

A CROSS-SECTIONAL SURVEY OF U.S. PH.D. STUDENTS: WOULD A WRITING  
CENTER-ORIENTED NEW RHETORIC PEDAGOGY HELP IMPROVE DOCTORAL  
PROGRAM COMPLETION TIMES AND ATTRITION RATES?

by

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(Under the Direction of CHRISTY DESMET)

ABSTRACT

This work focuses on the problem of long completion times and high attrition rates among U.S. dissertation-writing Ph.D. students. Data from the Council of Graduate Schools' Ph.D. Completion Project, as well as other studies, indicate that as many as 25 percent of beginning Ph.D. students either fail to complete degree requirements within the first ten years or leave their programs without ever completing. Most of these students unofficially exit their programs with only one task remaining: writing the dissertation.

Addressing the current state of dissertation-writing Ph.D. students, I first trace the evolution of philosophy from the earliest ontological inquiries to the point when the epistemic disciplines of philosophy and rhetoric converge in the inception of the contemporary Ph.D. dissertation. Emerging from humankind's desire to understand its origin, the earliest philosophers began asking *What is?* and later *How do we know what is?*, but with Aristotle's orderly mind, philosophy and rhetoric became systematized. Two ideas from those systems remain tenets of these disciplines: philosophers still seek new knowledge about our world's existence, and rhetors still seek to convey knowledge.

These ideals are also the focus of a Ph.D. dissertation, which charges writers to discover and situate new knowledge within the existing body of knowledge for their chosen discipline. As writers, they must not only convey the new knowledge, but they must also persuasively take their place among prior scholars in the field.

This researcher conducted an online survey of three stakeholder groups at eighteen U.S. doctoral-granting institutions. The results indicate that stakeholders value and desire writing assistance for their dissertation-writing doctoral students. As a result, the researcher recommends that campus writing centers offer several writing services (boot camp or jump-start programs, retreats, workshops, seminars or a lecture series, single lectures, and coaching sessions) for these students. Grounded in James Berlin's notion of New Rhetoric as an interplay between writer, reality (discovery), language, and audience, these services provide writers with the tools to discover new knowledge and communicate that knowledge while writing their dissertations.

**INDEX WORDS:** Doctor of Philosophy, Ph.D., doctoral studies, dissertation, composition, rhetoric, attrition, completion, writing, Aristotle, James Berlin, New Rhetoric

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## DEDICATION

For my partner, my rock, Tom.

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Dissertation-writing Students*

People without education say, “If only I had education I could write.” People with education say, “If only I had talent I could write.” People with education and talent say, “If only I had self-discipline I could write.” People with education, talent, and self-discipline—and there are plenty of them who can’t write—say, “If only . . .” and don’t know what to say next. Yet some people who aren’t educated, self-disciplined, smart, imaginative, witty (or even verbal, some of them) nevertheless have this peculiar quality most of us lack: when they want to say something or figure something out they can get their thoughts onto paper in a readable form.—Peter Elbow

The inspiration for this dissertation is two-fold. First, my professional experience for the last three years has been in the University of Georgia (UGA) Writing Center, so writing center work is always on my mind. The secondary inspiration was a change in practice within my home department. The English Department’s policy was and is to offer enrolled doctoral students teaching assistantships for up to five years. By that time, it was assumed, the students would graduate and begin careers at other institutions. However, the policy was not the practice. Doctoral students were taking longer than five years to complete their programs, and when a student finally graduated, the job market was already so flooded that few jobs existed. Graduates continued to teach part-time as

Adjunct Instructors. Eventually, the resources that were being directed toward long-term students and post-doctoral friends were necessary for incoming graduate students. One day in Spring Semester of 2010, current students received a letter announcing that the long-standing policy of a five-year support limit would be enforced immediately. Suddenly, students who were in their sixth and seventh years faced not only rejection from the job market due to their incomplete (ABD) status, but also ejection from their home department.

When I considered the students affected by this procedural change, I noticed that the group consisted of males and females, married and unmarried, those with children and those without. There was no obvious personal variable shared by everyone—except that their enrollment exceeded five years in the Ph.D. program. On closer examination, I noticed that everyone in the group had passed through coursework and exams quickly, only to come to a jarring halt while attempting to write the dissertation prospectus or the dissertation. These were excellent doctoral students who had become stalled while writing about what they enjoyed.

As I began researching U.S. graduate student writing, I found little literature addressing this specific area of writing. For over fifty years, Compositionists have fervently discussed the importance of writing for children Pre-K children to university students. During the same period, Compositionists researched and developed hypotheses about university First-year and cross-disciplinary writing programs, but these hypotheses and pedagogies were designed for beginning to intermediate writers, and dissertation writers are advanced writers.

A dissertation may be several dozen times longer than an average undergraduate essay, but more important, the dissertation is the first extended work that is completely conceived without the direct guidance of a professor or the structure of coursework. Dissertation writers receive no course outline. No one provides an assignment sheet with clearly laid-out instructions for research expectations or document design. Doctoral students must discover and design their own reading lists. For this initial extended independent research project, the student narrows her field of expertise to identify a topic of interest, and then she performs comprehensive research to further narrow the topic. Most important, the student is charged with discovering a gap in the existing literature or new knowledge about her chosen topic. Doctoral students often navigate the transition from student to independent researcher and academic writer through time-consuming trial and error. While many institutions require or offer undergraduate courses in research writing, few provide writing instruction or assistance for their graduate student writers. This is particularly disturbing because many U.S. doctoral—especially Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) programs—demand a traditionally written dissertation or thesis. Educators understand that writing is crucial to academic success, but scholars across the disciplines are just beginning to identify the problems that arise when graduate student writers do not receive adequate writing instruction and support.

Unfortunately, graduate writing should be a major topic of discussion, not only within the field of rhetoric and composition but also in discussions held by administrators at all levels of the academy. Our nation may be producing students with excellent minds, but our system of higher education often disappoints them once they enroll in graduate school. High school Language Arts teachers and post-secondary Compositionists have



long recognized the role that writing instruction plays in helping students navigate the transition from high school to college. Many students receive this instruction from Compositionists or rhetors through First-year (FY) or Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) programs. However, few students select additional writing-intensive courses throughout their undergraduate careers. It is easy to imagine how a graduate student might end up enrolled in a doctoral program trying to write a dissertation without having received any writing instruction beyond the FY or WAC courses; still doctoral students are certainly expected to write on a far more sophisticated level than undergraduates. How *do* successful doctoral students become advanced research writers? In many cases they stumble onto support groups, writing centers, or talented and patient advisers. In some cases, they simply do not acquire the necessary advanced writing skills, or they do not acquire them quickly enough. The deficits in doctoral—particularly Ph.D.—student writing are creating *huge* problems for students, administrators, programs, and institutions.

Among the highest achievers during their high school years and undergraduate work, graduate students have learned to anticipate their own success. Before they become graduate students, these individuals complete high school with GPA and test scores that are sufficiently high to gain acceptance to an undergraduate institution. After earning their undergraduate degrees, they complete with a GPA and test scores strong enough to gain admission to grad school. However, due to the competitive nature of graduate school admissions, sometimes even very good students fail to gain admission to these programs. Therefore, graduate programs, particularly doctoral programs, enjoy the privilege of selecting only the most promising students. These students are bright, industrious

individuals who are unaccustomed to failure, and they are selected for admission into doctoral programs because they have already demonstrated possession of these characteristics. What causes such good students suddenly to slow their academic progress or drop out of programs?

Some might ask why we should even care about the academic welfare of doctoral students, who account for only 3 percent of the 2011 overall U.S. population (U.S. Census). After all, these students choose to attend graduate school; nobody forces them to enter into a lifestyle that promises to include financial and intellectual stress, isolation from friends and family, and potentially a decade of lost earning potential. We should care because these students enter programs as eager minds that are particularly interested and successful in their academic endeavors, yet many are failing. We should care because the U.S. higher education system is failing our next generation of college and university educators—the educators of our children. We should care because institutions invest costly resources—the most highly educated faculty, the smallest classes, office space, tuition and payment for assistantships and more—in graduate students; however, these investments are not paying off. We should care because academic failure of this magnitude can ruin students' lives. In short, it is time to repair an educational system that is consistently failing those for whom it was specifically designed.

Barbara Lovitts and Chris Golde are among the scholars in higher education studies who are concerned with graduate program retention and completion rates. They have begun to pay attention not only to those who celebrate in cap and gown with hopes of landing a tenure-track assistant professorship at a research university, but also those who quietly leave programs, financially and emotionally drained, without hope of

attaining the academic dream job yet who remain inadequately qualified for other employment. The chain reaction begun by doctoral students who fail to complete their programs within the first ten years after initial enrollment negatively impacts individuals, departments, institutions, disciplines, and the U.S. labor force (Lovitts, “Transition to Independent Research” 320; Golde, “Beginning Graduate School” 370; Elkins et al.; Ehrenberg et al. 147; Austin et al. 208; Hu 103-4; Jones-White et al. 158). This dissertation asks and seeks to answer questions such as: “*What are we doing to solve the problem of Ph.D. dissertation writers?*” and “*What more can we do?*” to address doctoral student writers, particularly dissertation-writers, who are slowly completing their final project or those who will never complete it.

### *The Philosophy of the Doctor of Philosophy Degree*

Within the process and product of a dissertation, the inquisitiveness of philosophy melds with rhetorical persuasion. According to contemporary rhetor James Berlin and the ancient Greek philosophers and rhetors before him, both philosophy and rhetoric are epistemic disciplines. That is, they study ways of knowing, and they seek this knowledge dialectically, through an exchange of questions and answers leading to the discovery of a *truth*. As the ancient Greek philosophers sought answers to their ontological questions, they experienced a process, that of acquiring and recording knowledge. The field of epistemology developed to study the process and acts of knowledge-making. Philosophy and rhetoric generate very specific types of learning. Various areas within the study of philosophy explore the origin of the earth, man, the nature of being, and the difference between *truth* and *opinion*. The art of rhetoric allows the rhetor to persuasively

communicate that knowledge. Furthermore, according to Aristotle, false rhetoric becomes ineffective communication and is inherently unpersuasive. In this belief, philosophy and rhetoric unite. The philosopher cannot effectively persuade others about his theories unless he employs rhetoric. Likewise, the attention to *truth* and *reality* explored through philosophy is particularly well-suited to Aristotle's rhetoric, a discipline that persuades through and honors truthfulness. However, Aristotle's view of rhetoric does not represent a universal definition of rhetoric. For example, Plato criticizes rhetoric and claims that it is not a philosophical discipline.<sup>1</sup>

Much like the ancient philosophers, current-day Ph.D. students must discover and contribute new knowledge to their disciplines, and the purpose of the Ph.D. dissertation is to relate the discovery of that knowledge. This process includes identifying the existing research regarding the selected topic in order to establish *What is?* The process of discovering new insight or knowledge becomes a dialectical inquiry between the student and prior scholars in her field. As the student researches her topic, she asks questions such as: *What is \_\_\_\_?* and *How do we know \_\_\_\_?*, following the earliest inquiries of philosophers such as Thales of Miletus and Parmenides. In many instances, the scholarly responses to this dialectic appear as a section of literature review within the dissertation. After conducting a thorough review of the existing literature on her topic, the student collects responses from scholars in her field. Sometimes her research provides answers, and sometimes it leads to more questions and more research. By the end of her research stage, the Ph.D. student should have begun to identify gaps in her information. In reality, these gaps are more than a missing paragraph or even chapter. A gap represents the

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Gorgias* for Plato's description of rhetoric as a discipline that twists words to win an audience.

unknown or that which is not yet *true* or *real*. In fact, a gap in knowledge often represents *What is not* or *What is not yet*.

As a Ph.D. candidate almost ready to proclaim her expertise in the chosen area, it is the doctoral student's responsibility to fill the gaps, to create new knowledge, and to write a dissertation. Not only does this final Ph.D. writing project adhere to the epistemic aims of philosophy by asking *What is?* and by offering new insight and describing the student's methods of discovery, the dissertation also conforms to specific rhetorical structures and conventions. The discovery and drafting processes are inventive acts. The use of facts and data represents logos, the skilled rhetorician's persuasive tool that relies on logic, clarity, and evidence to support a claim.

When I began to think about the origin of the Ph.D. dissertation, it seemed to me to consist of two distinct but interwoven parts. The first part is philosophy, and it is the namesake of the *Doctor of Philosophy* degree. The Ph.D. student's most fundamental duty is to establish an informed line of inquiry into her chosen discipline. A student of African American Literature might ask "*What is a man?*" This line of questioning could lead her to vastly different descriptions of African American manhood. She would first study these representations and the critical work discussing representations of African American manhood to situate herself within the scholarly dialogue. Next, she must discover new knowledge to contribute to the dialogue. This first step toward writing a dissertation mimics the dialectic of ancient philosophers and initiates the student into the world of philosophy.

The second part of a dissertation involves the sharing of new knowledge. As I will discuss in a few pages, humans yearn for knowledge and the ability to communicate that knowledge to others. Rhetoric, though, means more than to simply communicate knowledge or information. Rhetoric means to *persuasively* communicate. This, too, is the dissertation-writer's task, to communicate knowledge to the scholarly community within her discipline. For the dissertation, persuasion may occur from the writer's language, her evidence, or her alignment with other scholars. A student of Digital Humanities might want to design an interactive website that presents and describes historically significant music venues in Athens, Georgia. This particular writing project is two-fold and requires that the writer employ a multitude of persuasive techniques. First, the writer must write the code that will be read by a browser.<sup>2</sup> Next, the writer designs a visual composition that persuades viewers to pause and browse. At this point, a writer must demonstrate proficiency in visual rhetoric, verbal rhetoric, and audible rhetoric, or she loses her audience. Without persuading the browser, there is no website. Even if the browser is persuaded to display a website, without a persuasive visual, verbal, and audible text, the writer will gain no readers. The result for unpersuasive coding and web design is lost information, knowledge that is never shared. Similarly, the unpersuasive dissertation-writer does not earn her place as a colleague among practicing scholars.

A description of significant points of intersection between philosophy and rhetoric sets the foundation for a discussion of the problem of dissertation writers who spend several years composing their dissertation or who eventually leave their programs without completing their degree. However, before moving directly into the discussion of

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<sup>2</sup> Browsers are far more difficult to persuade than humans. The type of rhetorical persuasion demanded by browsers appears in the code's syntax, and there are no shades or degrees of browser persuasion.

slow completion times and high attrition rates, this text introduces James Berlin's concept of New Rhetoric. Distinguishing it from other composition and writing pedagogy, Berlin explains that New Rhetoric generates knowledge through the interplay of *writer, reality or knowledge, language, and reader or audience*. While other pedagogies place emphasis on only one or two of these elements, New Rhetoric emphasizes the interaction among all four of these elements. I discuss Berlin and New Rhetoric because I believe that New Rhetoric offers advantages that meet the special needs of dissertation-writers.

In an attempt to identify whether a real or perceived need exists for dissertation-writing assistance, I designed and conducted a national cross-sampling study of the three stakeholder groups. This study used three online survey instruments to ask each group three sets of questions about specific writing center-oriented services (e.g., boot camps, retreats, workshops, seminars, single lectures, and coaching services) and specific faculty adviser services (e.g., discussing the writer's strengths and weaknesses with her adviser and discussing the writer's strengths and weaknesses with all of her committee members). Study results indicate that there is significant interest in increasing the availability of these services to help dissertation-writers reconnect to the fundamental elements of the dissertation: philosophy and rhetoric.

### *What is?—A Discussion*

The answers to philosophical questions such as *What is reality? What is true?* and *What is false?* are complicated ontological inquiries. They seek an understanding of *being* or *that which is*. These abstract concepts within a philosophical context are better understood through a brief discussion of the etymology of the two words *what* and *is*.

*What*, an interrogative pronoun, is most often used when the speaker seeks to define something: *What is your name? What are you reading? What was the assignment?*

*What*, when placed at the front of a short interrogative, connects the immediate inquiry to man's earliest queries to and about the world around him: *What is the world? What is the world's origin? What is my origin? What is my place in the world?* The latter part of the inquiry, *is*, comes from the infinitive *to be*, and it refers to the undeniable truth or existence of something. When used in a simple declarative statement, *is* indicates the factual nature of an event, object, or concept: *Today, the sky is blue. The computer is old. He is human. What is?* as either a complete thought or as the heart of a larger inquiry, reiterates man's thirst for knowledge. Ultimately, the speaker asking *What is?* seeks not only knowledge, but a *true* knowledge. The question *What is?* embodies epistemology and rests at the heart of ontology. These two areas of inquiry meet in the philosophical and rhetorical works of Aristotle, in which readers discover a man wrestling with the ambiguity of both philosophy and rhetoric. Therefore, Aristotle, existing at the juncture of these two disciplines, becomes an appropriate touchstone for understanding and contextualizing earlier philosophers and rhetors.

On the cusp of the sixth and fifth centuries, the earliest known philosophers were already seeking to understand how the world around them came to exist. These inquiries about the origin of man and the observable world around him would later be categorized as dealing with first principles, the discipline we now call metaphysics. Their earliest explanations relied upon elements they observed—fire, earth, air, and water. This notion, limiting the creation of earth and all that emerges or grows from it, to the known



elements of the earth is a useful line of demarcation, one that is distinctly Pre-Socratic (Osborne 23).

Initial significant points of intersection between philosophy and rhetoric occur between ca. 624 BC and ca. 322 BC, during which time both philosophy and rhetoric emerge as separate disciplines. The timeline below (see Fig. 0.1) begins with the birth of the ancient Greek philosopher Thales of Miletus, and it sets philosopher and rhetor Aristotle as the endpoint. This figure, though not comprehensive, highlights classical philosophers whose work especially advances the ontological inquiry *What is?* and those philosophers and rhetors whose work provides structure and instruction for persuasively articulating the results of that inquiry.

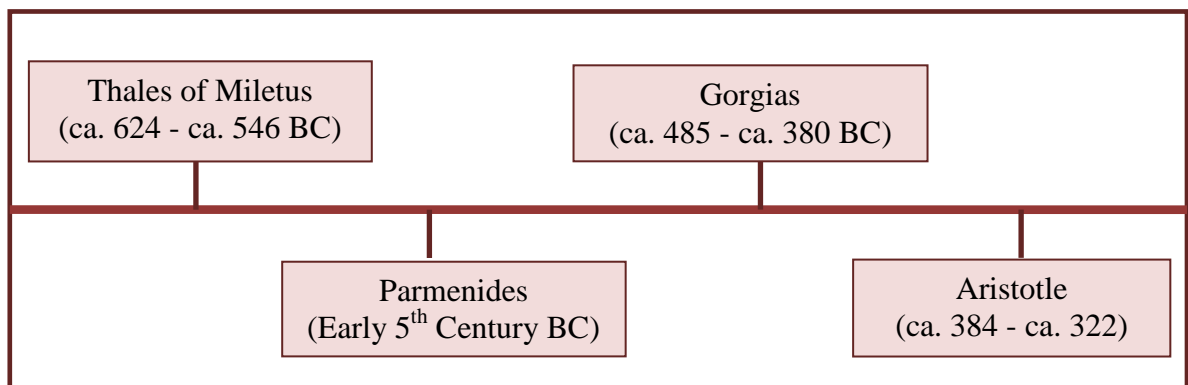


Figure 0.1: Timeline of Philosophers and Rhetors

The particular points of convergence producing these advances in philosophy and rhetoric are examples of *kairos*, the ancient Greek expression for the opportune or supreme time for an event or action. The timeline begins with Thales, who is generally accepted as the first philosopher. Asking *What is?*, Thales established the first First Principle by arguing that water is the first element. Parmenides continues this line of

inquiry, and in his *Eleatic Thesis* he complicates *What is?* by also asking *How do we know what is?* and suggesting that, although men may *know* and *believe* a *truth*, *knowledge* and *belief* are not the same. Gorgias follows by introducing the rhetorical technique *paradoxologia*, which acknowledges that two contradictory statements may both be *true*. As a point of convergence between philosophy and rhetoric, the paradox allows for <anything> to *exist* and *not exist* at the same time. I end the timeline with Aristotle because in *On Rhetoric* he further intertwines philosophy and rhetoric.<sup>3</sup> This early rhetorical textbook establishes rhetoric as the conduit for sharing philosophical theories. Aristotle's organization of prior philosophical explanations for the origin of man and the world around him becomes especially significant to rhetoric within the context of his Final Cause. This Cause includes philosophical contemplations that go beyond asking *What is?* to inquire *Why is it so?* This complication of philosophical thought encourages men to look for logical explanations of *What is?*, and it establishes rhetoric as the method for conveying *truths* about *existence*. Through logical and persuasive argumentation, men share *knowledge* and *truth*. The dialectic of these ancient philosophers gave men something to tell the world, and the dialectic of rhetoric prepared men to make persuasive arguments. When philosophy and rhetoric united, men persuasively presented their *knowledge* or *truth*. These ancient philosophers and rhetors, I argue, produced the sort of documents that evolved into the traditional written Ph.D. dissertation, the contemporary method of sharing philosophical theories.

