

Chapter 2

Creating a Support Structure for Academic Writing and Publication Support: The Rationale and Lessons Learned

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ABSTRACT

Although research and writing for publication are seen as important responsibilities for most graduate students and faculty, many struggle to understand the process and how to succeed. Unfortunately, writing centers at most universities do not cater to these kinds of needs but rather to course-specific needs of undergraduate students. This chapter presents and explains the principles underlying Florida International University's establishment of The Office of Academic Writing and Publication Support, an office specifically designed to aid the scholarly writing efforts of graduate students and faculty. In doing so, this chapter aims to describe strategies and programs for the improvement of scholarly writing, provide insight into the kind of learning that can take place in a university writing center, and reflect on successes and missteps along the way. This chapter may be especially helpful to educators who seek to create similar offices or services at their own institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing centers are prevalent within universities and are typically focused on the improvement of undergraduate student academic writing. These centers rarely focus on assisting graduate students or faculty with scholarly writing and the publication process. As the directors of an office charged with serving the scholarly writing and publication needs of graduate students and faculty, we have created programs, made mistakes, and improved processes around scholarly writing. The work we have done is based on Rankin's (2001) *The Work of Writing*, Vopat's (2009) *Writing Circles*, Rocco and Hatcher's edited volume (2011) *The Handbook of Scholarly Writing and Publishing*, and other literature on scholarly writing. The purpose of this chapter is to present the guiding principles underlying the establishment of The Office of Academic Writing and Publication Support at Florida International University, to describe strategies and programs designed to improve scholarly writing, to present insights learned, and to reflect on missteps – all with the goal of helping others develop similar programs at their own institutions.

Improving Graduate Student Scholarly Writing

Universities use a variety of strategies to improve graduate students' writing. One such strategy is to develop courses, wherein students learn about the processes, struggles, and forms of writing for publication. Another strategy is to create writing centers where students can go for grammar, editing, conceptual, and other types of assistance related to writing. While they are not the same entities (i.e., writing courses and writing centers), they can certainly bolster each other in meeting students' academic writing needs.

Courses on Writing

Sixty percent of doctoral students have difficulty conducting a literature review and synthesizing that information into a quality dissertation (Switzer & Perdue, 2011). Additionally, when feedback is given to graduate students, they often have difficulty addressing the constructive comments given on their writing (Rocco, 2002). While there is a deficit in the quality of graduate student writing, little has been done to address the problem. Occasionally, colleges will offer a stand-alone graduate writing course (e.g., see Street & Stang, 2008); however, most do not offer a writing course, partially due to the program curricular demands (Sallee, Hallett, & Tierney, 2011). Sometimes graduate schools teach scholarly writing imbedded in a research course (e.g., Sallee et al., 2011) or within content courses (e.g., McCarthy, 2008; Nolan & Rocco, 2009). Other programs and professors provide feedback to their students by using rubrics, Turnitin, and Microsoft Word Track Changes (Andrade, 2005; Jenson & DeCastell, 2004). Writing assistance is often limited to remedial courses and writing centers on university campuses, none of which focus on graduate-level academic writing.

A few colleges of education require their students to take a semester long graduate writing course. Street and Stang (2008) described a writing course for graduate teacher educators that incorporated writing various pieces of work (e.g., brief papers, reports to administrators, and class assignments). These assignments focused on "effective writing, writing across the curriculum, writing for professional audiences, and teaching writing to adolescents" (p. 43). All writing was graded by the use of a rubric, and students were encouraged to revise and resubmit their work until it was satisfactory. To receive an "A" for the course, the work had to be publishable. In the five years that the courses were offered, more than half of the students received an "A". Upon completion of one of the courses, most students indicated that

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