genres, such as the grant proposal, literature review, scholarly research article, and research poster from a rhetorical genre approach. We engage with examples from their fields, talk about genre features, discuss expectations, and encourage understanding of the whole context for the text. Other course meetings are writing workshops in which students work in small groups to peer review one another’s work and talk about their writing.

Finally, one of our goals is to help embed TDSS within our various graduate programs to both increase student exposure and to be able to offer more discipline-specific assistance to students. Some faculty members saw value in this and invited the director to give presentations in their professional development seminars or other related colloquia. In our next year, we intend to explore better integration into courses where appropriate. We are also seeking ways to develop specially designed events, such as dissertation bootcamps, for individual doctoral programs or disciplines on campus. A few faculty members have approached us with this idea, and we would like to pursue it as a possible source of income for the office, charging programs a modest fee for the services. At NC State, there are programs with budgets that could accommodate this approach, such as within our College of Engineering. Overall, pursuing integration into departments would provide us with the ability to reach students in an environment in which they are comfortable with their fellow students and also introduce faculty to this new office on campus.

Program Constraints and Potential Solutions

It will come as no surprise to readers of this journal that a significant constraint for TDSS is its budget. For its first year, the office had no budget at all. Handouts for workshops were printed using the larger Graduate School’s supplies budget, and a small amount of funding for the Dissertation Institute came from donations from NC State’s University Graduate Student Association and the Graduate School’s professional development program. The most significant part of this constraint for building the program is the ongoing uncertainty about long-term support for the office. As a state-supported institution in a state with recent significant cuts to the higher education budget, we do not know the financial landscape in the coming years, and this challenges our ability to grow TDSS in

meaningful ways for our constituents.

After building our core service model in the first year, it made sense to pursue the expansion of our services and the development of more opportunities to work with students. Many of our ideas required a budget of some sort, and having a continuing operating budget would help with the daily operations of the office. Ideally, a program like ours would have additional staff, specifically writing consultants who could assist with running genre-based workshops and seminars. Fortunately, we were able to obtain a small amount of funding. As we entered our second year of operation, the Graduate School hired a new dean. She approved a small amount of funding to run two Dissertation Institutes per year, funding that is used to hire one writing consultant to work closely with the students. Additionally, the director was provided a part-time graduate student assistant who works ten hours per week with the office. This student's primary responsibilities include handling the registration system for events, preparing handouts, publicizing the services, and assisting with other administrative tasks.

Though in our second year we have acquired a couple of important resources, we feel it is important to note that we were able to build a strong program without a budget and with only a single staff member in the first year. The workshops and seminars can be offered free to students by making any event slides or materials available online, and many of the other activities undertaken this year can be done at no cost. Most importantly, even without an operating budget, we have helped many students at our institution. Creating this type of programming can be both possible and effective with only the financial support for a staff member in addition to the director and no one else.

Given this situation, though, one of the limitations for the office is that its entire functioning depends on a single person, the director. This makes time an additional constraint on the development and growth of such an office. As mentioned above, the director's time is spent with the daily functions of the office, and there is very little time remaining in a week to undertake what we see as a key component to building our services: developing relationships with faculty, departments, and other offices on campus. While we can develop programming without financial support, it is critical to have the intellectual support of faculty and administrators at our university. These other members of our campus community will be important to our long-term success, and we must demonstrate for them the important niche we are filling for our graduate students. However, it takes time to build these relationships, and this has been an initial limitation to starting the program. We have identified this as an important use of the director's time, but such initiatives generally fall behind the daily activities of workshop development, administrative tasks, and responding to students.

Early Successes

Our earliest form of feedback for this new office came from the students' responses and interest in what we are doing. When we opened registration in August 2013 for the first-ever TDSS workshops and seminars, all of the events had a waiting list within the first couple of days. We had anticipated filling a need on campus; however, we had not anticipated the degree of excitement that students had. Throughout the year, event registrations generally filled to capacity, and our overall percentage of registrants was stronger than that of the very popular professional development programming also located in the Graduate School. Nearly a thousand students registered for our nineteen events, with an actual attendance rate of approximately 70%, fairly strong numbers for non-credit events offered to graduate populations. Additionally, some students attended multiple events throughout the year, demonstrating that they value the workshops and seminars that had been developed. At the end of each event, we asked students to fill out brief evaluation forms to help us assess what was offered and better understand our students' needs. On the whole, students commented on how useful it was to finally be told what kinds of expectations faculty have for graduate-level writing, the nearly-universal pattern for writing research article introductions, or what it means to make an original contribution in a dissertation. In our events, we demystified for students such key parts of their degree process, giving them language to understand what they were doing and empowering them to finish. Because our evaluation scores from students were high (averaging 4.75 out of 5 points possible), we elected to keep all of the events we had initially developed and focus on offering events regularly so that students could count on a workshop being available when the time was right for them. At the moment, we offer each workshop at least once per semester, with some of the more popular events—Writing Research Article Introductions and Writing Your Dissertation in 15 Minutes a Day—offered twice or more.