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<sup>3</sup> The code "<anything>" acts as a fill-in-the-blank and appears in this section to indicate that readers may insert any concept or thing into the sentence at that point.

*From Philosophy to Rhetoric*

Aristotle was the first to design the comprehensive systems of what we now know as Western Philosophy and Rhetoric, but he acknowledges that he was not the originator of either discipline. Thales of Miletus, regarded by Aristotle as the first philosopher, lived from about ca. 624 BC to ca. 526 BC (Osborne 23). Thales is probably best known for his first principle, a rule or law that applies to the genesis of things. Setting the groundwork for other Pre-Socratic philosophers, Thales's greatest contribution to philosophy was his attempt to answer *What is?* without referring to the mythological systems long established in Greece and other ancient nations. Therefore, Aristotle categorized Thales and those following him as Pre-Socratic, less because they preceded Socrates chronologically than because their inquiry sought explanations based on substance rather than intangible ideas or concepts (Osborne 7). In opposition to his contemporaries who held to mythological explanations, Thales posited that natural phenomena resulted from natural processes or from nature itself (Osborne 7). Thus, the initial first principle claimed that all existence comes from water, contains water, and returns to water.

Thales's first principle attempts to explain how humans, creatures of all kinds, the earth, and even the universe transition from *not being* into a *state of being* or *existence*. When Thales asks *What is?*, he attempts to establish a principle for material, matter, all things that *are* (Osborne 9). In response, Thales hypothesizes that before the earth existed, there was water. From the water, the earth emerges with her plants and creatures. While in retrospect, this may seem a simplistic line of thought, Thales employs a level of scientific observation in the composition of this theory. He observes that creatures, plants, even the earth itself, contain a moist, water-like substance (Osborne 9). Logically,

if all things contain water as a common element, then water must generate all things that exist. According to Thales's first principle, everything that exists and everything that grows or emerges from that, originates in water; everything that exists and everything that grows or emerges also rests upon water; everything that exists and everything that grows or emerges eventually returns to water. Thales's first principle remains significant to the field of philosophy not only because it relies upon concrete, observable answers to abstract inquiries, but also because his first principle is the first recorded epistemic inquiry into ontology (the science of being). Following the birth of philosophical inquiry, others such as Parmenides of Elea also recorded their attempts to understand abstract concepts such as *truth* and *reality*.

*Parmenides—The Eleatic Thesis*

Parmenides of Elea, a philosopher poet, first distinguished between *truth* as *that which is knowable and known* and *opinion* as *that which may or may not be known but is believed* (Osborne 72). Of his original 3,000 line poem "On Nature," fewer than 200 lines are preserved, and they exist in scattered fragments (Osborne 59). From the remnants of "On Nature," scholars have determined that the original contained three parts, a section titled "Proem," "The Way of Truth (*Alêtheia*)," and a final segment titled "The Way of Opinion (*doxa*)" (McComisky19). In the "Proem," Parmenides compiles introductory notes and describes a dream in which he is taken to visit a goddess. In the next section, "The Way of Truth," the narrator disappears, and the goddess speaks directly to Parmenides. First, she addresses the nature of being stating:

Come now, I will tell thee—and do thou harken to my  
 saying and carry it away—the only two ways of search that  
 can be thought of. The first, namely, is that *It is*, and that it is  
 impossible for anything not to be, is the way of conviction,  
 for truth is its companion. The other, namely, is that *It is not*,  
 and that something must needs not be,—that, I tell thee, is a  
 wholly untrustworthy path. For you cannot know what is  
 not—that is impossible—nor utter it. (Parmenides 1-10)

The goddess explains that two philosophical paths are open for exploration: a line of inquiry pursuing *What is?* and a line of inquiry pursuing *What is not?* She encourages philosophers to ask *What is?* because that path leads toward true knowledge; however, exploring *What is not?* cannot provide knowledge. Within an ontological context, the goddess aligns *What is?* and *truth* with reality because “It is impossible for anything not to be” (Parmenides 3-4). The ontological distinction between that which is and that which is not represents a landmark contribution to philosophy. As other Pre-Socratic philosophers asked *What is?* Parmenides complicates the question by asking *How can we know what is?* Using the goddess’s voice, Parmenides continues:

One path only is left for us to  
 speak of, namely, that *It is*. In it are very many tokens that  
 what is, is uncreated and indestructible, alone, complete,  
 immovable, and without end. Nor was it ever, nor will it be; for  
 now it is, all at once, a continuous one. (Parmenides 1-5)

Significantly, the goddess addresses the genesis and continuation of the world and all life emerging from it. According to the goddess, the world exists without beginning or ending as a continuation of itself. Parmenides's premise, that *It is*, emerges from his goddess's explanation that *reality*, *existence*, and *truth* include everything that may be reasoned without logical contradictions.

As philosophically interesting as the distinction between *truth* and *opinion* and between *impression* and *reality* may be, "On Nature" makes further contributions to both philosophy and rhetoric. Through a philosophical lens, Parmenides performs double duty with the poem. In addition to articulating that everything man determines from sensory impressions may be a *false reality*, Parmenides enters the field of ontology by attempting to define *reality* or *What is?* Through his discussion of *impression* and *reality*, Parmenides determines the fundamental *truth* to be *It is*. This is an example of the Principle of Identity, which states that a thing must always be that thing. It can be no other thing. For example, a blade of grass is a blade of grass and will remain a blade of grass. It can never become a flower. Parmenides's reply to the dialectic *What is*, is simply "*What is, is,*" and *reality* is forever unchanging. The philosophical and rhetorical significance of the Principle of Identity is that this principle explores both *truth* as opposed to *opinion* and *truth* as opposed to *existence* (McComisky 72). Beyond simply questioning *What is?* and *How do we know what is?*, this principle acknowledges that observation and experience may deceive man into *believing* he knows something and into *believing* he understands how to acquire knowledge. Parmenides introduces the concept that man may misperceive *reality* because opinion may differ from *truth* and *reality*. This

principle later becomes a cornerstone for Aristotle's discussion of appropriate forms of persuasion to be used in rhetoric.

*Gorgias—On Non-Existence*

Before Aristotle, Gorgias (Greece ca. 485 - ca. 380 BC) imported oratory, the ancestor of rhetoric, from Sicily to Athens, but he was also a philosopher who pondered the same ontological and epistemological concerns that vexed Parmenides and Thales—*What is?* and *How do we know what is?* Gorgias, like Parmenides, also composed a work titled "On Nature" (also known as "The Non-Existent") (McComisky 84). However, while Parmenides argues and logically concludes that *What is?* is now and has always been unchanged, Gorgias employs a similar logical structure to proclaim an opposing argument. In what is sometimes considered a philosophical parody of Parmenides's *Eleatic Thesis*, Gorgias demonstrates that *nothing exists and nothing ever existed*. Instead, everything remains confined not to a *state of being* or a *state of not being* but to a temporary state existing only within our minds. Gorgias claims: (1) Nothing ever exists; (2) If a thing ever existed, nothing could be known about it; (3) Even if something existed and something could be known about it, we could not communicate that knowledge; (4) Finally, even if something existed, and we could know about it, we could never communicate that knowledge to others (McComisky 87). Many rhetoricians, however, believe that Gorgias's "On Nature" was not intended as humor, but was, in fact, a serious attempt to prove that *thought* and *existence* are not the same (McComisky 91). This understanding appears to be similar to Parmenides's lesson from the goddess in his "Proem," in which she teaches him that *truth* is *reality*, but *reality* is not the same as

*opinion*. The goddess's speech indicates that men must be wary of and recognize the differences between *truth* and *opinion*. Her admonition implies that humans are capable of such recognition. However, Parmenides and Gorgias have quite different opinions about the existence and comprehension of truths. McComisky notes that

The skeptical ontology and relativistic epistemology articulated by Gorgias in *On Non-Existence* deny the possibility for universal truth; and should truth in some way exist, Gorgias defines it as external to the realm of human knowledge. Instead, Gorgias offers a nascent social constructionist view of language in which perceived realities (*ta pragmata*) condition the generation of statements (*logoi*) about the world, making pre-Socratic philosophical methodologies secondary intellectual endeavors to the study and use of language. (McComisky 34)

Here, McComisky suggests, are two distinctions between Parmenides's "On Nature" and Gorgias's "On Nature or on The Non-Existence." While Parmenides emphasizes the difference between *truth* and *opinion*, Gorgias distinguishes *what may be known* from *that which man is incapable of knowing*. Even more important, Parmenides's work emphasizes that language becomes the conduit for communicating truth among men; thus, he implies that knowledge pre-exists language used to communicate intellectual discoveries. In contrast, Gorgias claims that language pre-exists knowledge, a position that is the reverse of Parmenides. McComisky points out that Gorgias's belief that language was the primary intellectual act diminishes the ontological inquiries of pre-Socratic philosophers because they, like Parmenides, privileged studying the science of being over rhetoric. Gorgias, however, does not simply displace the primacy of



traditional philosophical inquiry; he employs the study of language to advance philosophical studies in what we now know as ethics. To accomplish this, Gorgias draws readers' attention to the dangers of using logos for unethical purposes:

The problem, however, as Gorgias explains in the *Helen*, is that *logos* as a means of persuasion (*peithô*) can lead not only to communal truths-as-probabilities but also to deceptions of opinion in the psyches (*psuchai*) of rhetorical audiences. However, when logos is used for ethical purposes in the service of communal truths-as-probabilities, it can help sincere orators defend those who act justly and prosecute those who do not; and in the *Palamedes*, Gorgias offers artistic *topoi* for the invention of logical, ethical, and emotional arguments based on probability. (McComisky 34)

According to McComisky, Gorgias describes two potential outcomes from employing logos for persuading audiences. First, logos may help the rhetor and audience together compose a communal truth-as-probability. In this rhetorical act, the rhetor and his audience form what I will call a knowledge-generating community. Second, there may be two different results from a knowledge-generating community. The community will either generate a truth-as-probability, or the community will deceive itself. These are the only two outcomes because, according to Gorgias, there are no universal truths, only probable truths. Therefore, the community is left to generate either a probable truth or an improbable truth, which is really a deception.

Unfortunately, the original writings and speeches of Gorgias no longer exist; however, Sextus Empiricus's (c 160-210 A.D.) paraphrased the works of Gorgias, and these records are considered credible. Gorgias's attention to rhetoric extends beyond his

attention to ethical and unethical uses of *logos*. In fact, he views rhetoric as a tool for constructing the philosophical paradox. Using logical statements that follow the outline of Parmenides's *Eleatic Thesis*, Gorgias expands the original argument to demonstrate that if <anything> exists, then <anything> cannot not exist. First claiming that

For everything which is generated has some beginning, but the eternal, being ungenerated, did not have a beginning. And not having a beginning it is without limit. And if it is without limit it is nowhere. For if it is somewhere, that in which it is, is something other than it, and thus, if the existent is contained in something it will no longer be without limit. For the container is greater than the contained, but nothing is greater than the unlimited, so that the unlimited cannot exist anywhere. (Sextus; par. 69)

As Gorgias explains, if, as Parmenides claims, <anything> is generated, then it must have beginning and ending points, a time and place for coming into the state of beginning and a time and place for leaving a state of being. However, before <anything> *comes into being*, Gorgias argues, it must be *nonexistent*. Noting that <anything> cannot simultaneously exist and not exist, Gorgias describes the paradox: "The nonexistent does not exist; for if the nonexistent exists, it will both exist and not exist at the same time, for insofar as it is understood as nonexistent, it will not exist, but insofar as it is nonexistent it will, on the other hand, exist" (Sextus; par. 67). As Gorgias discusses nonexistence, he logically proves that <anything> may either exist or not exist, but <anything> cannot both exist and not exist. The reason for this is that in these paragraphs Gorgias defines existence and nonexistence as binary opposites. If <anything> *exists*, it cannot *not exist*. If <anything> does *not exist*, then it cannot at the same time *exist*; furthermore—and this

is where Gorgias's rhetoric becomes integral to his ontological argument—if <anything> *exists* in his life experience, it does *not* necessarily *exist* in the life experiences of other men. For instance, Gorgias might have observed a bird seen by no other man. For Gorgias, the bird *exists*, but for other men, the bird does *not exist*. This example demonstrates that a simple statement such as “The bird exists” may be both true (for Gorgias) and untrue (for other men). *On the Nonexistent* is a complex example of *paradoxologia* (the use of paradoxes), a rhetorical technique credited to Gorgias.

Through the use of *paradoxologia*, Gorgias explains that men cannot really know *truth* or *reality*, but men can honestly report what they believe to be true and real. To explain why *true* objectivity is impossible, Gorgias asks, “How can anyone communicate the idea of color by means of words since the ear does not hear colors but only sounds?” (McComisky 116). Gorgias argues that a speaker always conveys his personal sense of blueness when describing the color blue to a sightless human. Thus, the description becomes subjective rather than objective.

As a philosopher, Gorgias continues the ontological inquiry of the philosophers before him; however, his greatest contributions may be in rhetoric. As a Sicilian orator, Gorgias was renowned as a speaker for the structure and ornamentation of his arguments and as a performer for the pleasure he gave audiences (Higgins). Rhetors, though, credit Gorgias with the introduction of *paradoxologia*, the theory that opposite and contradictory statements may both be true, into rhetoric. Higgins asserts that Gorgias's ontological paradoxes present an ambiguous stance. While Gorgias's works fail to clearly indicate his beliefs about the existence of truth, they clearly articulate his concerns with rhetoricians who employed that art to deceive their listeners or audiences. Claiming that

rhetoricians are “ethically obligated to avoid deception, and [they have a duty] to declare what [they] should rightly and to refute what has been spoken falsely,” Gorgias charges rhetoricians to adhere to community expectations regarding morality and to avoid deception (Higgins).

*Aristotle—Where Philosophy Meets Rhetoric*

Philosophers credit Aristotle (Greece ca. 384 BC – ca. 322 BC) with establishing a system of philosophy. A first step was to develop categories for the various ontological inquiries. Aristotle determined that the first principles all fell within one of four categories: (1) The Material Cause, (2) The Formal Cause, (3) The Efficient Cause, and (4) The Final Cause. The Material Cause describes that some material or materials pre-existed and generated the earth, man, and the world around him. The Formal Cause explained that a similar form pre-existed and created men and their world. The Efficient Cause characterizes actions and events that occur to produce the earth and living things. The fourth cause, The Final Cause, is most relevant to a discussion of the evolution of philosophy and its eventual union with rhetoric. While the first three causes offer explanations for how things come to be, The Final Cause answers why things come to be. The difference between these categories of questions effectively links Aristotle’s philosophical and rhetorical works.

Both *Why?* and *How?* act as interrogative adverbs. *Why?* invites an explanation of reason or purpose, and *How?* asks in what way or manner. The invocation of reason through the use of *Why?* suggests that a reasonable or logical explanation exists and is knowable. In *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle explains that the purpose of rhetoric is to persuade

audiences through strict rhetorical methods. He names three modes of persuasive appeals: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, and of the three, Aristotle considers *logos*—Greek for reason or logic—the most honorable method of persuasion. He argues:

Let rhetoric be [defined as] an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion. This is the function of no other art; for each of the others is instructive and persuasive about its own subject: for example, medicine about health and disease and geometry about the properties of magnitudes and arithmetic about numbers and similarly in the case of the other arts and sciences. But rhetoric seems to be able to observe the persuasive about “the given,” so to speak. That, too is why we say it does not include technical knowledge of any particular, defined genres [of subjects]. (*On Rhetoric*, 377-78, bk. 1. chap. 2)<sup>4</sup>

Aristotle becomes particularly influential for discussing the interconnectedness of philosophy and rhetoric due to his emphasis upon the importance of persuasion. Unlike earlier rhetors such as Gorgias, Aristotle discourages reliance upon style, such as ornamentation, as the key element of persuasion. While he recognized the effects of aesthetic and emotional appeals, he preferred to employ logical arguments that appealed to a man’s intellect:

It belongs to the same capacity both to see the true and what resembles the true, and at the same time humans have a natural disposition for the true and to a large extent hit on the truth; thus an ability to aim at commonly

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<sup>4</sup> Brackets inserted by Kennedy.

held opinions [*endoya*] is characteristic of one who also has a similar ability in regard to the truth. (*On Rhetoric* 34; bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 11)

Because Aristotle believes that virtuous men are fundamentally truthful, he rejects the idea that false or uncertain knowledge can persuade the educated man.

Aristotle's Final Cause links philosophy to rhetoric because both emphasize reason and logic. This Cause also describes the goals of dissertation-writing Ph.D. students because the use of *Why?* implies an ongoing dialectic among scholars in the discipline. Through research that follows the epistemological path of the Final Cause, dissertation-writers construct a rhetorical argument that both situates them within an existing conversation and demands rigorous persuasion. Aristotle's broader understanding of rhetoric, beyond the Four Causes, employed as an artistic method of persuasion and as a means of communicating knowledge, aligns current-day rhetorical practitioners with him. Having moved away from the formal term "rhetor" during the intervening centuries, we now call modern rhetors teachers, instructors, professors, or consultants.

While it may be difficult to imagine a Composition instructor as anything other than a red-pen wielding grading machine, her profession is rooted in Aristotle's rhetoric, which could easily be considered the modern academic ancestor of the dissertation. Along the continuum of writing teachers, from Language Arts in primary grades to graduate faculty in rhetoric, writing center consultants may be the most recent type of rhetors to appear. Although they are chronologically the most distant rhetors from his time, writing consultants' pedagogy may align more closely with Aristotle's teachings

than any other rhetors in the continuum. When a writing consultant and a dissertation-writer begin to talk about a dissertation, they establish a connection that involves the *writer*, her *reader or audience*, the use of *language*, and the knowledge discovered by the writer.

These types of personal connections occur every day in campus writing centers where consultants and writers develop a one-on-one relationship as they discuss writing. At the typical writing center, a consultant may discuss papers about artificial intelligence, academic scholarships, and journalism in a single day. Consultants may also work with non-native speakers, first-year students, and graduate students in back-to-back sessions. Increasingly, the writing center is becoming a site for graduate students, especially dissertation-writing doctoral students, to discuss their dissertations (Powers). In spite of the topical and hierarchical differences students may bring to a session, the common element in most writing center encounters is one-on-one human interaction. In the UGA Writing Center, we call this *counseling* the writer. All writers benefit from this personal attention, but we are discovering that the counseling element of consultations is particularly beneficial to dissertation-writers.

Many of the UGA Writing Center consulting staff are themselves dissertation-writing Ph.D. students. However, regardless of their own academic status, all consultants eventually encounter dissertation-writing students. Dissertation-writers appear with a distinct need. The objective of the dissertation is to convey the student's discovery of new knowledge and situate that discovery among the works of other scholars within a disciplinary conversation. In other words, the student is charged with participating in a dialectic, a sort of virtual conversation with prior and future scholars. As the student

builds upon the works of prior scholars, her work becomes the foundation for forthcoming scholars. In the same manner, the content of a writing consultation must also become a dialectic, a conversation between *writer* and *reader*, with and about the use of *language* to convey a *new discovery* or *reality*. Ideally, the dissertation establishes a dialectic among scholars, and the writer establishes a dialectic within the writing center. This need for the dual layers of dialectic is uncommon among less experienced writers such as undergraduates, making this service one of the special needs of dissertation-writers.

Graduate faculty and advisers traditionally provide the point of access for this dialectical service, but faculty access may become difficult when the dissertation-writer needs these services most. When a faculty adviser refers her advisee to the writing center, she is offering the student not a professional replacement, but the opportunity to engage in a dialectic about the student's topic with a real reader. This opportunity invites further discovery about both the topic and the student's writing. This important interaction between writer, reader, language, and knowledge or reality is the foundation for the study conducted as part of this dissertation. A summary of the chapters follows.

### *Summary of Chapters*

The Introduction to this work traces a line of inquiry through its philosophical works to the point of Aristotle, in particular his two works *Final Cause* and *On Rhetoric*. These ancient works appear to have anticipated the goals of contemporary dissertation-writing Ph.D. students. The ontological and epistemological nature of ancient philosophy unites with rhetoric, resulting in a human's ability to communicate to others his discovery



of *What is?* Additionally, the dissertation-writer's objective, to produce a document that both conveys new knowledge and situates that knowledge among the works of other experts, is the embodiment of a dialectic. Charged with asking and discovering *What is?*, contemporary Doctor of Philosophy students continue to uphold the ontological and epistemological nature of the ancient philosophers. Aristotle's broader understanding of rhetoric, beyond the four Causes as an artistic method of persuasion and a means of communicating knowledge, aligns him with modern rhetors whose exploration of effective composition pedagogies directly impacts methods of writing instruction that current-day dissertation-writers experience. Among these modern rhetors, writing center consultants are particularly well-equipped to help dissertation-writers establish and maintain a dialectic about their writing. The following five chapters of this dissertation set the groundwork for a study investigating writing center-oriented dissertation-writing pedagogy.

Chapter One begins at the philosophical and rhetorical intersection presented in the work of Aristotle and introduces twentieth-century rhetor James Berlin as a modern descendant of Aristotle. As a practicing scholar of rhetoric and composition, Berlin steps away from his professional practices to provide a thorough analysis of contemporary pedagogies. Chapter One introduces Berlin and his taxonomy and demonstrates why he offers New Rhetoric as a superior theory. Additionally, this chapter explores New Rhetoric theory with emphasis upon the interplay between what Berlin identifies as the *writer, reality, language, and reader*. For the dissertation-writing student, this interaction reenacts one of the goals of dissertations: to discover and communicate new knowledge. Even though Berlin uses the term *reality*, for the philosophers in our timeline reality is

knowledge; therefore, the terms are used interchangeably in this dissertation. Finally, this chapter discusses the opportunity for writing center pedagogy to embrace New Rhetoric theory to meet the special needs of dissertation-writing students.

Following Chapter One's discussion of a need for a New Rhetoric-inspired dissertation-writing pedagogy, Chapter Two begins a discussion of Ph.D. program attrition rates. Landmark studies by Bowen and Rudenstine, Nelson and Lovitts, and the Council for Graduate Studies all show that attrition, either officially or unofficially leaving an institution without completing, is a rising problem at U.S. doctoral-granting institutions. Various studies indicate that up to 25 percent of an entering cohort leaves the program without completing by the end of ten years. Other reports indicate that over time, as many as 50 percent of entering students fail to complete. Solving the problem of high attrition is not simple. First, studies identify many barriers, such as insufficient funding, academic preparedness, and emotional preparedness, that all appear to contribute to high attrition rates. Also, studies often define these terms differently. For instance, should length of enrollment, or time to completion, begin with the first date of enrollment in the doctoral program, or should it begin with entrance as a college freshman? Even though many U.K. studies count enrollment from the beginning of undergraduate work, the U.S. studies used in this dissertation count enrollment as beginning from the first day in the doctoral program.

Chapter Two is divided into two sections. The first part of this chapter reviews relevant studies to establish the parameters for the discussion. Studies from 1992 to 2010 show that attrition is a problem with many causes. Extended completion times are among the factors contributing to attrition that frequently identify the students who will

eventually leave without completing. Therefore, an attempt to reduce completion times might also help reduce attrition rates. The second part of the chapter looks closely at the Ph.D. Completion Project data. This report shows that Ph.D. students are either more likely to complete their degrees, or to leave the program without completion, when they are enrolled in certain broad fields. Additionally, the Ph.D. completion project reports that students who are enrolled between four and six years are those most likely to complete the program, and those enrolled beyond the sixth year become increasingly less likely to complete with each passing year. Thus, these data help predict which groups of Ph.D. students are most at-risk for attrition.

Chapter Two reveals two possible actions that may help reduce both completion time and attrition rates for Ph.D. students. Most importantly, both actions might emerge from campus writing center practices. First, most campus writing centers already offer one-on-one writing consultations, a service that addresses both the academic and emotional preparedness of Ph.D. students. Writers experiencing difficulty at any point in their writing process may schedule one or more consultations. Research also indicates that one-on-one interaction benefits Ph.D. students by reducing their sense of isolation. After discussing the potential benefits of a writing center pedagogy for dissertation-writers, Chapter Three introduces the methodology for a study of Ph.D. students and Graduate Faculty participation in campus writing centers.

Chapter Three describes the study design and data analysis of a study conducted during the 2012-2013 academic year. First, the chapter details the random selection of survey participants from eighteen U.S. doctoral-granting institutions. To attain a sample population reflecting different types of institutions, the survey design began by grouping

297 doctoral-granting institutions as either RU/VH (Research Universities supporting very high levels of research), RU/H (research universities supporting high levels of research), or DRU (doctoral-granting universities), according to the Carnegie Classifications (“108 Results,” “99 Results,” “90 Results”). Ten institutions from each Carnegie Classification were randomly selected, and the researcher communicated with representatives from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), or local equivalent, at each institution to arrange permission to recruit survey participants. As a result, eighteen institutions agreed to participate and allow recruitment. Next, the researcher identified three groups of individuals who are stakeholders in the dissertation-writing process: Dissertation-writing Ph.D. students (DWP), Graduate Faculty (GF), and Writing Center Administrators (WCA). During the recruitment process, these stakeholder groups were informed of the survey’s start and end dates, and later, they were reminded to participate in follow-up emails.

The researcher elected to use descriptive analysis for this study. Because the survey questions sought demographic information and sought to determine whether a respondent had participated in specified writing center-oriented services, descriptive analysis was sufficient. This means that she studied the data and considered the potential value of frequencies, the number of identical responses. Some data are easily understood through a straightforward description and analysis technique. For instance, the first group of survey questions asked basic for demographic information, and the next three groups asked about awareness, previous experience with the specified writing survey, and the respondents’ opinion about future use. Therefore, descriptive analysis provided the

percentages responding affirmatively and negatively to questions. Descriptive analysis also set the foundation for a discussion of the results in Chapter Four.

After identifying the sample population, the researcher designed an online survey instrument. Using both open-ended and closed-ended questions, the online surveys (and the resulting data) were maintained and administered by the Survey Research Center on secure servers. Chapter Three includes a description and evaluation of alternate survey instrument options, but the online survey instrument was selected because of the ease and low cost of administration and data collection. An online survey may begin producing results as soon as the first respondent submits her answers, and storing results in a database presents the researcher with multiple options for analyzing data. Actual study results are presented and discussed in Chapter Four.

This chapter is divided into three major sections: a discussion of demographic data, a discussion of the dissertation-writing students' attitudes and beliefs regarding specific writing center services, and a discussion of the graduate faculty's attitudes and beliefs regarding specific writing center services. Unfortunately, too few writing center administrators participated to provide reliable data; therefore, this additional section is very brief. Demographic information reveals that more female DWP students responded than male, and more male GF responded than female. The median age for DWP respondents was under thirty, and the median age for GF respondents was over thirty. The gender results do not vary significantly from the 50 percent mark, and they closely reflect actual enrollment and employment data. Likewise, mean age results mimic trends in DWP enrollment and GF employment. However, data regarding the attitudes and beliefs of these two groups offer some interesting findings.

Both the DWP and GF surveys asked three sets of questions following the demographic section. The first group of questions asked if selected writing center services were available at the students' home institutions, and participants were asked to select between the answer options "Yes," "No," and "I don't know." A large group of respondents selected "No," but the largest group of respondents chose the "I don't know" option. The same answer options were available for the second and third groups of questions, which asked "Have you participated in these services?" and "Would you participate in these services if available?" DWP respondents overwhelmingly indicated that they had not participated in the named services for the second group of questions, and they responded that they would participate in the services if they were available at their home institutions.

The GF participants were asked the same groups of questions and given the same answer options. For the first group, the great majority of respondents indicated that their institutions did not offer the specified services. This suggests a level of certainty not apparent in the DWP respondents, and it may indicate that GF respondents have a greater level of knowledge about the services than their DWP counterparts. The second group of questions asked GF respondents if they had referred advisees to the writing center services, and the results indicated an extremely emphatic "No." The percentage of GF respondents who had not referred students was even larger than the percentage of GFs who knew that their institutions did not offer the services. This suggests that GF respondents, on the whole, understand what the services include and choose not to refer DWP students. This surprising result may mean that GF respondents are dissatisfied with current services or may be doubtful that the services can meet the needs of their DWP

students. The final group of questions asked GF respondents if they would refer advisees to the writing center services, and the majority said that they would. This area requires further investigation because the results may provide conflicting information. For instance, a currently low rate of GF usage combined with the very high desirability indicated in the third question hints that GF respondents are optimistic that *new* services might work where the current ones do not.

Chapter Five presents the researcher's conclusions and recommendations based upon implications of the results. The superficial results for this study indicate that DWP student and GF respondents value and desire the specified dissertation-writing services; however, further investigation uncovers the real issue: neither the DWP nor the GF respondents are using writing services. While the unavailability of certain services and lack of awareness about the types of services offered may factor in this finding, other results indicate that many respondents do understand the services and are choosing not to seek these types of writing assistance. Therefore, the researcher recommends a two-pronged approach in which institutions offer the specified writing center services and elevate the general awareness of these services among their student and faculty populations. A second, and perhaps more pervasive, implication also arose from this study. DWP respondents are not able to transfer their knowledge from one writing class to another. While educators have discussed the academic problems caused when students fail to transfer knowledge from one course or experience to another, transfer theory is still emerging. In fact, Elon University is hosting the Elon Research Seminar, a three-year retreat-style institute in which forty active researchers in rhetoric and composition work to refine transfer theory and practice. Excited about the potential of transfer to assist

dissertation-writers, this researcher offers a two-part recommendation. First, institutions must embed transfer skills into the curriculum, so that students become aware of transfer and begin transferring their experiences. Second, the researcher suggests a writing center pedagogy designed specifically for dissertation-writers. This pedagogy would encourage transfer and rely on the interplay of *writer, reality or knowledge, language, and reader* to generate knowledge and help facilitate the written dissertation. Situating these services in a writing center setting provides the sort of dissertation-writing assistance that may shorten completion times and reduce attrition rates for Ph.D. students.

For many, this dissertation presents a new topic, the problem of Ph.D. slow completion times and high attrition rates; however, this problem has been discussed in academic journals for the last four decades. As educators and advisers, we can no longer sit idly by observing another entering Ph.D. cohort diminish by 5 percent, 10 percent, 25 percent, or 50 percent. This study offers a New Rhetoric writing center pedagogy to supplement current forms of writing assistance for dissertation-writing Ph.D. students.



## CHAPTER ONE

### ARISTOTLE AND BERLIN

#### *Ancient Rhetoric Meets New Rhetoric*

In teaching writing we are tacitly teaching a version of reality and the student's place and mode of operation in it.—James Berlin

In the Introduction, I present a timeline of philosophers who have been particularly instrumental in advancing an ontological line of inquiry, beginning with Thales of Melitus and ending with Aristotle. This chapter introduces twentieth-century rhetor James Berlin as a legitimate theoretical descendent of Aristotle and discusses Berlin's theory of New Rhetoric.

#### *Berlin—What Is New Rhetoric?*

James Berlin (1942-1994) emphasizes the point of convergence between philosophy and rhetoric when he views rhetoric and composition studies through an epistemological lens. In *Rhetoric and Reality* Berlin discusses major U.S. pedagogical approaches to writing from about the 1860s to the 1980s. Berlin's discussion frames rhetoric and composition studies as the epistemological interaction of *writer*, *reality*, *language*, and *audience*. For Berlin, writing is a path toward understanding *reality*, *truth*, or *what is*. He describes three categories of rhetorical theory:

- (1) Objective Theories;
- (2) Subjective Theories;
- (3) Transactional Theories.

Berlin writes that he selected an epistemic taxonomy not to deny the influences of ideology, but to more closely focus on the rhetorical acts (6). Describing these theoretical approaches, Berlin tells his readers that:

Objective theories locate reality in the external world, in the material objects of experience. Subjective theories place truth within the subject to be discovered through an act of internal apprehension. And transactional theories locate reality at the point of interaction of subject and object, with audience and language as the mediating agencies. (*Rhetoric and Reality* 6)

In this manner, Berlin's taxonomy of rhetoric views theoretical approaches of writing pedagogy as a way to discover the reality, what is, by:

- (1) Looking to the writer's experiences of acts and objects external to herself;
- (2) Looking inward to the writer's personal and unique understanding;
- (3) Looking outward, not to the writer's experiences but for the moment of connection.

Berlin's taxonomy rests on his belief that "To teach writing is to argue for a version of reality . . . And all composition teachers are ineluctably operating in this reality, whether

or not they consciously choose to do so” (“Contemporary Composition” 766). Berlin further claims that teaching our students to write is tantamount to teaching them—and defining for them—*What is real?*, *What is true?*, and *What is?*.

With the later publication of “Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogies” in 1982, Berlin asks his peers and readers to re-envision Composition Studies. Berlin readily acknowledges a tradition of attempting to evaluate and categorize composition pedagogies, and he claims that his work in “Contemporary Composition” directly responds to “Four Philosophies of Composition” by Richard Fulkerson and “A Critical Survey of Resources for Reaching Rhetorical Invention” by David V. Harrington et al. In the philosophical tradition, Berlin situates himself within a disciplinary dialectic among other respected scholars. An example of an excellent researcher, he is careful to acknowledge prior scholarly contributions before identifying a gap in the existing literature. Berlin notes, “Since all pedagogical approaches, it is argued, share a concern for the elements of the composing process—that is, for *writer*, *reality*, *reader*, and *language*—their only area of disagreement must involve the element or elements that ought to be given the most attention” (“Contemporary Composition” 765). Fulkerson and D. Harrington et al. all agree that the *writer*, *reality*, *reader*, and *language* are consistent components in a variety of writing pedagogies, and that the pedagogical differences are not *What elements compose composition?*, but *How do the elements work to create a composition?* (Fulkerson; D. Harrington et al.). Berlin disagrees with this analysis, writing that “From this point of view, the composing process is always and everywhere the same because writer, reality, reader, and language are always and everywhere the same” (“Contemporary Composition” 765). Berlin begins to question what Fulkerson, D.

Harrington et al., and Woods assume is a *truth* or *reality* about composition, that the separate elements (writer, reality, reader, and language) always function the same way with variety existing only in the emphasis a particular pedagogy asserts over one of these elements. If the purpose of *writer*, *reality*, *reader*, and *language* remains unchanged, then Berlin views pedagogical differences as insignificant attempts to establish non-existent distinctions. Next, Berlin identifies the parameters of his new knowledge writing:

I would like to say at the start that I have no quarrel with the elements that these investigators isolate as forming the composing process, and I plan to use them myself . . . I do, however, strongly disagree with the contention that the differences in approaches to teaching writing can be explained by attending to the degree of emphasis given to universally defined elements of a universally defined composing process. (“Contemporary Composition” 765)

Berlin’s nod of approval toward his peers’ application of *writer*, *reality*, *reader/audience*, and *language* to discuss composition pedagogies does not mitigate his overall disapproval of their findings. While they used appropriate terminology and technique, Berlin disagrees with their conclusions. Specifically, he believes that “[t]he differences in these teaching approaches should instead be located in diverging definitions of the composing process itself—that is, in the way the elements that make up the process—writer, reality, audience, and language—are envisioned” (“Contemporary Composition” 765). Rather than assume that the task of *writer* remains the same for all pedagogical approaches, Berlin claims that the four major composition pedagogies all view the tasks of *writer*, *reality*, *audience/reader*, and *language* quite differently.

In order to distinguish his claim as new and unlike those of his taxonomist/peers, Berlin explains that “rhetorical theories differ from each other in the way writer, reality, audience and language are conceived—both as separate units and in the way the units relate to each other” (“Contemporary Composition” 766). For Berlin, there is no “universally defined composing process”; rather, he views the process as always generative, always interactive, and always changing (“Contemporary Composition” 766). This means that Berlin wants readers to discard their conception of the writing process as consisting only of recursive drafting, revising, and reading. Instead, he asks readers to reimagine a process in which knowledge may be discovered (and *truth* or *reality* discovered) not through a solitary process privileging authorial ownership of a composition, but through the interplay of whatever forms the composing process takes. In fact, Berlin hopes his readers will view the composition of knowledge not as the traditionally accepted completed written project, but as the generative collaboration of *writer, reality, reader, and language* throughout and beyond the entire composition process.

### *The Roles of Writer, Reality, Reader, and Language*

According to Berlin, contemporary composition pedagogies approach their understanding of *What is truth?* and *What is reality?* quite differently. A discussion of the perception of *truth, knowledge, and reality* as viewed by the Berlin’s four major pedagogical types demonstrates their philosophical distinctions. For Neo-Aristotelians, *truth* and *reality* are “discovered through rational (syllogistic) operations in the mind” (“Contemporary Composition” 773-74). Conversely, Current-Traditionalist pedagogies

insist that writers discover truth “through the correct (inductive) perception of sensory data” (“Contemporary Composition” 774). Viewing *reality* from opposing perspectives, Neo-Aristotelian pedagogies promote deductive reasoning while Current-Traditionalists teach the path to *knowledge* through inductive reasoning. Neo-Platonic pedagogies claim that truth cannot be conveyed to others because it is always and everywhere dynamic (“Contemporary Composition” 774). Neither deduction nor induction leads to truth for the Neo-Platonist, because truth is ever-changing. New Rhetoricians view *truth*, *knowledge*, and *reality* as acts that arise “out of the interaction of the writer, language, reality, and audience” (“Contemporary Composition” 775). For New Rhetoric pedagogies, *truth*, *knowledge*, and *reality* cannot exist without the active interdependence of all four compositional elements.

The role of the *writer*, according to Neo-Aristotelian pedagogies, is an “exalted position but one in which her efforts are circumscribed by the Neo-Aristotelian emphasis upon the rational—the enthymeme and the example” (“Contemporary Composition” 775). Neo-Aristotelians believe that even though the writer is credited with generating knowledge and presenting it to her audience, she is restricted to discovering knowledge exclusively through the deductive reasoning of enthymemes. An ancient form of logical argumentation, an enthymeme contains two statements and a conclusion. An enthymeme first makes a major premise, then a minor premise, and finally it draws a conclusion about a truth demonstrated through the two true statements. Here is an example:

Major Premise: All flowers have petals.

Minor Premise: Violets are flowers.

Conclusion: Violets have petals.

The enthymeme begins with a major premise—that all flowers have petals. The minor premise, which is always more specific in nature than the major premise, focuses on a subset of flower, the violet, and states that violets are flowers. The enthymeme works because we have two true statements. It is true that flowers have petals, and it is true that violets are a type of flower. The logical conclusion, then, is that the subset of flowers (violets) must have petals because all flowers do. Especially through the use of enthymemes, Neo-Aristotelian rhetoricians view the writer as the lone creator and disseminator of knowledge.

In contrast, Current-Traditionalist pedagogies believe that the writer is a facilitator who “must focus on expression in a way that makes possible the discovery of certain kinds of information—the empirical and the rational—and the neglect of others—psychological and social concerns” (“Contemporary Composition” 775). For Current-Traditionalists, the writer directs the discovery of knowledge in a manner that causes her audience to observe and make her own discoveries. Neo-Aristotelian and Current-Traditional pedagogies differ in their view of which composition element possesses the power of discovery. For Neo-Aristotelians, the writer holds the power to construct and deliver knowledge. For Current-Traditionalists, the writer’s job is to present information so that the reader is able to construct knowledge.

For the Neo-Platonists, writers regain the power of discovery. In fact, Berlin states that “the writer is at the center of the rhetorical act, but she is finally isolated, cut off from community, and left to tell the lonely business of discovering truth alone” (“Contemporary Composition” 765). Neo-Platonists emphasize the individual writer’s subjective experiences, and when this belief is translated into a composition pedagogy, *knowledge*, *truth*, and *reality* become unique to the writer and her current situation. Because the writer is always recording an immediate personal *truth*, *knowledge*, *truth*, and *reality* differ from person to person and time to time. Even writers may revisit a composition to discover new or different *truths*.

Berlin’s fourth category, New Rhetoric, “teaches that truth and reality are dynamic and dialectical” (“Contemporary Composition” 774). Unlike Neo-Aristotelians and Current-Traditionalists, New Rhetoric pedagogies suggest that *language* pre-exists and is integral to the construction of *truth*. Even though this belief is similar to the Neo-Platonic practice that language is used to construct *truth*, New Rhetoric and Neo-Platonic pedagogies view the generation and residence of *truth* differently. While the Neo-Platonists believe that individuals construct individual *truths*, New Rhetoricians view *truth* as emerging from the interaction of individuals and residing within their communication. Truth, states Berlin, “is a relation that is created, not pre-existent . . . Truth is always truth only in relation to others in a linguistically circumscribed situation” (“Contemporary Composition” 774). This vision of truth is always and only collaboratively created with language. Berthoff describes *truth* as not only a communal event but as an epistemic dialectic employing “the mutual dependence of seeking and knowing” (Berthoff 44). Thus, New Rhetoric pedagogies, though more sophisticated in



their understanding of discovery, are, perhaps, more closely related than Berlin's other three categories to the epistemological pursuits of ancient philosophy and rhetoric.

Even though Berlin's taxonomy was designed because he believed that the four major pedagogies view the elements of composition differently, he notes that *language* is actually viewed quite similarly by Neo-Aristotelians, Current-Traditionalists, and Neo-Platonists. Each pedagogical style teaches that *language* follows *truth*. Each style teaches that *truth* is not discoverable but pre-existing. Each style charges the writer with "identifying and employing the appropriate way to communicate knowledge" and the audience with receiving *knowledge* ("Contemporary Composition" 774-75). Assigning primacy to *truth*, *knowledge*, and *reality* over language parallels Parmenides's thinking and minimizes man's desire to communicate.