We want to acknowledge a recurring challenge in defining our program as a genre-based writing support service and not an editing service for our graduate students. It is clear that students appreciate the focus on the higher-order concerns with their writing, and indeed they are not getting this type of instruction anywhere else on campus; however, we do frequently receive requests for editing and grammar-based workshops as well as requests to edit students' theses and dissertations. We see this particularly from the large number of international students that attend NC State, students who have expressed their desire to write academically as a native English

speaker would. Writing scholars know the challenge of getting students to focus on the higher order issues in their writing. These students' concerns and requests are certainly valid, but in our case, we have made the choice not to incorporate editing or English as a foreign language instruction into our office identity. This choice is partially due to staffing constraints—it is not the expertise of either of us—and due to how we have defined the mission of the office. We have purposely chosen to work with students on their genre awareness, as we feel developing this skill serves students well not only in the writing of a thesis or dissertation but also in their professional lives as they write into other occluded genres or genres with which they have little experience.

Another early success for the office is the warm reception from our university's faculty. Their response has been less directly visible, but still encouraging. We emphasize that the work we are doing in TDSS is not meant to supersede students working closely with their committee members but to complement the expertise of faculty and provide guidance in an area where many faculty just don't have the rhetorical vocabulary to teach students. The Directors of Graduate Programs have supported our development by providing suggestions of the types of guidance they see their students needing, and one even commented, "I wish this type of support existed for faculty members!"

As we continue in our second year of operation, we are trying to work closely with faculty to meet the needs of their students. Our efforts have included increasing the number of specially designed sessions the director offers for individual courses at the request of faculty, made possible because some of the director's time has been freed up by the office's part-time graduate student worker. This increased outreach has allowed us to develop stronger relations with faculty across our colleges, establishing good will at our willingness to speak directly to their students and tailor genre-based content to their discipline. It is also an important form of advocacy for writing instruction, advocacy that will help us continue in our work as groups see the value and importance of our genre-based services.

What We Have Learned

It is our hope that sharing our program model and early development can be valuable for writing program administrators and other administrative professionals who may be seeking to develop their own graduate writing support or enhance the offerings they currently provide. Rhetorical genre theory has provided us a solid foundation upon which to build this important service for graduate students. TDSS is about instruction in the many occluded genres that our students face, genres that are essential to their success. We, as professionals with PhDs and genre expertise, have the insider genre knowledge they lack along with the rhetorical vocabulary to assist them. What we have wondered this year is this: Why do these genres have to be occluded for students? There is no good reason for keeping expectations hidden from them, yet this culture persists (Lovitts). It is more beneficial for all parties involved in graduate education for discussions of theses, dissertations, and the related genre systems to be openly taught, discussed, and given support for. It is better to actively assist them in acquiring genre knowledge, knowledge that is critical to their participation in their disciplinary communities (Miller, Rhetorical Community). Furthermore, at our institution, TDSS fills an obvious gap in students' professional preparation. Very few graduate programs include writing courses for their students. Some of the few that do offer them as occasional special topics courses and place the primary focus on grant writing in their disciplines. While grant writing is important for many of the departments on our campus, particularly those in the sciences and engineering, this form of writing is only one in the vast array of genres students must learn and master in their careers here and beyond. Furthermore, when taught by faculty members in these colleges, the grant writing courses focus on explicit genre instruction rather than the more holistic approach suggested by Devitt, which includes antecedent genre instruction and critical genre awareness. This is an important element of writing instruction that we as rhetoric and composition scholars can bring to our campus.

As such, in our work, we have become advocates for the graduate students at our institution. Genre-based instruction is critical to the long-term success of these students. Regardless of the profession they enter, whether as faculty, industry researchers, or the variety of other opportunities they have, writing will be a critical component of their professional life. In demystifying the genres of graduate school and teaching students how to think about genres they do not understand well or have little exposure to, we are providing them with important skills to be successful in their professions. In particular, this is important for the doctoral students who will be future faculty members. Not only are we preparing them for the work necessary for their careers but we are also preparing a future generation of faculty who will be better able to mentor their graduate students when the time comes.

Overall, we are energized by the positive reception by both graduate students and faculty at NC State. As one might expect, we spent much of the first year working on logistics of this type of office. We established core offerings, connected with students and faculty across campus, sought partnerships with other offices and

departments, and listened to what our students and faculty need. In our second year, we have shifted our thinking to an important question: How do we sustain what we have established? And what can the future be for TDSS at NC State? Ideally, we would be a part of a "Graduate Writing Program," combining our office with a writing center support model where students can come in for consultations with writing tutors as well as attend workshops and seminars, having one centralized location for graduate writing support on our campus. NC State only this year launched a Graduate Writing Center, which is currently housed in our Undergraduate Tutorial Center. This is not an ideal location and causes confusion with our students. An amalgamated model, though, would provide all the support for graduate-level writing in a single location and would increase the visibility of both types of support on our campus. Bringing together the services would allow each to grow and for us to achieve NC State University's overall mission: "enhancing the success of our students through educational innovation."

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