However, the importance of language for New Rhetoricians cannot be minimized. While language is a contributor to discovery, it also "provides a way of unitizing experience . . . a way of selecting and grouping experience in a fairly consistent and predictable way" (Young, Becker, and Pike 27). However, New Rhetoric pedagogies teach that knowledge is not a static event; rather, it is a dynamic action where the role of language is to "embody and generate truth" ("Contemporary Composition" 774-75). Noting that "language is dialectical," Berthoff simplifies the concept of discovery, explaining that "ideas are conceived by language; language is generated by thought" (47). For the New Rhetoricians, *language* becomes a catalyst as important to discovery as the *writer* and *audience*, who also participate in the generation of *knowledge*.

Again, all four pedagogical approaches vary in their view of the fourth compositional element, audience. Neo-Aristotelians believe that they must “take the audience seriously as a force to be considered in shaping the message” (“Contemporary Composition” 775). Because *truth* pre-exists language, *writers* must be careful to select the appropriate *language* to convey that knowledge to the *audience*. Current-Traditionalists, according to Berlin, “demand that the audience is as ‘objective’ as the writer” when communicating knowledge (“Contemporary Composition” 775). For Neo-Platonists, *audience* becomes an editorial “check to the false note of the inauthentic” and an error-in-communication detector (“Contemporary Composition” 765). Because Neo-Platonic rhetoricians view *truth* as unique to the individual *writer*, the only purpose for an *audience* is to confirm clarity. New Rhetoric pedagogies, however, teach that audience is exactly as important to discovery as writer, reality, and language because “the message arises out of the interaction of the writer language, reality, and audience” (“Contemporary Composition” 775). For New Rhetoricians, knowledge cannot be generated and truth and reality cannot be discovered without the reciprocal action between all four compositional elements. Berlin’s taxonomy demonstrates that New Rhetoric offers a pedagogy that views writing as a method for both generating and conveying the discovery of new knowledge.

For the doctoral student facing a lengthy writing assignment or any other major writing project, a New Rhetoric-inspired pedagogy offers a theory appropriate for achieving the two purposes of the dissertation: (1) for the candidate to situate herself among scholars; and (2) to convey her original contribution to the discipline. In

describing New Rhetoric, Berlin also explains how the pedagogy allows the doctoral student to begin situating herself.

Within the context of contemporary composition, Berlin tells us that *truth* is dynamic, and that it does not reside only in the rhetor or only in the audience, but occurs at some point between them. For Berlin, *truth* is an evolving conversation—at once a point of agreement and also a catalyst for new discoveries. New Rhetorician Anne Berthoff implies support for Berlin’s stance, and she offers further explanation claiming that “neither knowledge nor language can preexist; they emerge simultaneously” (45). Berlin and Berthoff draw an image of the convergence of philosophy and rhetoric as they set forth a first principle (philosophy) of writing (rhetoric)—*What is \_\_\_\_? What is the cause of \_\_\_\_?*

In dissertation-writing terms, New Rhetoric does not view the discovery of new knowledge as a separate act from communicating newly discovered knowledge. In many ways, New Rhetoric redefines process writing as a spontaneous single act involving all four New Rhetoric elements of writing: *writer, reality or knowledge, language, and reader*. For New Rhetoric, the process *is* writing. The process *is* reading. The process *is* the act of interplay rather than the isolated, recursive acts of writing reading, revising, sharing, reading, revising as we have learned from process writing. Through New Rhetoric, Berlin ends the discussion of *What is process writing?* Process writing simply *is*. It can occur everywhere and at all times. A New Rhetoric-defined writing process, finally, unites writer and reader in an act that defies geography and time. Especially because this pedagogy requires writer and reader to interact, the campus writing center

offers an excellent site for dissertation-writers to seek assistance and experience a new process.

This particular intersection between philosophy and rhetoric is, perhaps, the most important for the dissertation-writing Ph.D. student. New Rhetoric, unlike Neo-Aristotelian, Current-Traditionalist, or Neo-Platonic rhetoric does not privilege either language or knowledge. New Rhetoric privileges interplay. The dissertation-writing student's dual charges, to situate herself among the scholars in her field and to discover some new knowledge about the field, embody the philosophical first principle, and dissertation-writers begin their research by asking *What is \_\_\_\_?* Answering *What is \_\_\_\_?* prompts the initial investigation of her discipline. A thorough exploration of *What is \_\_\_\_?* generally guides the dissertation-writer to a gap in the literature, what will become her discovery of *truth, knowledge, or reality*. The interplay of *writer, reality, language, and audience* found in New Rhetoric offers the dissertation-writer a way to both generate knowledge and communicate that knowledge. Because New Rhetoric pedagogy requires writer and reader to interact (with language and about knowledge), the campus writing center is an excellent site for practicing New Rhetoric pedagogy. As the Introduction notes, traditional writing centers already provide synchronous interaction between writer and reader or consultant. Even though the session topics vary in content, the goal is to discuss how the writer is conveying her knowledge. Therefore, I argue that the consultation is an act of New Rhetoric pedagogy.

This chapter introduces Berlin, Berthoff, and other modern rhetors who can be considered descendants of Aristotle, and who represent a contemporary point of convergence between philosophy and rhetoric. This point is New Rhetoric, and the

pedagogy is particularly appropriate for dissertation-writers. The next chapter focuses on current-day emerging philosophers, the dissertation-writing Ph.D. students. Current literature, as well as data from across the last four decades, show that Ph.D. students are entering doctoral programs and taking longer to complete. While some Ph.D. students devote eight years or more before earning the degree, others just walk away from an incomplete program. Chapter Two presents and discusses the harms and trends of slow completion times and high attrition rates. This demonstrates that a lack of faculty support presents one of the most common barriers to Ph.D. completion and as such is an area of much critical research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### DISSERTATION-WRITING

#### *The Impact on Ph.D. Completion Times and Attrition Rates*

High attrition from Ph.D. programs is sucking away time, talent, and money and breaking some hearts too.—Scott Smallwood

Aristotle's Final Cause identifies a line of philosophical inquiry that moves away from asking how things exist to asking why they exist. This move creates a new and greater emphasis on the use of reason and logic in philosophy, and it introduces persuasive argumentation (rhetoric) as an epistemological mode of philosophical inquiry. Additionally, Aristotle teaches his students that *logos* is the most persuasive rhetorical mode. To date, reason and logic remain integral to both philosophy and rhetoric. In Chapter One, Berlin addresses the failings of rhetorical and compositional pedagogies that do not view rhetoric and composition as ways of learning. Berlin's description of New Rhetoric, I argue, is the appropriate pedagogical approach for doctoral students writing a dissertation. Teaching the process of writing as the process of learning responds to the dissertation writer's dual charge: (1) to discover new knowledge in a chosen discipline; and (2) to clearly and persuasively convey that knowledge to the larger academic community.

The purpose of Chapter Two is to provide evidence that a need for a New Rhetoric-inspired pedagogy exists. A thorough exploration of relevant literature indicates

that Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) students, in general, are in trouble. Too many students enter programs but fail to complete within program or institutional guidelines. As a result, programs, institutions, disciplines, and especially, individual students suffer. The resulting costs include: (1) individuals pursuing a long-term advanced degree while generating income below the poverty level; (2) tuition costs and stipends awarded by programs and institutions in the form of scholarships and assistantships; and (3) all monetary costs associated with Ph.D. students, from subsidized health care to library materials, from office space to graduate faculty salaries (Golde, “Role of the Department” 693). Non-recoverable intangible costs also include lost productivity when students leave a program without completing their research and the devastating emotional burden of failure, for both the students who do not graduate and the faculty who invest time and emotional support in their students’ work.

Susan Gardner, who has spent her career studying K-20 student success in the U.S., addresses the problems of attrition rates (Gardner 61). In a 2010 report to the *Journal of Higher Education*, she notes that “these high attrition rates translate into high costs for institutions that sponsor these students, for the faculty who work with them, and of course, for the students themselves” (Gardner 62). Gardner's comment refers specifically to the financial burdens associated with students who take many years to complete or never complete their programs. However, the bottom line in a financial report cannot fully reflect all costs associated with slow completion times and high attrition rates.

David Pauley estimates that 25 percent of students in the humanities and social sciences leave their doctoral programs after entering candidacy, noting that “tales of

students mired, seemingly forever, in the ‘ABD’ [All But Dissertation] stage are ubiquitous in academic departments throughout the country (Pauley 28). Barbara Lovitts and Chris Golde agree, noting that “The most important reason to be concerned about graduate student attrition is that it can ruin individuals’ lives. Students who leave doctoral programs face isolation, humiliation, and debt in addition to the emotional burden of failure from which many cannot recover (Lovitts, “Transition to Independent Research” 316; Golde, “Role of the Department” 672; Hagedorn 6-7; Labaree 17).

### *Three Phases of Ph.D. Programs*

Sadly, the current model for U.S. doctoral programs has not evolved significantly since the first Ph.D. was awarded in 1861 (Bowen and Rudenstine viii). The format for U.S. Ph.D. programs involves progress through three phases that may overlap or appear as discrete stages (see Fig. 2.1). Phase One includes coursework and varies in length from two to four years. The purpose of coursework is to provide students with a broad understanding of the chosen discipline. Coursework may also introduce students to a deeper understanding of a particular facet of their discipline. However, coursework alone does not always provide the necessary depth and breadth of knowledge to prepare students for Phase Two. In these instances, students are expected to conduct independent research to acquire additional knowledge about the discipline. Following the guided and independent acquisition of knowledge, students enter the second phase, in which they prepare for and take comprehensive exams. Again, programmatic requirements vary, but most Ph.D. programs require students to pass two sets of exams, one written and the other oral. Administered by a committee of disciplinary experts, these exams are intended to



determine the student's successful understanding of subject matter. Passing this phase is crucial to the student's future academic career as an educator because these exams also act as a certification that the new graduate is competent to teach in her areas of specialization. In some programs, Phase Two immediately follows Phase One, and the rigors of coursework are assumed to have sufficiently prepared the students for these exams. Other programs expect students to spend several months to a year or longer independently exploring the discipline in ways that complement or expand upon coursework.

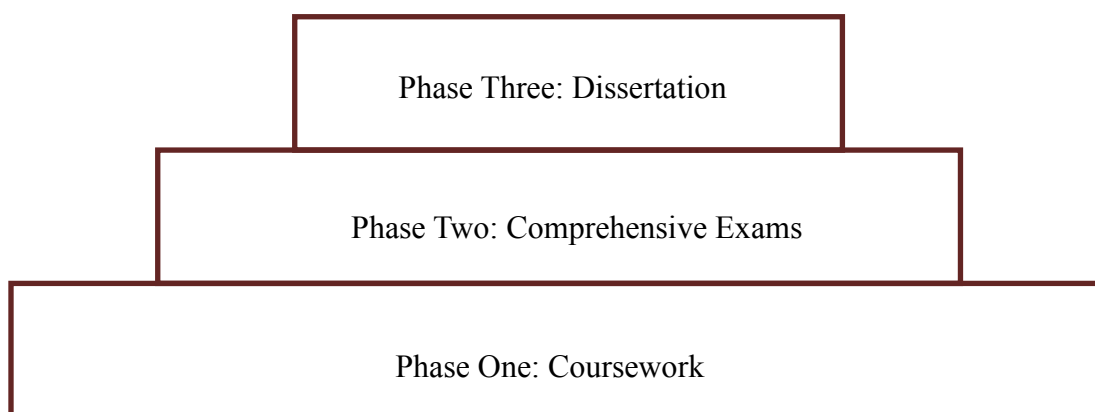


Figure 2.1: Three Phases of the Ph.D. Program

After Ph.D. students pass their comprehensive exams, they enter the third phase, researching and writing the dissertation. Students whose comprehensive exam preparation overlaps with the focus of their dissertation are already well ahead of their peers because they have received some degree of assistance preparing a reading list of significant works and authors. Some students complete their dissertation in only a few months. Others may devote as much time to Phase Three as they have spent in the first two phases combined.

The dissertation traditionally represents the candidate's initial endeavor into independent scholarship, an area for which there is currently no specific writing pedagogy. Graduate faculty often expect students in this phase to demonstrate a significant level of independence, unlike in earlier phases of the program, which have been predominantly structured (Lovitts, "Being a Good Course-taker" 142; Bourke; Hu 104). For instance, during Phase One, a faculty member provides a syllabus detailing the course objectives, reading materials, scope, and assignments. After coursework, advisers and committee members help the student identify areas of interest, construct reading lists, and prepare for exams during Phase Two. Following the exams, this accustomed level of structure usually disappears. Having entered candidacy, the final phase of the program, students may spend months aimlessly researching and drafting in hopes that inspiration will simply direct them to a more focused topic. However, if a candidate has little prior experience conducting a prolonged research project or constructing an extended argument, where does she go for assistance? Where should any student go to receive one-on-one writing assistance? The university writing center should be providing help to students across all levels of writing expertise, especially doctoral students. The question, then, is "Can a university writing center fill this pedagogical gap by providing research and writing support to doctoral students?"

Just as doctoral students move through three phases during their program, those who do not complete also exit at three distinct points (see Fig. 2.2).

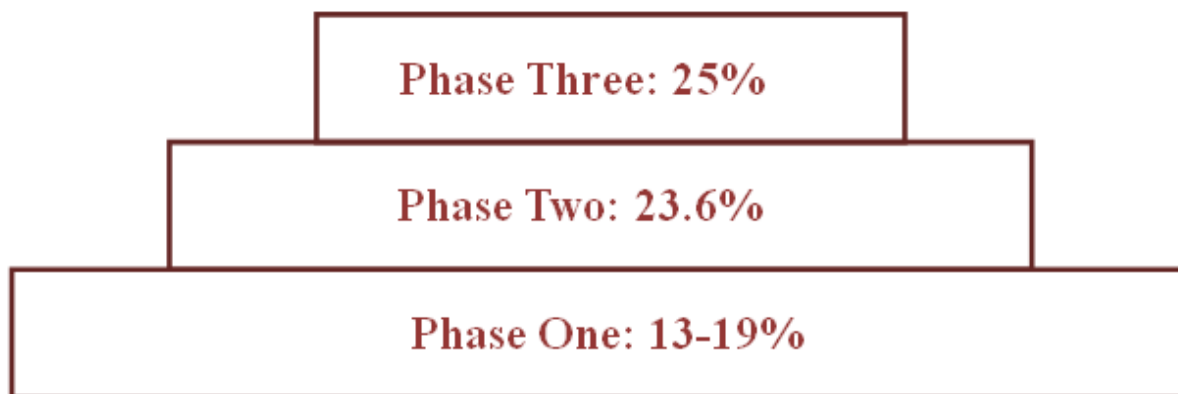


Figure 2.2: Three Phases of the Ph.D. Program with Attrition Rates

Approximately 13.8 percent leave either near or at the end of coursework during Phase One.<sup>5</sup> Students leaving the program during this phase may find that they entered as underprepared students, that they are simply not a good fit with the selected department, or that the academic lifestyle no longer interests them. By the end of the third year—usually between coursework and comprehensive exams—19 percent have left, and that number increases to 23.6 percent of the entering cohort by the end of the fourth year—between Phases Two and Three. Reasons for leaving at this time include fatigue, insufficient funding, and an increasing sense of isolation. The largest group of students, 25.5 percent, leave doctoral programs after passing their exams and entering candidacy (Garcia, Malott, and Brethower 190; Bell). Even though almost one quarter of Ph.D. students do not complete after a decade of enrollment, Lovitts and Nelson claim that doctoral students are overwhelmingly students who perform exceptionally at the Bachelors' and Masters' levels. If a program is producing a low rate of completion and a high rate of attrition, Nelson and Lovitts suggest looking inward toward the program to

<sup>5</sup> Data in Figure 2.2 reflect the percentage from the entering cohort and not a percentage of the remaining cohort after Phase One, Phase Two, and Phase Three.

find the problems (Nelson and Lovitts). The students who do continue begin their work as independent scholars, a research-intensive phase culminating with the completion of the doctoral students' first major work and a demonstration of their potential contributions to the discipline—the dissertation.

Two studies of the causes for long completion times and high attrition rates of doctoral programs have become standard reading for researchers. The first, *In Pursuit of the Ph.D.* by William G. Bowen and Neil L. Rudenstine (1992), is considered the first thorough exploration of trends in graduate education, the factors affecting outcomes, and the policies and program designs that contribute to attrition as well as those that enhance U.S. doctoral program retention. Results from the second and more recent study, conducted by Barbara Lovitts, were published in *Leaving the Ivory Tower: The Causes and Consequences of Departure from Doctoral Studies* (2001). Lovitts's work surveyed 816 doctoral program completers and non-completers and interviewed the non-completers, graduate faculty, and directors of graduate programs. The overlap of results in these two studies of barriers to completion emphasizes the reliability of both studies.<sup>6</sup>

Bowen and Rudenstine identify four general and four programmatic factors that contribute to high attrition rates. The four general factors include: 1) Completion rates and time-to-degree; 2) Fields of study; 3) Scale of the program; and 4) Student-year cost and associated costs. Like the Council of Graduate Studies Ph.D. Completion Project, Bowen and Rudenstine found that students who remain enrolled in a doctoral program for extremely long periods of time (between six and twenty-four years) become less likely to receive the degree with each passing year (121). Bowen and Rudenstine also discovered

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter Three for a discussion of study validity and reliability.

that doctoral students enrolled in certain fields of study (Math and Physics) have, in general, shorter completion times than those in other fields (English, History, and Political Science). Their study showed that doctoral students in Math and Physics received their degrees in 6.1 years, while English, History, and Political Science students completed in eight years, taking almost two years longer (Bowen and Rudenstine 132). The scale of the doctoral program was also a barrier to completion, with larger doctoral-granting institutions producing longer completion times and higher attrition rates than smaller institutions during the study period (Bowen and Rudenstine 154). Finally, Bowen and Rudenstine discovered that more expensive programs produced “low completion rates; long time-to-degree for those students who do earn doctorates; and [a] greater concentration of attrition in the later years of graduate study, rather than in the early years” (164, Lawson and Fuehrer 189). In addition to these general variables that might be found at any institution, Bowen and Rudenstine explored the possible program-specific policies and practices that might contribute to slow completion times and high attrition rates.

Noting that programmatic policies and practices may vary within institutions as well as across disciplines, the Bowen and Rudenstine study investigated five variable conditions that may be uniquely designed for every program: 1) Financial support; 2) Fellowship programs; 3) Program requirements and content; and 4) Program design, oversight, and culture. With half of their book devoted to programmatic design, readers should not fail to note the significance that Bowen and Rudenstine place on the design of individual doctoral programs regardless of institution type or discipline. The importance of careful program design is a recurring theme in literature concerning completion time

and attrition rate. The first variable that Bowen and Rudenstine review is financial assistance for graduate students. As one would expect, their findings support the idea that students who receive institutionally-awarded financial assistance complete more quickly and at a higher rate than those who are self-supported. Study results supported these findings across programs, institutions, disciplines, and student demographics (Bowen and Rudenstine 177-95). Likewise, students who received national fellowships (e.g., Danforth, Woodrow Wilson) also graduated sooner and at a higher rate than the general population of doctoral students (Bowen and Rudenstine 196-228). The decreased financial obligation that institutional assistance and national fellowships allow for seems to benefit students by freeing them to focus their time and attention on their doctoral programs rather than dividing their time and energy between work and academics.

Bowen and Rudenstine explain that “the ways in which universities and faculties define and conduct programs of graduate education matter enormously” (229). Focusing exclusively on the fields of English, History, and Political Science, the study discovered the two significant variable conditions among programs, institutions, and disciplines: 1) Areas or periods within disciplines that are given greater or lesser emphasis; and 2) Courses that differ in level of difficulty, methodology, inclusion or exclusion of theory, and in the number of courses offered and required (Bowen and Rudenstine 229-49). This means that a Ph.D. in English and a Ph.D. in History from even the same institution may offer the student completely different levels of depth and breadth, even though the degree may suggest otherwise. That said, the disparity between institutions may be even greater.

Bowen and Rudenstine also note several practices that contribute to attrition beyond the programmatic or institutional policies. They note that sometimes, students and

admissions committees simply make mistakes. A good student and a good program do not always make a good match. Also, many students fail to quickly adjust to the abrupt loss of academic structure when they complete coursework and comprehensive exams (Bowen and Rudenstine 254). While some students simply cannot begin the dissertation or even the prospectus, others cannot stop revising and refining their work. According to Bowen and Rudenstine, both situations result in students who feel they cannot move forward. Naturally, this slows their progress toward graduation and contributes to slow completion times and high attrition rates. Following what becomes a personal battle against time, the study also identifies: 1) Expectations concerning the originality of the dissertation; 2) Scholarly depth of the dissertation; 3) Disciplinary significance of the dissertation; 4) The student's inexperience with archival research of the magnitude required for a dissertation; 5) Faculty availability and level of expressed interest in the student's dissertation; 6) The student's increasing isolation from support groups both within and external to the academy; 7) The student's need for frequent evaluation and monitoring of dissertation progress; and 8) Other life choices made by the student or her extended family (Bowen and Rudenstine 256-67). Through these final eight variables, Bowen and Rudenstine imply that readers cannot underestimate the significant role that their individual Ph.D. programs play in the success of doctoral students. This is a theme that Barbara Lovitts revisits and one that other researchers focus upon with increasing frequency and emphasis.

In the results from her work about barriers to doctoral program completion, Lovitts focuses solely on programmatic issues. She prescribes ten policies, some the responsibility of the program and some the responsibility of the doctoral or prospective

doctoral student, to decrease completion times and attrition rates: 1) Undergraduate programs should prepare students for the culture of graduate school; 2) Departments should fairly report completion data and completion requirements so that there is no ambiguity; 3) Graduate students should visit the campus before attending; 4) Applications should do more than mention which faculty member they want to work with; 5) Students should teach a single course per year; 6) Programs should pay their students a living wage so that they are not required to take out loans or work another job to make ends meet; 7) Programs should closely monitor all advising relationships; 8) Programs should offer opportunities for professional growth; 9) Programs should provide a hospitable environment; and 10) Programs should conduct exit interviews (Lovitts and Nelson 1-5; Lovitts, “Transition to Independent Research” 296-325).

Gilliam and Kritsonis and Vincent Tinto also place the blame for attrition squarely on the shoulders of the program and the faculty. For example, programs should have an assessment of students by their faculty adviser so that students who are falling behind can be caught (Gilliam and Kritsonis 3; Tinto ix ). Tinto finds three places where faculty should be catching the underprepared or the failing students: the first period is during the transition into the doctoral program. This means that admission standards and early communication between students and mentors as well as students and program administrators and mentors and administrators is essential. The second crucial period that Tinto identifies is reaching Candidacy. This usually occurs following coursework and a period of independent study in U.S. universities. He believes that a close mentor or apprentice relationship will identify students who are under-prepared to continue before they have gone too far. Through this second area of identification, there is time to



intervene and prepare the student so that independent scholarship is not impossible to accomplish. The final period that Tinto identifies is during active research. If the student is closely monitored by advisers and administrators, everyone will notice where the student stumbles, and an intervention can occur much more quickly. Intervention at these three periods should alleviate attrition and also reduce completion times (Lovitts, “Who Makes It”).

Gilliam and Kritsonis, Tinto, and the Ph.D. Completion Project identify similar areas of student attrition and arrive at a shared recommendation: to increase *faculty support*. Even though Gilliam and Kritsonis and Tinto pinpoint areas where faculty support could decrease completion times and reduce attrition rates, they fail to explain *what kind* of increased mentorship is needed. To understand this significant omission, consider the three dangerous phases that these two studies identify: transitioning into a Ph.D. program, reaching candidacy, and active research. I agree that the initial transition into a doctoral program is an excellent point to mentor and observe new students to ensure that they are adjusting to new expectations and fitting in well with their peers and advisers. What these studies miss is that this is also an excellent point for faculty and advisers to note any writing deficiencies or offer an introduction to independent research writing. The second point where these studies recommend that intervention occur is after students have completed coursework and passed exams. This is another crucial point at which the dissertation writer can gain access not only to general mentorship but also to writing instruction or assistance that would be directly applicable to the task at hand. A writing course at this point could inform the student about writing expectations unique to her discipline, program, faculty, and project. Finally, specific writing assistance while the

student performs active research might help her become a more efficient and productive writer early on in the process. While close mentorship at these three junctures is necessary, the mentorship should be focused on helping the student design and compose a written product that will meet the needs of her advisers and committee.

Beyond close academic mentorship, another barrier to completion is the great difference between undergraduate and graduate cultures. According to Nelson and Lovitts, “academics often assume that a student’s knowledge of the discipline is all that matters, but advance awareness of the culture of graduate school is equally important” (2). Educators may miss opportunities to prepare some of the very best undergraduate students for life as graduate students. Nelson and Lovitts demonstrate a link between students who lack experience establishing and maintaining an extended researched topic or presenting at professional conferences and doctoral students who struggle or fail (2). These results concur with those from a study by Peter Allan and John Dory in 2001. Allan and Dory find that psychological and capability variables of the student as well as the program’s structure and other institutional factors may form significant barriers to completion (1-3). Janice Austin et al. find that professionals transitioning into the role of full-time doctoral students experience significant difficulty simply adjusting to the classroom and the student-teacher hierarchy (211). All three of these studies find that doctoral students are more likely to graduate if they have a strong and accurate understanding of graduate school in general and specifically of their program of choice.

Many studies also indicate that the individual student’s ability to adapt to graduate school is another significant barrier to completion. According to Scott Wilson and Emily Gibson, “graduate students drop out as a result of their experiences once they arrive on

campus” (157). They identify fourteen learning curves for under-prepared doctoral students:

weakness working with statistics, learning reading strategies, learning writing strategies, learning content, conducting research, balancing academic demands, balancing life demands, working independently, social isolation, independence in a new setting, developing social networks, prejudice in the academic setting, prejudice in the community, and financing graduate study. (153, 158)

In addition to the learning curves, studies also show that entering a doctoral program leads to stress and other emotional strains. One Graduate Resources Director describes the “catch-22” situation that results in doctoral students’ emotional fatigue. The “catch-22” situation tells students:

We value teaching, and you will teach (though you may receive little or no training as you become a TA), but if you excel at teaching we may reward you with a special grant that allows you *not* to teach. The demands will be so great that you will need a unique support system to help you through your academic quest, but the environment will allow little time to establish relationships, and the department may be so competitive that it hinders relationships from forming. You might want to take advantage of your adviser as a mentor, and they will enjoy that also; however, their research demands force them to commit their time and energy in the direction of research and publishing and may force you to do the same. You might

desire coherence in your life, and that would assist you in your personal wholeness and integration of your studies, but again, there is no time for such things. (Repak)

In further describing the “catch-22” situation, Repak also identifies many of the barriers previously noted by Nelson and Lovitts, but he offers no solution. Timothy J. Lawson and Ann Fuehrer, however, do offer a solution to emotional fatigue and stress. They recommend support groups and note that such groups have a very positive effect on increasing self-concept and decreasing anxiety (Lawson and Fuehrer 186). Generally, the goal for support groups and counseling sessions is for the members to help one another assess a troubling situation and move forward despite any setbacks. The sort of support group that Lawson and Fuehrer suggest mimics the one-on-one coaching or small group consultation sessions in a writing center setting. Therefore, the writing center may be an excellent host site for dissertation-writing support groups.

Money matters are also frequently presented as barriers to completion. The National Science Foundation report *U.S. Doctorates in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, notes that “Ph.D. recipients have increasingly had to go into debt to earn their degrees. By 1999, for the first time, more than 50 percent of graduating doctorate earners had accumulated education debt, and the proportion who said they owed more than \$20,000 had climbed to 20 percent, up from less than 7 percent a decade earlier” (Bell, Table 4-3). Wendy Stock et al. note that “financial aid is related to both the tier of a student’s Ph.D. program and to attrition rates. Securing some form of aid and receiving a fellowship (absent a work requirement) are more common among students enrolled at top-tier programs, and attrition is significantly lower among students with some form of aid, especially among

those holding fellowships” (Stock et al. 4). Dongbin Kim and Cindy Otts describe the ultimate price students pay for the high cost of attendance and lengthy completion times:

Given the considerable extent of time that students commit to doctoral study—the median graduate time to degree among students in all fields was 8.2 years in 2005 (Hoffer et. al, 2006)—and given that time to degree is an important indicator of doctoral students’ attrition rates (De Valero, 2001), this study that focuses on graduate debt and its relationship with time to doctoral degree is timely. The results generate significant implications for policy makers who need to be aware of the impact of increasing reliance on loans, particularly among doctoral students. (Kim and Otts 22)

Kim and Otts conclude that “the nation’s schools fail to fully educate many students who enter doctoral programs because the programs are plagued by high attrition rates” (Kim and Otts 1). Earning a Ph.D. has become a significant investment, and programs have become unable to adequately support their students. The tragic result is that some academically successful students must leave programs that they can no longer afford. Nelson and Lovitts’s advice that students should learn about programs and that program representatives should be forthcoming might prevent these good students from leaving their programs without completing.

Thus, the literature on doctoral program completion times and attrition rates identify three major areas from which barriers arise: 1) General institutional or discipline-specific policies and practices; 2) Program design; and 3) Student character or

personality. While several studies offer recommendations that may apply to a specific discipline, program, or student, the barriers that arise from problems within programs seem to appear more frequently. Bowen and Rudenstine devote half of their book to the topic, and the entirety of Lovitts's book focuses on programmatic issues that contribute to slow completion and high attrition. In fact, literature spanning from 1992 to 2011 identifies similar program practices and policies that negatively impact student progress.

In multiple studies of doctoral program completion times and attrition rates, student participants stated that unavailable advisers and committee members and generally unsupportive faculty members contribute directly to slow completion and high attrition rates. Willis's study from 2007 notes the following themes for graduate student success: 91.4 percent of the participants said "Professor Interest" is one of the "Most Important" characteristics for student success and completion; just below, but still within the "Most Important" category at 91.1 percent was "Knowledgeable," meaning that the adviser was knowledgeable about the student's topic (Willis 211-12). Students want to trust that their advisers are knowledgeable about topics that interest the students. To date, the surveys in these studies invite participants to describe faculty availability and support in a very general way. The ambiguity of the term *faculty support* in these studies also makes the term problematic. Do responding students refer to general faculty, graduate faculty, or advisers and committee members? Of course, levels of responsibility vary within the system of faculty hierarchy (e.g., Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor). Are students saying that the faculty remains professionally and emotionally distant, or do they mean that they cannot see faculty on campus? Perhaps students are not complaining that their faculty advisers are absent and unsupportive, but are trying to

articulate that faculty members are not providing specifically applicable writing instruction. Faculty may feel that they are professionally and emotionally supportive and physically available; however, if students' needs are not being met, then the students do not perceive faculty representative as helpful. Because many doctoral students either leave programs or significantly slow down their progress upon reaching candidacy, the independent scholarship phase is precisely when doctoral students' need for writing assistance is greatest. Berlin, Berthoff, and Young, Becker, and Pike all concur that writing creates knowledge, and the goal for a dissertation-writing Ph.D. student is to create and convey new knowledge. Writing is a way of learning and an ongoing, dynamic conversation—determining *reality* and discovering *truth* (“Contemporary Composition” 774; Berthoff 44; Young, Becker, and Pike 27).

The evidence is in, and it is compelling; numerous barriers to completion exist. As a result, U.S. Ph.D. programs report lengthy completion times and high attrition rates. The situation has only worsened over the last four decades, and current reports indicate that this trend will continue. Now that we are beginning to understand the causes of slow completion times and high completion rates, the following sections discuss some of the key terms and present the findings of the Ph.D. Completion Project (PCP). In an effort to compare a true cross-section of Ph.D. program completion times and attrition rates, the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) study chose to recruit survey participants from a wide variety of Ph.D. program and institution sizes and types. Therefore, the CGS study relies on institution classifications designed by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. These classifications have become standard categories in higher education scholarship, and they are used to compare like institutions. The study

for this dissertation also refers to participating institutions by their Carnegie Classification, so the next section explains these three standard classifications of U.S. doctoral-granting institutions as well as the Carnegie Foundation's methodology for evaluating institutions.

### *Carnegie Classifications*

The Carnegie Classification taxonomy, developed through the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in 1972, describes these classifications as “time-specific snapshots of institutional attributes and behavior based on data from 2008-2010,” noting that “institutions might be classified differently using a different time frame” (Bell; McCormick and Zhao 56). Basic classifications are subdivided into Associate's Colleges, Doctorate-granting Universities, Master's Colleges and Universities, Baccalaureate Colleges, Special Interest Colleges, and Tribal Colleges. Institutions conferring at least twenty research doctorates during each update of the classifications are considered doctoral-granting institutions. Institutions granting only professional degrees are excluded from this research. All doctoral-granting institutions are assigned to one of three categories based on a measure of their supported research activity. Thus, institutions with very high support for research activity may differ significantly in the number of enrolled doctoral students and the delineation of productivity, as measured by publications and degrees conferred.

Based upon the level of research activity, each doctoral-granting institution is assigned to one of three categories: RU/VH, RU/H, or DRU. RU/VH identifies Research Universities rated Very High in their levels of research productivity, instructional duties,



or a combination of both and community service. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of Georgia, and Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College all fall within this classification. RU/H is the classification for Research Universities rated as producing High levels of research, instructional duties, or both and community service. Auburn University, Boston College, and Rutgers are among the RU/H universities. DRU institutions offer research doctorates, but they do not support high levels of research. Clark Atlanta, Marquette, and Pepperdine Universities are among those in this classification. Throughout this dissertation, institutions are described by using their Carnegie Classification.

### *Definition of Key Terms*

Since 2004, when the CGS initiated the PCP, the council has reported disturbingly high attrition and slow completion times. Bourke et al. report that 70 percent of doctoral students complete and 30 percent withdraw by the end of the sixth year (28). The PCP measures completion times for public, private, RU/VH, RU/V, and DRU institutions. It also compares completion times across broad fields. Finally, the Project's findings reflect completion times for various student demographics (age, gender, marital status, prior education level and type, etc.). The structure for this chapter and much of the structure for the methodology follow the structure of the PCP.

One reason that attrition rates are an often overlooked area in doctoral studies is because there is no widely accepted understanding of the associated terms. For instance, when describing the related topics of doctoral retention, attrition, and completion, we might assume that retention refers to students completing one year and returning for the

following one. Likewise, we could define attrition as those students simply not returning. Completers might be the students who are retained until they graduate. However, a seemingly straightforward understanding of these terms ignores several important variables that render this perception flawed. Reducing the data to reflect students only through the binary of retention and attrition fails to report on common factors, such as taking time off from school or transferring to another institution to complete a different program's requirements. Therefore, the next section reviews key enrollment terms and identifies the most appropriate definitions of these terms based on similar studies.

### *Persisters and Non-persisters*

Two fundamental terms in this discussion are *persister* and *non-persister*. Linda Hagedorn notes that “measuring college student retention is complicated, confusing, and context-dependent” (16-17). Persisters enroll in college until completing degree requirements, and non-persisters exit the program before completing. However, Hagedorn invites us to contemplate how individual student choices stretch these definitions and skew obtainable data. A persister/non-persister binary does not account for students who persist at multiple institutions. She describes “Student A,” who enrolls for a couple of semesters, leaves the institution for several years, returns to the first institution, and completes all degree requirements. Similarly, “Student B” enrolls for a year, transfers to a second institution, and graduates from that second institution. These students meet the definition of both persisters and non-persisters at different points in their academic careers and at different institutions. Hagedorn describes eight more student enrollment examples that defy viewing enrollment as having dichotomous

outcomes. This study uses the term *persisters* to describe doctoral students who have completed at least one year of their doctoral program and who return for the following year.

### *Dropouts*

While a student who leaves a program or institution is informally considered to have dropped out, transferring or returning students and slow completion times complicate the precise meaning of a doctoral program dropout. Is it the student who leaves her program and returns several semesters or years later? Is it the student who transfers from one program to another? Is it the student who begins a program and does not return within a prescribed number of years? Slow completion times even complicate when and how dropouts may be determined. Has the student dropped out after ten years? Twenty? Can dropout status even be determined prior to the student's death? Due to the negative connotation and the degree of ambiguity associated with the term, this study does not employ the term *dropout*.

### *Attrition*

*Attrition* is far less likely than the term *dropout* to appear in informal discussions, but it is favored by scholars in higher education studies. Attaining a consensus about the definition of attrition can be tricky; however, some institutions simplify the term by setting a time limit for completion. In one case, Charlotte Kuh was enrolled in a Ph.D. Program at Yale University and had already set her defense date when she was notified that she had “left” the program because she had exceeded the seven-year expected

enrollment time for her doctoral program, and she was later informed that she had become a non-degree-seeking student (Kuh). Another complicating factor is that some institutions do not designate whether enrolled graduate students are enrolled as Master's or Doctoral students until they reach certain benchmarks. At any of these capstone points, a student who might personally identify herself as a Doctoral student may leave the program with a Master's and might never appear as a Doctoral completion or attrition statistic. Current research generally accepts doctoral attrition as the percentage of Doctoral students who exit a program before completion. Whether students exit through official or unofficial methods does not affect the understanding of attrition.

### *Completion*

*Completion* refers to students who have successfully exited a doctoral program. For instance, a student who enrolls in and completes that same program is a *completer*. So too, is a student who enrolls in a program, leaves the program, returns to the same program, and finally *completes* that program's requirements. Likewise, a student who enrolls in a doctoral program, leaves that program, enrolls in a new program, and completes that new program is still considered a *completer* for the second program, but she becomes an instance of attrition for the first program. While multiple configurations of completion exist, the PCP and my own study measure only those who begin and complete the same program, regardless of intermittent attendance or other interruptions.

### *Current U.S. Completion Times*

For nearly fifty years, U.S. institutions have reported high and steadily rising doctoral completion times and attrition rates. In its long-term study of Ph.D. student completion times and retention rates, CGS data show that:

Under highly favorable conditions, no more than three-quarters of students who enter doctoral programs complete their degrees; completion rates are higher in the physical and life sciences than in the social sciences and humanities; higher for men than for women; higher for majority than for minority students; and higher in smaller than in larger doctoral programs. (Bell)

Armed with this information, in 2004 the CGS initiated a dialogue about this national doctoral student crisis. Out of the discussion grew a series of pilot projects run by graduate school deans across institution types, sizes, and missions. The resulting reports became the basis for the PCP, the first comprehensive investigation into the barriers to completion of Ph.D. programs. The PCP's data address completion time separately from attrition because, even though lengthy completion times often lead to student attrition, slow completion results in its own set of problems. Thus, PCP reports completion and attrition data separately.

The updated 2010 PCP reports doctoral completion times across all fields, programs, institutions, and disciplines. Figure 2.3 indicates that by the end of the third year, 4.5 percent of Ph.D. students at all programs and doctoral-granting institutions successfully complete their program requirements. The seventh year is a turning point in

doctoral student completion statistics. While the number of students completing continues to grow, this increase in the percentage of completers begins to slow.

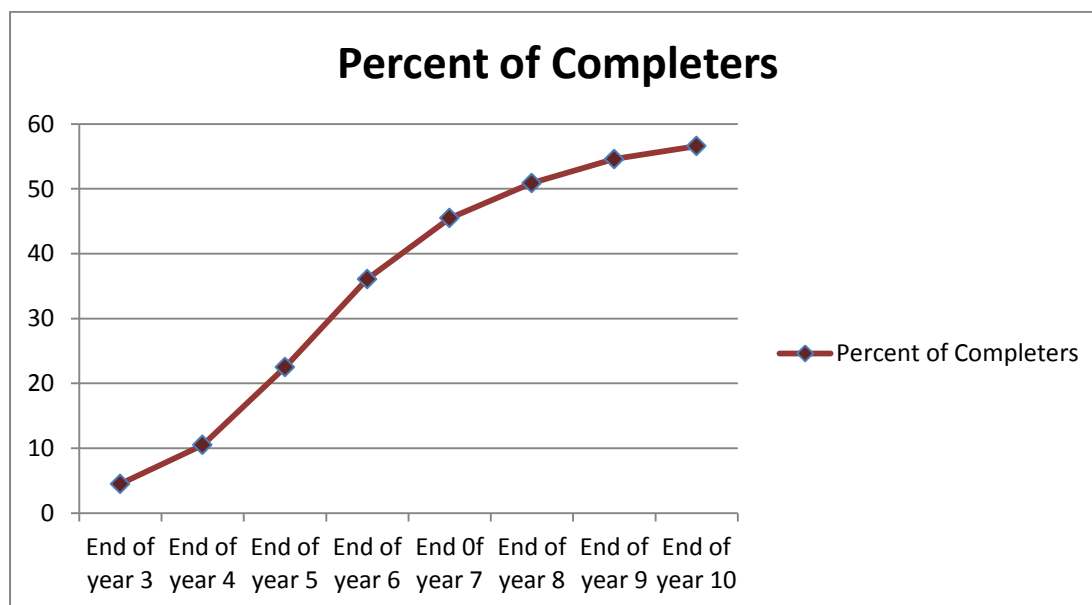


Figure 2.3: Percent of Completers by Year,  
Years Three through Ten (Bell)

The percentage of completers at the end of year seven is 45.5, but this represents an increase of only 9.4 percent. Finally, by the end of year ten, 56.6 percent of doctoral students have completed, and this reflects an increase of 2 percent more than year nine.

These data reflect two significant implications. First, doctoral program completion times suggest that fewer than half of entering doctoral students will complete their program's requirements in fewer than eight years. This is important for both students and faculty to acknowledge. Students who begin a program anticipating to exit successfully within four years may beat the odds, but the data suggest that they are more likely to double their anticipated length of enrollment. All too often students view their

department's degree completion guidelines as indications of what is both possible and expected. Faculty and program coordinators should also be aware that the ideal of graduating within four or five years is not the reality. In fact, the PCP notes that no broad fields have an average completion rate above 50 percent earlier than year seven. Thus, program administrators must alert entering Ph.D. cohorts to the realities of completion times and attrition rates.

A second important completion-rate implication is that students are most likely to graduate during their sixth year. Students who remain continuously enrolled during the first five years are statistically making the sort of progress that is consistent with completion. However, students who remain beyond year six lose that momentum, and each year they become less likely to graduate. They have, essentially, remained in the program beyond the point that statistical probability suggests they will graduate.

### *By Broad Field*

The PCP recognizes that students who enroll in some Broad Fields complete more quickly than others. Figure 2.4 demonstrates that great disparity exists in the completion times between the broad fields. Numerous variables account for this; however, the first notable variable to completion time is the field of study. The PCP classified twenty-four programs of study within five broad fields (see Appendix I for a list of the broad fields).

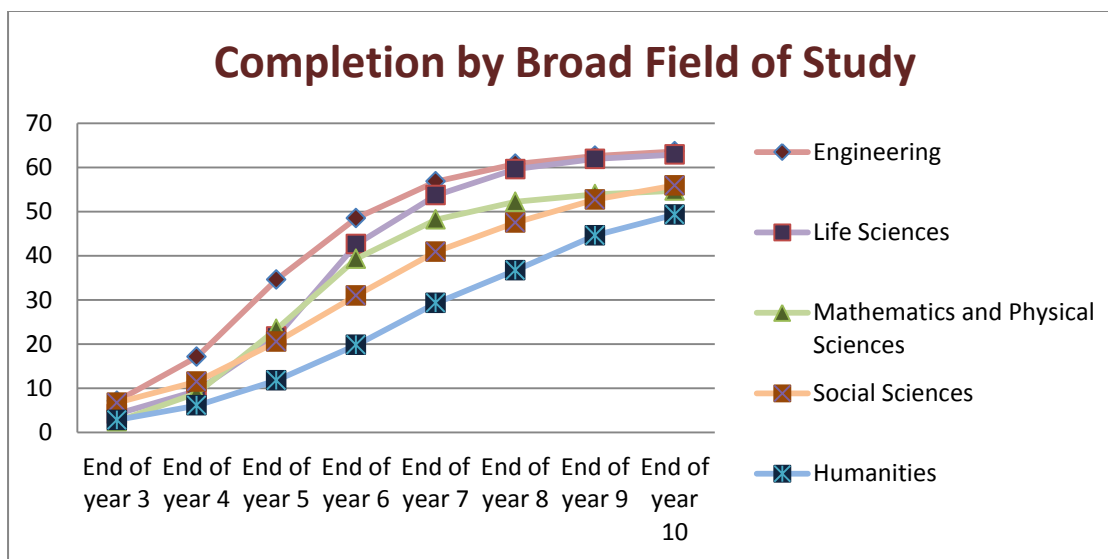


Figure 2.4: Percent of Completers by Broad Field of Study,  
Years Three through Ten (Bell)

#### *Disciplines with Exceptionally Short Completion Times*

Among the Broad Fields, Engineering had the highest percentage of completers (63.6 percent). Within the broad field of Engineering, the PCP lists five sub-fields (see Table 2.1).<sup>7</sup> Moving far more quickly than the overall average, 34.6 percent of Engineering students complete their degrees by the end of year four. A full 60.8 percent complete by the end of the fifth year, and this is 4.2 percent more than the overall average. From the first day of enrollment to the end of year ten, 63.5 percent of all Engineering doctoral students successfully exit their programs. This is 6.9 percent more than the average of all doctoral students.

<sup>7</sup> Table 2.1 and all tables for Chapter Two appear at the end of this chapter.



### *Exceptionally Lengthy Completion Times*

Within the broad field of Humanities, only 2.8 percent complete by the end of the third year (see Fig. 2.5). 11.8 percent of students complete by the end of year five. This is the lowest five-year completion rate for any of the broad fields. By the end of year seven, only 29.3 percent of students have completed. This is the lowest seven-year completion rate for any of the broad categories. By the end of the tenth year, 49.3 percent of students complete their programs, just under the 50 percent mark. This is the lowest ten-year completion rate reported for any of the broad fields, and it is the only field in which a full 50 percent completion rate is not achieved.

### *Current U.S. Attrition Rates*

Grand total attrition rates indicate a trend of slowly increasing rates over the course of a decade. At some point during their first year of enrollment, 6.6 percent of all doctoral students will leave their programs without completing. By the end of year two, this number increases by 7.2 percent, the highest single-year growth in attrition rates, to a total of 13.8 percent by the end of year two. During the third year, 19.9 percent of students leave without receiving their degree. This marks an increase of 6.1 percent in the attrition rate over the second year. Figure 2.5 also shows that the following year, attrition rates increase by only 3.7 percent, but this means that nearly one quarter, 23.6 percent, of all doctoral students leave without completing by the end of year four. This is especially significant because fourth-year students have generally completed coursework and comprehensive examinations.

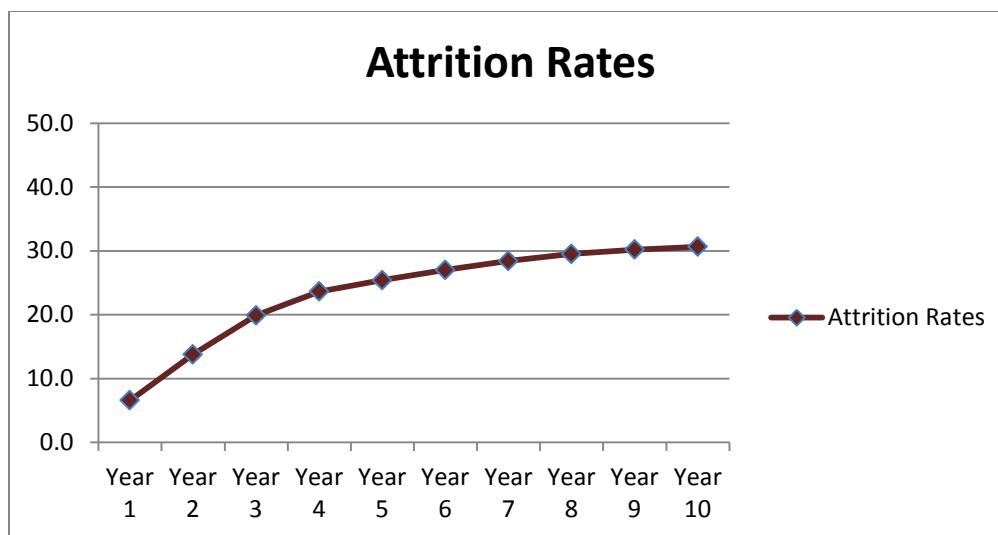


Figure 2.5: Attrition Rates by Year, Years One through Ten (Bell)

#### *U.S. Overall Attrition Rates*

Most students leaving their programs during or following the fourth year face a single obstacle to completion—writing the dissertation. By the end of the fifth year, over one-fourth (25.4 percent) of all students leave their programs without completing. While the rate of attrition continues to rise, this growth reaches a peak quite early—following the first year. As early as year four, the attrition rate increases steadily slows with each year, resulting in a mere .4 percent increase between years nine and ten. However, students remaining enrolled in a doctoral program longer than the fifth year gain no assurances that they will complete. In fact, a full 27 percent of students leave during year six; 28.4 percent leave by the end of the seventh year; and by year eight, 29.5 percent of students have left without completing. Just over 30 percent (30.2 percent) leave by the end of the ninth year, and after working on their doctorate for a full decade, 30.6 percent of students walk away.

### *Broad Field*

According to the PCP, attrition rates for all programs reach 6.6 percent by the end of year one (see Fig. 2.6). However, during the second year, the total attrition rate (13.8 percent) more than doubles from the initial rate. The overall attrition rate for year three is 19.9 percent. Students continue to leave their programs, though at a slower rate, across the fourth and fifth years, until 27.0 percent of students leave their doctoral programs by the end of year six. The attrition continues to increase, topping out at 30.6 percent by year ten.

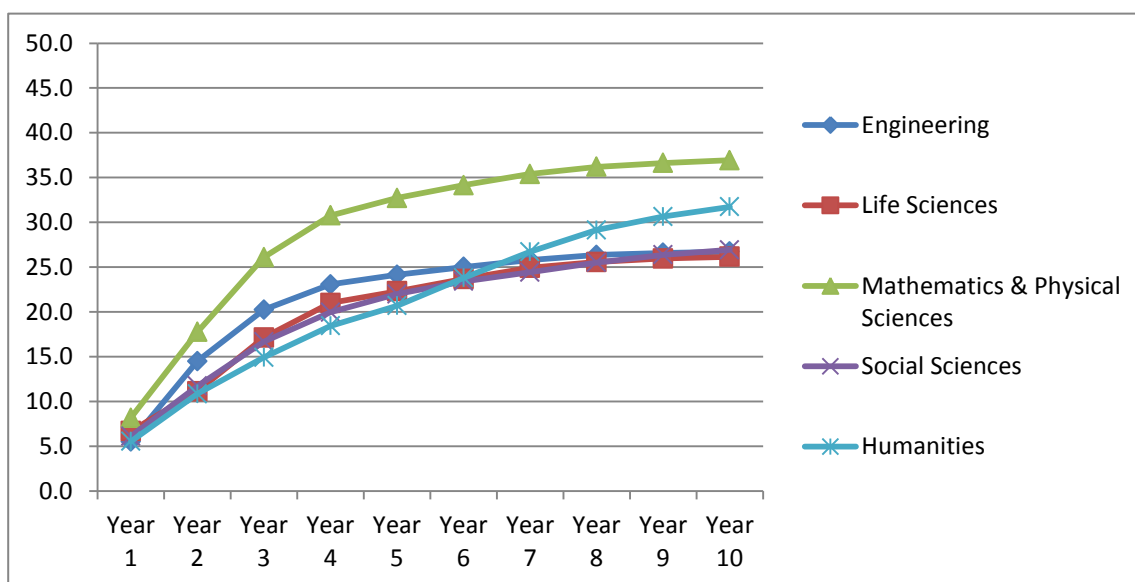


Figure 2.6: Attrition Rates by Broad Field,  
Years One through Ten (Bell)

Figure 2.6 shows that, while all broad fields end the first year with similar attrition rates, by years five, six, and seven, some fields produce significantly higher rates of attrition than others. For instance, by year two, the broad field of Mathematics and Physical

Sciences shows an attrition rate that is almost double the rate of Life Sciences, and Mathematics and Physical Sciences continues to produce the highest attrition rates across the first decade of enrollment. While the attrition rate in the broad field of Humanities slowly increases across the first five years of enrollment, the increase becomes more rapid in the second five years of enrollment. The steep incline of the blue line in Figure 2.5 reflects this trend.

#### *Discipline with an Exceptionally Low Attrition Rate*

Communication programs hold the lowest first-year attrition rates, with only 3.2 percent of students leaving these programs at that point. While Biomedical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Genetics and Molecular Genetics, Neuroscience, Communications, Psychology, and English Language and Literature programs all maintain single-digit attrition rates through the end of the second year, only Communication programs maintain an attrition rate below 10 percent beyond that point. In fact, Communications holds only a 9.3 percent attrition rate at the end of six years.

#### *Discipline with an Exceptionally High Attrition Rate*

At the one-year benchmark, Sociology programs have the highest attrition rate—10.8%. Computer Science and Information Sciences (CSIS) programs, at 43.3 percent, have the highest five-year attrition rate. By the end of ten years, CSIS programs still have the highest attrition rate, with more than half (51.4 percent of all students) leaving before completion. Other programs with high ten-year attrition rates include: Electrical and Electronics Engineering, in the number two slot with a 43.4 percent rate; Mathematics in

third place with a 39.9 percent rate; and Biology with the fourth highest rate of attrition—38.5 percent.

Overall, the existing body of work regarding Ph.D. completion times and attrition rates indicates that a shocking percentage of bright individuals are failing when they should be succeeding. While slow completion times may be the greatest contributor to attrition rates, numerous barriers may arise to prevent students from completing their work within the first decade of enrollment. The landmark study of Bowen and Rudenstine identified four major factors that contribute to high attrition rates:

- Time to completion;
- Field of study;
- Scale of program;
- Costs of program.

These categories described by Bowen and Rudenstine also draw attention to several program-level barriers, which became the focus of the next major Ph.D. attrition study conducted by Lovitts. The results of Lovitts's study led her to recommend eleven program-level policies:

- Applicants should investigate the productivity of faculty they want to work with;
- Enrolled students should teach a single course each year;

- Programs should prepare undergraduate students for the culture of graduate school;
- Programs should fairly report completion data and requirements;
- Programs should invite prospective graduate students to visit campus before they enroll;
- Programs should pay their students a living wage;
- Programs should monitor all advising relationships;
- Programs should offer opportunities for professional growth;
- Programs should provide a hospitable environment;
- Programs should conduct exit interviews.

Lovitts's attention to program-level changes suggests that truly beneficial changes to Ph.D. programs may be our best hope for reducing completion times and attrition rates.

In keeping with the work of Bowen and Rudenstine and Lovitts, this dissertation investigates the possibility of writing centers as sites for change on the program and institutional levels. Chapter Three describes the methodology of this study which was designed with Berlin's New Rhetoric in mind. Using the writing center as the location for a New Rhetoric pedagogy, this researcher designed an online survey instrument that investigated the practices, attitudes, and beliefs of three stakeholder groups: dissertation-writing Ph.D. students, graduate faculty, and writing center administrators. The following

chapter includes descriptions of the sample population, the survey instrument design, and the data analysis. Study results will follow Chapter Three.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Description of a Cross-sectional Online Survey Study*

This study seeks to measure beliefs of three stakeholder groups regarding U.S. Ph.D. writers, especially those entering the dissertation or thesis writing stage, to determine whether writing assistance or instruction specifically designed for dissertation writers would improve their likelihood of continuing in the program through the successful completion of all requirements. The researcher designed a survey and an emailed invitation to participate that was delivered to Dissertation-Writing Ph.D. (DWP) students, Graduate Faculty (GF), and Writing Center Administrators (WCA) at eighteen U.S. doctoral-granting institutions. This chapter describes in detail the study design, data collection, and data analysis procedures.

In general, the researcher divides design into two initial phases. During Phase One, the researcher establishes the sample population. In the second phase, the researcher determines the population estimate and the reliability of that estimate (Glasgow 2-1). Following the study design, the researcher administers the chosen instrument, conducts data collection and analysis, and records the results and conclusions.

#### *Study Sampling*

Sampling, or identifying the population containing study participants, is the first step in conducting a study. The steps to establishing the sample population include



determining the appropriate methods for sample selection and size as well as the study method. Sample selection and size methodology often depend on the purposes of the study. For instance, if a study hopes to determine the percentage of unmarried males living within a specific community, the study parameters would limit recruitment to only those males with residences in that community. However, if a study seeks to identify males either living or working within a specific community, the parameter widens to include males who might live outside the setting.

For this study, the overall population might include anyone even tangentially connected to DWPs who are expected to write a dissertation or thesis. However, this large population hypothetically includes all administrators, faculty, students, and family members of doctoral students at all U.S. institutions. Therefore, the researcher first narrowed the target population to the 297 doctoral-granting institutions identified as such by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in their updated 2010 report (*Carnegie Foundation*). Doctoral-granting institutions included in the Carnegie Classifications collectively award 81 percent of all U.S. Master's degrees and 92 percent of all doctoral degrees. The Carnegie Foundation is a non-profit organization considered to be an initiator, innovator, and integrator in the field of education. The Foundation strives to provide opportunities for leaders in education to conduct research about the issues affecting the greatest number of students, to share the benefits of this research, and to collaborate on gaining new insight (*Carnegie Foundation*). The Foundation recognizes three divisions of doctoral-granting institutions: (1) Research universities supporting very high levels of research activity (RU/VH); (2) Research universities supporting high levels of research activity (RU/H); and (3) Doctoral research universities (DRU). The

Foundation's methodology identifies 109 institutions as RU/VH, 99 as RU/H, and 90 as DRU. This researcher randomly selected thirty institutions: ten RU/VH, ten RU/H, and ten DRU to begin the recruitment procedures.

### *Random Sampling Procedures for this Study*

Using randomization software, the researcher compiled a list of the 109 RU/VH institutions. The researcher created thirty mock institutions for Table 3.1 to provide an example of the randomization procedures. Column 1 simply provides reference numbers. The second column in Table 3.1 lists these mock institutions by name. Column 3 shows that, while all thirty institutions remain in the list, they now appear in a computer-generated random order. In the fourth column, each mock institution's name is replaced with a randomly-generated numerical identifier. In the next step of randomization, the software selects ten schools for the researcher to contact. These selections are highlighted in Column 4, and then ten numerical identifiers are placed in Column 5. Column 6 shows that each of the ten schools invited to participate is assigned a two-part alpha-numeric identifier. Part one of the identifier represents the institution type: RU/VH, RU/H, or DRU. A hyphen separates the institution type code from the number, and each institution is assigned a number beginning with one.

The purpose of the randomization process is to ensure that each school has an equal and known opportunity of being selected, and second, that no institution receives preferential treatment for selection (Glasgow 2-1). The procedures used in this study provide three separate levels of randomization—randomized ordering of names, randomized selection of ten, and randomized ordering again, and two levels of

confidentiality—randomly assigned numerical identifiers and institution type alphanumeric identifiers. These procedures were conducted for the lists of all RU/VH, RU/H, and DRU institutions, resulting in one list of ten RU/VH institutions, coded RU/VH-1 through RU/VH-10, one list of RU/H-1 through RU/H-10, and one list of DRU-1 through DRU-10.

### *Sample Size for This Study*

The researcher narrowed the study sample population to only ten doctoral-granting institutions at each of the three research levels. As a courtesy, the researcher also sought local Internal Review Board permission to recruit from the thirty identified institutions, and a total of eighteen institutions, eight RU/VH, five RU/H, and five DRU granted permission for the researcher to recruit. Subsequently, the institution identifiers became RU/VH-1 through RU/VH-8, RU/H-1 through RU/H-5, and DRU-1 through DRU-5 (see Table 3.2).

The researcher further narrowed the field of potential participants to three groups of stakeholders found at all eighteen institutions. Group One was limited to only dissertation-writing Ph.D. Students (DWPs) in Doctoral programs. DWP students were selected as a target population because they composed the affected population of graduate student writers. The second group contained only Graduate Faculty (GFs) members, and this population was selected because they advised and encountered DWPSs as part of their everyday duties. The third and final group included only Writing Center Administrators (WCAs). This final group provided the campus with writing resources.

At the institutions already offering writing assistance to graduate students, these initiatives often emerged from the writing center.

### *Recruitment*

Recruitment began with an emailed invitation to participate sent from the researcher's account to the highest ranking Academic Officer (AO) and all Deans (Ds) at all participating institution. Appendix A is a copy of the email template sent to all eighteen institutions. The content of the email describes the study and the online surveys, contains separate Universal Resource Locator (URL) links to the GF, GS, and WCA surveys, and asks the AOs, and Ds to forward the email containing the links to the three stakeholder groups. The survey opened on October 2, 2012 and closed on October 17, 2012. A follow-up email sent to all AOs and Ds on October 8, 2012 appears in Appendix B. A low response rate from this recruitment phase indicated the need for a second phase of recruitment.

On January 14, 2013, the researcher began the second phase of recruitment. This time, the researcher contacted all Deans (D) and the Head (H) or Chair (Ch) of each academic department for all eighteen institutions. Appendix C is a reproduction of this email. A follow-up contact on January 23, 2013, with Ds, Hs, and Chs, also contains information about the study, links to the surveys, and a request to forward the email to all three stakeholder groups. This follow-up email appears in Appendix D.

## *Study Instrument*

### *Research Instrument Types*

A research instrument is a tool for measuring data. Interviews, experiments, and questionnaires are all examples of research instruments. Glasgow insists that study instruments should be selected using the following criteria: (1) The instrument is the best possible option based upon available resources; (2) The instrument yields valid data; (3) The instrument yields reliable data (2-2). Criterion one, available resources, requires the researcher to consider the study in terms of what research is possible to accomplish. For example, this researcher knew from the outset that any type of synchronous interview with participants from the three stakeholder groups was unfeasible. The population was too large and too widely dispersed across the U.S. for the researcher to undertake face-to-face or online interviews, and the researcher had no funds and insufficient time for the necessary travel. Because the researcher hoped to elicit subjective responses regarding DWP student writing, an experiment would also have been unhelpful. An experiment for this topic would, ideally, require a long-term study in order to compare a control group of DWP students who receive no writing assistance or instruction as part of the program and other groups that each receive a different type of writing assistance or instruction. Again, time constraints and the absence of resources precluded an experiment of this magnitude.

Questionnaires, however, presented an affordable instrument that would also elicit the desired information. Questionnaires do not offer the interviewer a method of following up on responses, but carefully designed questions allow respondents to convey their ideas. Paper questionnaires were immediately rejected, not only on the basis of time and budgetary constraints, but, as Glasgow notes, because of several significant

disadvantages to the paper questionnaire (2-4). First, participants are simply less likely to respond. Second, they may respond, but they are likely to forget or neglect to return the completed survey. Third, respondents might intentionally or unintentionally skip questions, and paper questionnaires provide no method for reminding respondents to check their answers. Fourth, if a paper survey is provided to a group, the individual participants are less likely to provide honest, thoughtful responses. Fifth, the desire to fit in with the majority further reduces the number of respondents, as some participants who fear they may represent outlier opinions may refuse to respond to paper questionnaires while in a group setting (Glasgow 2-4, 2-5). Likewise, oral surveys were rejected as an effective option because the researcher lacks resources, and because they become unreliable when untrained or under-trained interviewers conduct the interview (Glasgow 2-5). Another option, an online questionnaire in the form of a survey, appealed to the researcher. The online survey instrument could be designed and administered with the assistance of the Survey Research Center (SRC) located at the University of Georgia's Athens campus. While these services required some funds, the researcher received a research award to offset the fees.

Criterion two for strong study design requires the instrument to present valid data. A research instrument is valid when it measures what it is supposed to measure (Glasgow 2-5). For instance, while a measuring cup is a valid instrument for measuring flour or sugar, the cup cannot provide valid data about a length of string or the weight of an infant. In determining validity, the researcher should ask questions such as, "Could an online survey elicit information regarding stakeholder beliefs about graduate writers?" If the answer to this or similar questions is "No," then the researcher should reconsider

other study designs. However, if the answer is “Yes,” then the researcher should continue with the chosen instrument, in this case the online survey.

Criterion three refers to the instrument’s reliability. Glasgow notes that a research instrument’s reliability is demonstrated when the study repeatedly provides consistent data. Reliability is an important consideration for studies eliciting subjective responses from participants because subjective responses are themselves frequently inconsistent within any group or even for an individual (Glasgow 2-5). Glasgow identifies subjective responses as data that describe the participant’s beliefs and attitudes: “Beliefs are subjective opinions that indicate what people think. Attitudes are subjective opinions that identify what people want” (Glasgow 2-9). When a person *thinks* that handwritten communications are superior to electronic communications, this is a belief. When a person *prefers* to receive handwritten communications over electronic communications, this is an attitude. Subjective responses present challenges to a study’s reliability because subjectivity is dynamic. For example, subjective responses may be influenced by context, mood, or experiences. If asked whether she prefers a vegetable, a fruit, or a dairy product, at one moment a child might choose a fruit over a vegetable. However, if the context features a specific vegetable (asparagus), or a specific fruit (apricot), the child’s choice might change. Other contextual shifts, like time of day or mood, are also likely to influence the child’s subjective response. Our imaginary child might select a dairy product (egg) for breakfast, but that might not be her choice for the evening meal. If given the opportunity, she might consider another dairy product—ice cream—for any time of the day simply because it makes her happy. Finally, personal experiences also influence subjective responses. For instance, individuals who drop out of graduate

programs before completion are more likely to find fault with those programs than students who complete the program's requirements. While all these subjective responses provide valid responses, they also demonstrate that subjective responses are likely to shift. Because subjective responses produce a low level of study reliability, data from subjective responses should not be used to determine, for instance, the long-term gas mileage of a vehicle. Instead, data from subjective responses are best used to elicit a snapshot of current opinions and beliefs.

### *Instrument Selection for This Study*

The researcher selected an online survey to collect data, and she designed a set of three separate online survey instruments. The first survey, the Dissertation-Writing Ph.D. (DWP) Student Survey, was administered to participating DWP students. The Graduate Faculty (GF) Survey was administered to participating GFs, and the Writing Center Administrator (WCA) Survey was administered to all participating WCAs. To simplify data collection, the SRC created three separate URL links, one for each survey at each school. As a result, the study actually contained 54 surveys, eighteen each of three different types. Table 3.1 illustrates the breakdown for all 54 surveys. Column 1 of Table 3.1 provides reference numbers. Column 2 lists the alpha-numeric institutional identifiers, and Columns 3 through 5 indicate the surveys for DWP students, GFs, and WCAs, respectively.

A notice of informed consent, explaining the study's purpose and the level of confidentiality guaranteed to the participants, precedes each survey. (Appendix E is a copy of the informed consent document.) Selecting the double-forward-arrow icon in the



lower right corner of the screen indicated consent and allowed participants to begin the survey. These surveys and data were collected and remain on a secure UGA server accessed through the SRC. Due to an initial low response rate, the survey was available in two phases. Phase One began in late October 2013 and a total of 119 DWP students, 20 GFs, and 6 WCAs participated. Phase Two occurred in January 2013. The final response rate was sufficient to avoid a Phase Three.

### *Development of the Survey Instruments*

#### *Wording of Questions*

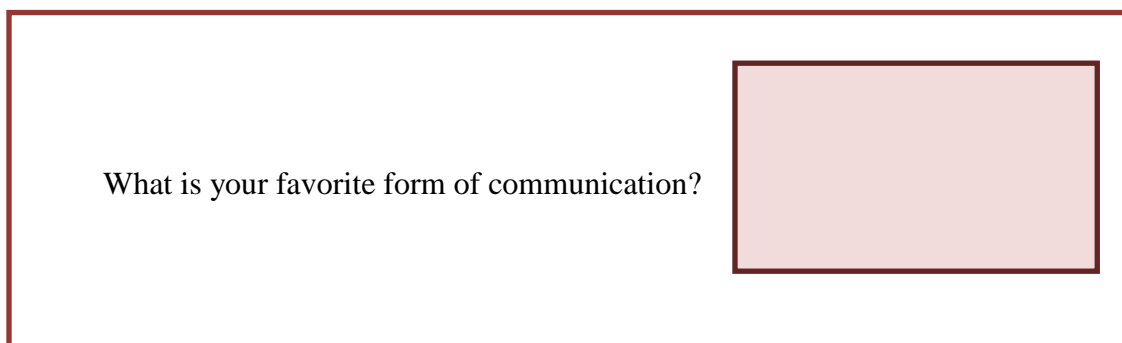
The wording of survey questions and response options is crucial to ensure that participants gain a clear understanding of the desired information. If respondents correctly interpret the questions and answer options, they are likely to provide more accurate information than if they are unsure about what the question is asking. Glasgow provides several tips for researchers as they begin crafting questions:

- Avoid using epithets or other words that elicit strong emotions;
- Avoid ambiguous terms;
- Avoid jargon;
- Avoid combining questions;
- Avoid questions that might create legal or moral vulnerability for respondents;
- Conform to Standard English Usage;
- Use concise language;
- Offer an “I don’t know” option. (2-5, 2-6)

Following these guidelines ensures that: (1) Respondents may reply honestly and unemotionally; (2) Respondents clearly understand the information elicited; (3) Questions are neither demeaning nor too sophisticated for respondents; (4) The researcher must clearly articulate questions for respondents; (5) Respondents do not have to weigh responding truthfully with potential consequences should their identity be revealed. With assistance from the SRC, the researcher followed Glasgow's guidelines in order to elicit the most honest response from participants. All efforts were made to construct clearly articulated and concise questions.

### *Types of Survey Questions*

While survey questions may appear in a variety of formats, there are generally considered to be two major question types: open-ended questions and closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions do not provide answer options. Instead, they require the respondents to compose an answer using their own vocabulary (Glasgow 2-7). An example of an open-ended question eliciting a subjective response is: "What is your favorite form of communication?" In this case, the survey designer would type the question preceding a blank space for the response. For an online survey, an open-ended question might look like Figure 3.1:



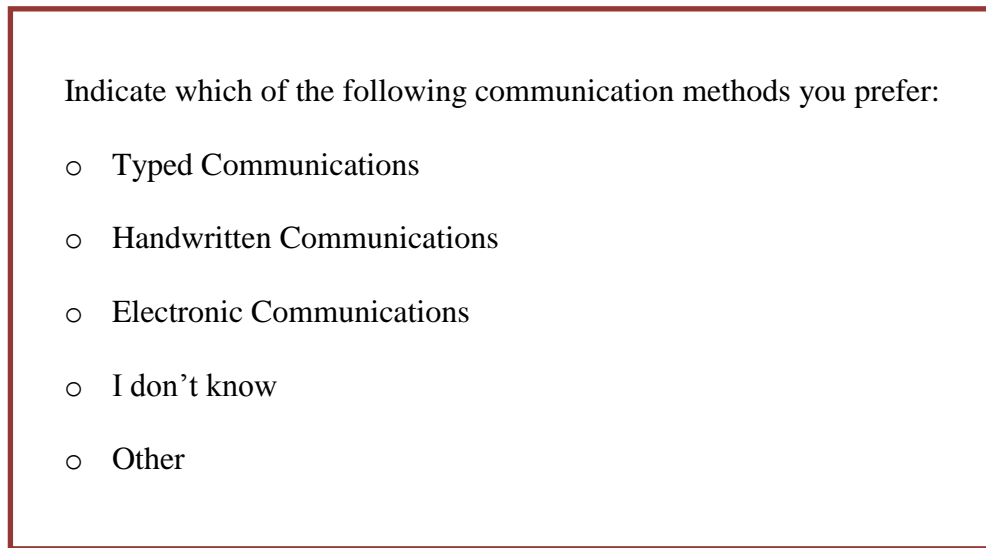
What is your favorite form of communication?

The image shows a survey form with a dark red border. Inside, the question "What is your favorite form of communication?" is centered. To the right of the question is a light pink rectangular box with a dark red border, representing an expanding text area for the respondent's answer.

Figure 3.1: Example of Open-ended Question

The expanding box allows respondents room to reply in several sentences. Open-ended questions present an advantage in that the response may provide new ideas or areas that the researcher had not considered initially. This means that the collected data will be richer. Even though open-ended questions provide valuable additional data for investigating, they require the respondent to spend more time composing an answer than closed-ended questions. Glasgow notes that “time intensive,” open-ended questions are often considered inconvenient for participants and that the data are more difficult to analyze (2-7). As a result, impatient respondents may skip or provide brief answers to open-ended questions. The unpredictability of responses to open-ended questions also complicates data analysis and coding and increases the number of outliers; thus, it further reduces the study’s reliability. Even considering the difficulty of analysis, this researcher chose to include several open-ended questions in the online survey. Because one of the study’s goals is to learn what writing assistance exists for DWP students across the U.S., the researcher collected data that included ideas and practices that she had not yet considered.

On the other hand, closed-ended questions provide a list or range of answer options for the respondent to select from. Because closed-ended questions require selection rather than composition, they are completed more quickly and are less likely to be skipped; their range of responses, furthermore, is almost entirely controlled by the survey designers (Glasgow 2-7). In an actual survey, the formatting of this question might look like Figure 3.2.



Indicate which of the following communication methods you prefer:

- ☐ Typed Communications
- ☐ Handwritten Communications
- ☐ Electronic Communications
- ☐ I don't know
- ☐ Other

Figure 3.2: Example of Closed-ended Question

In contrast to open-ended questions, closed-ended questions are easier to analyze because the prescribed responses become the codes and categories for future analysis. For example, during data analysis, the researcher could very easily describe how many respondents preferred typed, handwritten, electronic, or other forms of communication, as well as the number of respondents who were unable to decide. It is important to remember, however, that these are still subjective responses that may vary across time. The resulting data will only provide a momentary glimpse of the beliefs and attitudes held at the time the survey was completed.

### *Types of Questions for This Study*

The researcher included primarily closed-ended questions, but she also carefully selected several open-ended questions for the online surveys. The DWP Student Survey in Appendix F contains thirty closed-ended questions and eight open-ended or partially open-ended questions, for a total of thirty-eight questions. A partially open-ended question might ask about enrollment duration for the DWPs, but it would also require the DWP respondent to select an answer from several options. Appendix G is a reproduction of the GF Survey, which contains twenty-eight closed-ended questions and sixteen open-ended questions, for a total of forty-four questions. The WCA Survey appears in Appendix H and contains eleven closed-ended questions and thirteen open-ended questions, for a total of twenty-four questions.

### *Data Collection*

Online surveys produce primary or raw data. This means that the data are collected directly from respondents and have not yet experienced any processing or manipulation. For this study, the researcher's online survey collected primary data from three groups (DWP, GF, and WCA) at eighteen doctoral-granting institutions. This raw data was stored in a secure server under the purview of the Survey Research Center (SRC), a unit of the Office of the Vice President for Research at the University of Georgia. The researcher provided the survey questions to the SRC, where a representative created and coded the survey using Qualtrics survey design software. A unique URL was designed as a survey link for each of the three groups at each of the eighteen institutions.

As a result, a total of fifty-four links were created. Thus, survey results became easily accessible to each group at each institution.

### *Data Analysis*

After the survey was concluded, data were compiled into three reports noting frequencies, or the number of identical responses, for each question. The first report included all tallies for all DWP responses and identified missing data for questions that DWP respondents skipped. Missing data may occur when respondents do not understand a question, do not have access to the answer to a question, choose not to answer a question—even when “choose not to answer” is an option—or accidentally skip a question. Surveys may be designed to prevent missing data by requiring an answer for each question before respondents are allowed to proceed or by alerting respondents to skipped questions. However, one participating institution for this study required the survey design to allow respondents to skip questions as a condition of that institution’s permission to recruit. All three reports provided the researcher with charts listing the total number of DWP, GF, and WCA respondents, as well as the number skipping and responding to each answer option. The reports also calculated the corresponding percentage of responses for each answer based on the total number of responses for that question. This process accounted for missing data and provided a more accurate response rate than simply noting the percentage of total survey participants selecting each answer for the specified question.

The researcher conducted the study to determine whether the three stakeholder groups believed that writing assistance or instruction for doctoral students might help

these students produce a dissertation more easily. As Chapter Two notes, students who consistently progress through all three phases of their programs are those most likely to complete all requirements and earn their doctoral degree. Thus, the researcher anticipated that the appropriate method of data analysis was first to conduct an intensive study of only three groups at the participating institutions. Using a holistic approach, all cases were grouped as DWP, GF, or WCA, and the characteristics of trends for all responses were noted. Because this was a short-term, or synchronic, study, each group's responses were tabulated, and results between groups were compared to determine the implied knowledge and attitudes. The purpose of descriptive analysis was appropriate for this study because: (1) It can determine knowledge and attitudes; (2) It can pinpoint areas for further and more in-depth study; (3) It is simple enough that statistical expertise is not required; and (4) it may be completed quickly, providing a rapid project overview.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter set forth the methodology for the researcher's study, which investigated the beliefs and attitudes of three stakeholder groups regarding writing instruction and assistance for DWP students. Because the researcher hoped to capture a snapshot of subjective responses, an online survey instrument that included both open- and closed-ended questions was designed and administered to the DWP students, GFs, and WCAs eighteen U.S. doctoral-granting institutions. Due to budgetary and time limitations, other instruments—such as individual or group interviews, telephone interviews, and paper surveys—were rejected. Data collection was conducted through UGA secure servers in the possession of the Survey Research Center located on the

University of Georgia campus in Athens, GA. Descriptive data analysis of the study results began in late January, 2013.

The researcher gave careful consideration to overall study design, as well as to sampling methodology, instrument selection and design, data collection, and data analysis. Thus, the results provide valid data for both DWP and GF respondents. Chapter Four presents and discusses the results of the study described in this chapter. The first section explains the sample population's demographics, and the rest of the chapter is devoted to analysis of the attitudes and beliefs expressed by study participants. One of the most interesting findings suggests that many DWP respondents had not previously contemplated the potential of writing instruction or assistance.



Table 3.1: Randomization Process Using Thirty Mock Institutions

<b>Mock RU/VH Institutions</b>						
No.	Institution Name	First Random Ordering	Random # Identifier	Random Selection (Selection Order)	Second Random Ordering	Alpha-Numeric Identifier
1	A	F	002255		039847	RU/VH-1
2	B	BB	188324		788431	RU/VH-2
3	C	H	192834	192834 (6)	685475	RU/VH-3
4	D	U	443354		891289	RU/VH-4
5	E	Y	163857		091459	RU/VH-5
6	F	A	159354		954781	RU/VH-6
7	G	O	487591		192834	RU/VH-7
8	H	V	740302		580648	RU/VH-8
9	I	X	091459	091459 (10)	192834	RU/VH-9
10	J	I	685745	685745 (1)	128911	RU/VH-10
11	K	E	580648	580648 (4)		
12	L	L	042635			
13	M	G	585127			
14	N	DD	987356			
15	O	M	039847	039847 (8)		
16	P	K	547234			
17	Q	AA	894657			
18	R	M	211537			
19	S	O	532872			
20	T	CC	954781	954781 (2)		
21	U	J	458794			
22	V	Z	788431	788431 (5)		
23	W	D	248687			
24	X	T	287445			
25	Y	C	652947			
26	Z	R	597559			
27	AA	Z	891289	891289 (9)		
28	BB	B	214575			
29	CC	S	893255			
30	DD	Q	128911	128911 (3)		

Table 3.2: Participating Institutions with Alpha-numeric Identifiers

<b>Participating Institutions</b>	
<b>RU/VH</b>	
<b>No.</b>	<b>Alpha-numeric Institutional Identifier</b>
1	RU/VH-1
2	RU/VH-2
3	RU/VH-3
4	RU/VH-4
5	RU/VH-5
6	RU/VH-6
7	RU/VH-7
8	RU/VH-8
<b>RU/H</b>	
<b>No.</b>	<b>Alpha-numeric Institutional Identifier</b>
1	RU/H-1
2	RU/H-2
3	RU/H-3
4	RU/H-4
5	RU/H-5
<b>DRU</b>	
<b>No.</b>	<b>Alpha-numeric Institutional Identifier</b>
1	DRU-1
2	DRU-2
3	DRU-3
4	DRU-4
5	DRU-5

Table 3.3: Participating Institutions with Alpha-numeric Identifiers

Showing Number of Surveys Created for Study

Surveys Created and Hosted on Secure UGA Servers				
RU/VH				
No.	Institutional Identifier	DWP Student Survey	GF Survey	WCA Survey
1	RU/VH-1	✓	✓	✓
2	RU/VH-2	✓	✓	✓
3	RU/VH-3	✓	✓	✓
4	RU/VH-4	✓	✓	✓
5	RU/VH-5	✓	✓	✓
6	RU/VH-6	✓	✓	✓
7	RU/VH-7	✓	✓	✓
8	RU/VH-8	✓	✓	✓
RU/H				
No.	Institutional Identifier	DWP Student Survey	GF Survey	WCA Survey
1	RU/H-1	✓	✓	✓
2	RU/H-2	✓	✓	✓
3	RU/H-3	✓	✓	✓
4	RU/H-4	✓	✓	✓
5	RU/H-5	✓	✓	✓
DRU				
No.	Institutional Identifier	DWP Student Survey	GF Survey	WCA Survey
1	DRU-1	✓	✓	✓
2	DRU-2	✓	✓	✓
3	DRU-3	✓	✓	✓
4	DRU-4	✓	✓	✓
5	DRU-5	✓	✓	✓

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### *Trends in Participant Responses*

Most people's relationship to the process of writing is one of helplessness. First, they can't write satisfactorily or even at all. Worse yet, their efforts to improve don't seem to help. It always seems that the amount of effort and energy put into a piece of writing has no relation to the results.—Peter Elbow

A student's dissertation represents the final requirement in a lengthy and arduous academic journey. For the student who chooses the long Ph.D. path, the itinerary may include a commitment of four years to a Bachelor's degree, two years to a Master's degree, and six years or more to the Doctorate. Generally, Ph.D. students experience success before they enter the doctoral program, but with only the dissertation-writing phase remaining, as many as 25 percent walk away without completing degree requirements (Nelson and Lovitts; Lovitts, "Being a Good Course-taker" 148; Bell; Murtaugh, Burns, and Schuster 355-71 ). This chapter presents and discusses the results for the study described in Chapter Three, which was intended to discern the attitudes and beliefs of three stakeholder groups regarding the value and availability of writing assistance or instruction for Ph.D. students writing dissertations at their home institutions.

*Study Sample: Participant Demographics*

The study recruited survey participants from the Dissertation-Writing Ph.D. (DWPs), Graduate Faculty (GFs), and Writing Center Administrators (WCAs) at eighteen participating doctoral-granting institutions in the U.S. A total of 307 GS, 94 GF, and 13 WCA participants supplied responses. It is important to note that the DWP recruitment population is, naturally, much larger than the GF population both at individual institutions and across the nation. Likewise, the overall WCA population is even smaller than the GF populations. While most institutions assign one or more faculty or staff members to WCA duties, this is not the case everywhere. In fact, some institutions do not even have a single WCA position. To demonstrate the significance of this reality, a single institution may have a DWP student population of 8,000, a GF population of 1,500, and only one or two WCA positions. Because comparatively few WCAs exist, the study received a very low response rate from this population, and the WCA data are, therefore, invalid. However, the robust response rates for the DWP and GF populations provide valid and interesting data. Both valid and invalid data are reported and discussed throughout this chapter.

*Demographics for Dissertation-writing Ph.D. Students and Graduate Faculty*

Demographics for DWP and GF populations are significantly dissimilar. While most DWP respondents are female, most GF respondents are male. Figure 4.1 shows that DWP females responded at twice the rate of their male counterparts. Unlike the female-to-male DWP ratio, the GF males outnumbered females by only a slim margin (see Fig. 4.1). While a total of thirteen WCA participants responded to some questions, only two

participants (both females) responded to the demographic questions. Thus, 100 percent of WCA participants are female, but so many WCA respondents failed to answer this question that no general claim of gender may be stated. The WCA demographic results exemplify invalid data.

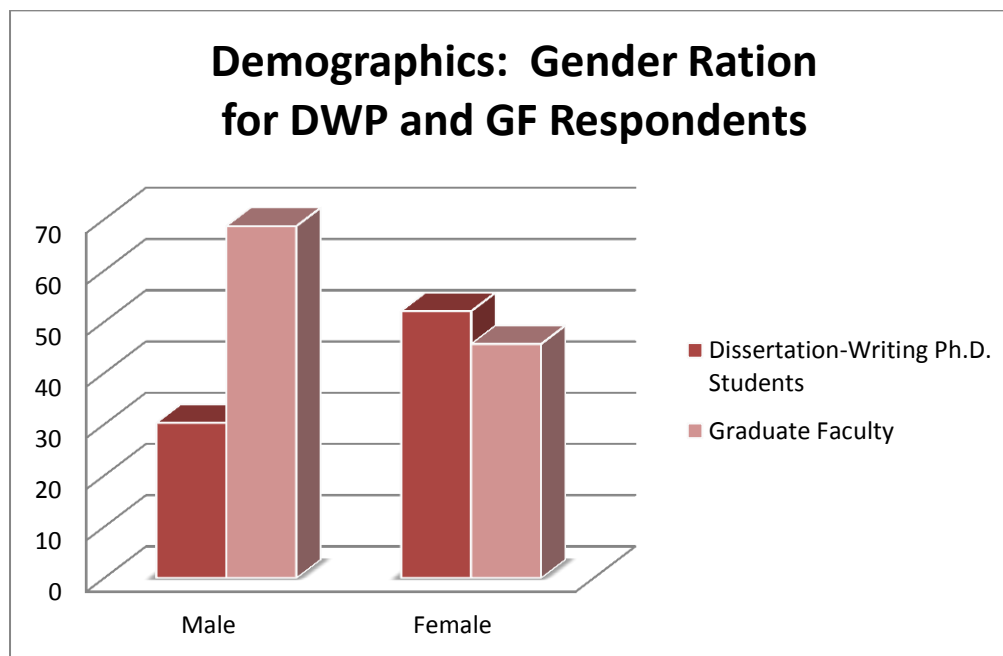


Figure 4.1: Gender Ratio for DWP and GF Respondents

Like the gender data above in Figure 4.1, the age ranges for the DWP and GF populations differed significantly. The mean age of DWP respondents is between twenty-two and twenty-nine, but the mean age of GF respondents is between forty and forty-nine. Figure 4.2 compares the mean age of both DWP and GF respondents to the mean age of enrolled U.S. doctoral students and to active U.S. graduate faculty.

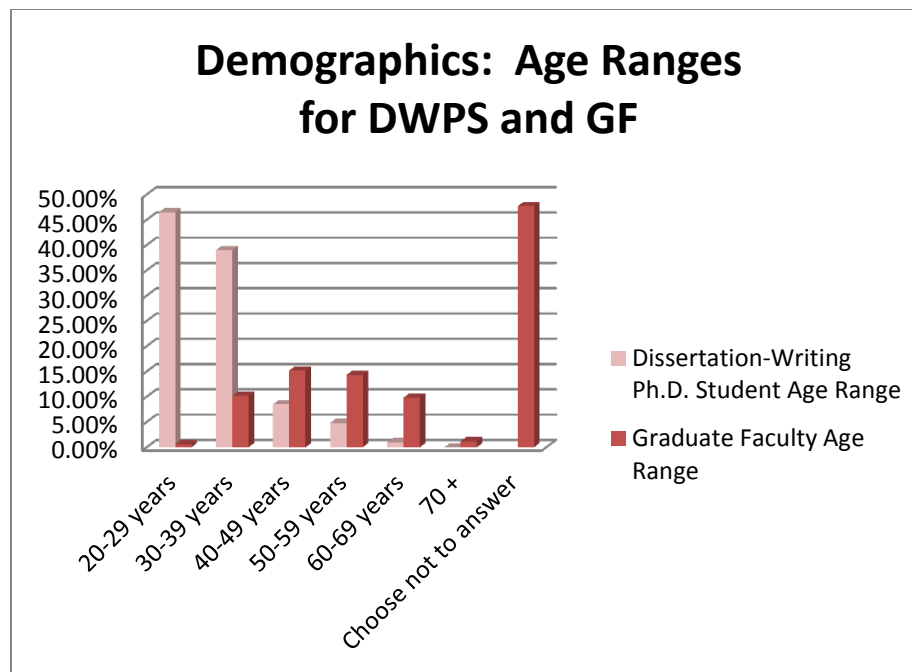


Figure 4.2: Age Ranges for DWP and GF Respondents

Again, too few WCA participants responded to the age question, so WCA age is not plotted on the graph. The expected response rate for all online surveys indicates that the mean participants will be females between 18 and 29; however, the nature of the three stakeholder groups, particularly the age difference between DWP and GF populations, precludes responses from conforming to these expectations (Knapton and Myers). For instance, few individuals in the GF population responded that they were in their twenties. Thus, the demographics of DWP respondents, whose age range is generally consistent with national online survey response rates, replicate the finding DWP of Knapton and Myers in 2002, while the GF demographics do not (Knapton and Myers). The replicability of these demographics is an example of reliable data.

## *The Responses: Participant Attitudes and Beliefs*

### *Graduate Students*

This section describes the results of stakeholder attitudes and beliefs about writing assistance and instruction for dissertation-writing Ph.D. students. Overall, all three stakeholder groups support writing assistance and instruction for these Ph.D. students; however, disparity exists between their beliefs about the current status of writing services. For instance, GFs generally believe that assistance is available for their students, but the DWP respondents do not believe the services are offered at their home institutions. WCAs seem to represent the middle ground, indicating that some services exist, but others do not. Table 4.1 includes questions that asked DWP participants about their beliefs regarding writing assistance and instruction for dissertation-writing Ph.D. students. First, participants selected either “Yes,” “No,” or “I don’t know” in response to the availability of these services at their home institutions. Next, they were asked if they had participated in any of those services. Finally, they were asked to indicate whether they would use the same list of services if they were available. Affirmative responses to the first group of services indicated the availability of services and the DWP population’s awareness of that availability. Affirmative responses to the second group of questions speak to the DWP population’s value of available services, and finally, affirmative responses to the third group of services indicated the perceived value of unavailable services. These types of responses are significant for several reasons. First, an affirmative response to awareness indicates that institutions offer and market the services, acts that create a level of visibility and higher usage. Thus, a large number of DWP participants responding that their institution offers a specific service indicates to the researcher that



the service is most likely well-used. Likewise, an overall high affirmative response to a specific service indicates that the service is used frequently by most participating institutions.

The first group of questions asked DWP students if they believed their institution offered writing services. Respondents were asked to select one of three answer options, “Yes,” “No,” or “I don’t know,” for each question. Table 4.1 shows the list of services specified and the percentage of participant responses. Significantly, DWP students appear unsure about the availability of several dissertation-writing services at their home institutions. Row five of Table 4.1 highlights the six services, 1-3, 5, 6, and 9, for which one third or more of participants selected the “I don’t know” response. These services included boot camp, retreat, workshop, single lecture, coaching, and other. Additionally, more than 50 percent of respondents noted that their institutions did not offer services one and two (boot camp and retreat). These services acquired the largest negative response for the question.

Figure 4.3 indicates that, overall, DWP students believe that their institutions offer one-on-one discussions of their writing strengths and weaknesses with the major adviser and committee members. The services most DWP students believe that their institutions offer are the opportunity for DWP students to discuss their writing strengths and weaknesses with the adviser (67.0 percent) and with their entire committee (52.7 percent).

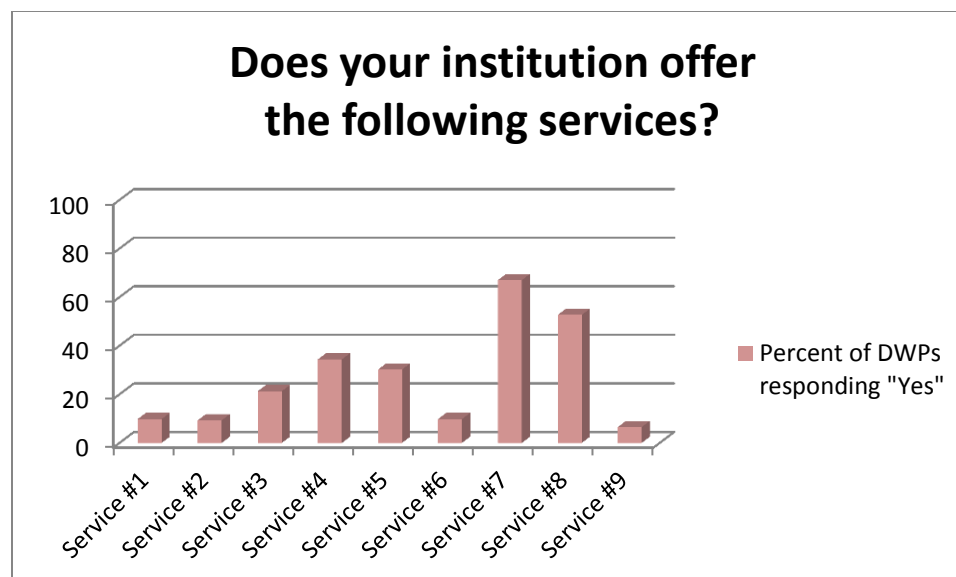


Figure 4.3: Percentage of Ph.D. respondents indicating that their institution offers the specified services

A significant factor involved in offering these services is cost, since they are among the least expensive forms of assistance to provide. Dissertation-writing services, by contrast, can become quite costly in terms of time, space, and materials.

Even though GF's salaries are often among the higher salaries within academic departments, these meetings between GFs and their advisees usually incur no additional costs to the institution beyond the GF's salary and the GF overhead. Other services that DWP respondents believe their institutions offer include seminars (34.4 percent), single lectures (30.2 percent), and workshops (21.3). Depending on the faculty rank and other planning costs such as materials, rental fees, and food and beverage expenses, these group-setting services can become far more expensive than the one-on-one meetings. Few DWP respondents believed that their institutions offered the most costly writing-intensive services, such as dissertation-writing boot camps, retreats, or coaching. The

purpose of a boot camp or retreat is to remove the writer from the daily responsibilities that distract her from producing the dissertation so that she can more readily focus on her writing. Coaching services, however, provide the writer with scheduled tasks that are intended to break down the dissertation into achievable segments. The writer and coach determine what can be accomplished before the next meeting, and the writer is accountable for producing her chapter or section.

The second group of questions asks DWP respondents about their participation in the specified services. Table 4.2 indicates that the overwhelming majority of DWP students have not participated in dissertation-writing services, whether or not their institution offers these services. Even though a slim majority (53.1 percent) of DWP students have discussed their writing strengths and weaknesses with their major adviser or committee chair, more than 80 percent responded that they have not participated in services one through six. Figure 4.4 reflects the small percentage of students who have participated in dissertation-writing services. In fact, service number seven, discussing the writers' strengths and weaknesses with their major adviser or committee chair, is the only service in which more than 15 percent of respondents participated. In spite of low participation rates, the research does not indicate that DWP respondents are uninterested or opposed to dissertation-writing services.

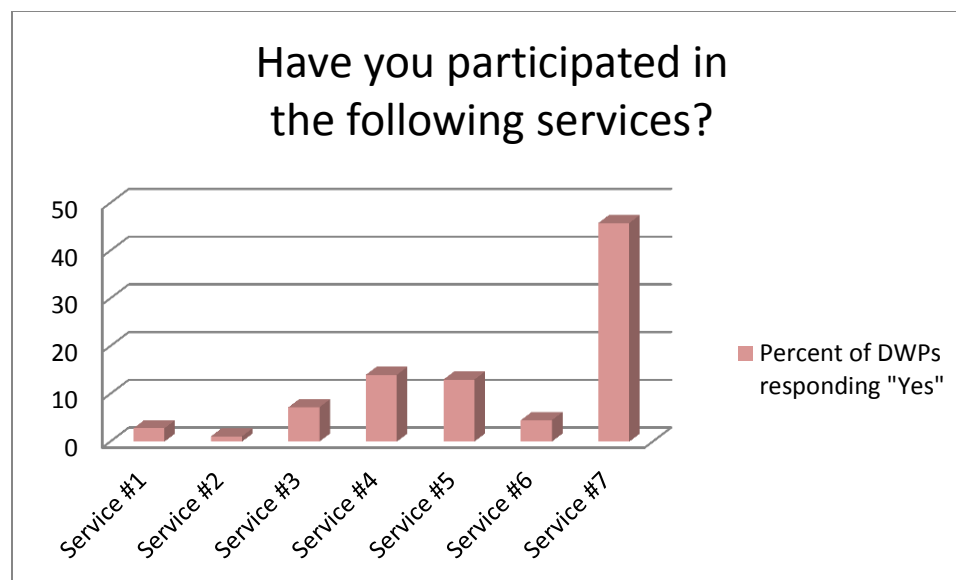


Figure 4.4: Percentage of DWP respondents indicating they have participated in specified services

In fact, the extremely low percentage of affirmative responses to these questions emphasizes the generally low levels of awareness regarding the possible availability and potential assistance of writing services held by DWP respondents. In fact, results from the final group of questions for DWP respondents indicate that DWP students believe these writing services are quite desirable.

The third group of questions asked DWP students to indicate whether or not they would participate in the writing services if these opportunities were available at their home institution. The majority of participants responded affirmatively to their willingness to participate in available writing services at a rate greater than 50 percent for services one and three through seven (See Table 4.3).

These services include boot camps, workshops, lectures, and one-on-one writing consultations with experts and faculty advisers. It is not surprising that more than 90

percent of respondents would meet with their adviser or committee chair to discuss their writing strengths and weaknesses since over 50 percent of DWP respondents indicated that they had already participated in this service. However, the very high level of interest in other services is surprising. Interestingly, these services include both group settings and one-on-one sessions. The results indicate that the DWP respondents are willing to allow others to read and review their writing as both public and private acts. Because the researcher's experience with dissertation-writers indicates that they may be hesitant to ask for writing assistance, these results have the potential for further exploration. Perhaps DWP respondents like the idea of these services, but they have not yet considered the level of vulnerability required for participation because the survey question's wording did not require deep contemplation of the entire experience.



Figure 4.5: Percentage of DWS respondents indicating they would participate in services if available

Figure 4.5 reflects the very high positive attitude that DWP respondents demonstrated across the board when replying to this third group of questions. Without exception, respondents expressed a desire to participate in all services listed. This very high positive response to the use of specified writing services indicates that DWP respondents consider these services both quite valuable and desirable.

#### *Graduate Faculty*

This section presents and discusses the GF survey results for this study. Like the DWP survey, the GF survey also sought data that reflected the attitudes and beliefs of GF respondents. Also like the DWP survey, the GF survey divided the remaining questions into three groups: those asking the GFs if their home institution offered specific dissertation-writing services, those asking the GFs if they had recommended specific dissertation-writing services to their advisees, and those asking if they would refer advisees to these services if they became available at their home institution.

As the researcher anticipated, GF respondents were more certain about the availability or unavailability of these services than their DWP counterparts were. Table 4.4 reflects either a significantly affirmative or negative response to all services. GFs might be more certain about the existence of these services because they have taught in the institution for several years, because their experience with advisees caused them to seek out and use these services, or because of a number of other reasons. Figure 4.6 shows that the service that most GFs know that their home institution offers is the opportunity for DWP students to discuss their writing strengths and weaknesses with advisers.

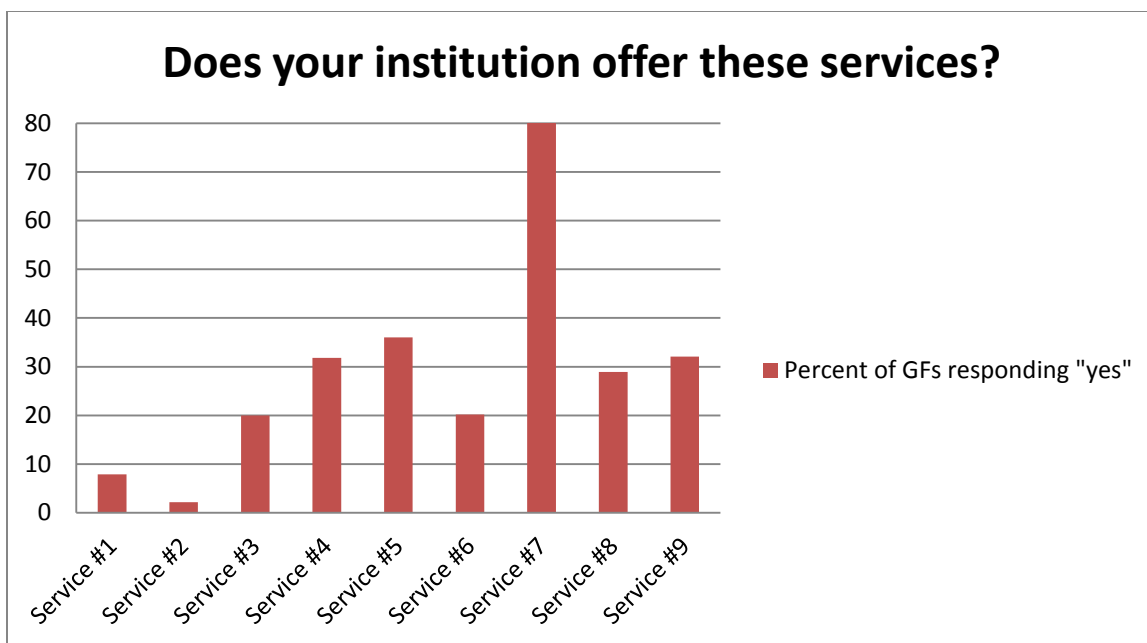


Figure 4.6: Percentage of GF respondents indicating their home institutions  
offer specified writing services

GF respondents demonstrated a high level of awareness regarding this service throughout the survey. Another theme within the DWP and GF respondents is the elevated awareness of and use of less costly services and a correspondingly low awareness of and use of the more costly services. For example, high percentages of both DWP and GF participants responded that they were not generally aware of available boot camps, retreats, and workshops; however, very high levels of both groups of respondents indicated that they were aware of available one-on-one consultations with major advisers. GF one-on-one discussions are often considered part of the GF's regular duties included in regular salary, and GFs and DWP students alike are aware of this service, have used this service, and would use it whenever available.

This section produced some very interesting data. Table 4.5 shows GFs consistently responding that they are not using most of the services specified in the survey. This is particularly surprising in light of the GF respondents' level of awareness of these services. I have already noted in Table 4.4 that the high percentage of negative responses to all questions reflected a high level of GF respondent awareness regarding the specified services. Table 4.6, discussed later in this section, demonstrates this awareness even more emphatically. The information gained by the researcher from Table 4.5 is that in spite of knowledge about the services, GF respondents are not recommending that their advisees seek dissertation-writing services. GF responses to the most costly services in Table 4.4 show that they know with certainty that boot camps, retreats, and workshops are not available on their campuses, and Table 4.5 shows that they do not recommend these services to their advisees. What this study cannot explain is why the GF respondents are not referring their advisees to these services. One possible explanation is that GF advisers choose not to recommend a service that their DWP advisees must seek off-campus. Another possibility is that GF respondents may know of boot camps and other services, but fail to recommend them because they fear their advisees cannot afford such programs.

The "Yes" Column, highlighted in Tables 4.5 and 4.6, further underscores a significant dissonance between the GF respondents' awareness of existing services and their usage of those same services. For instance, an extremely low percentage of GF respondents indicated that they had recommended that their advisees attend a dissertation-writing boot camp; however, an extremely high percentage (61.4 percent) of the GF group responded that they would make the recommendation if the service was



available. Even the most highly valued service, the opportunity to discuss the DWP student's writing strengths and weaknesses with an adviser or committee chair, reflects this trend, as 82.2 percent of GF respondents responded that the service is available at their institution, but only 79.8 percent have recommended that an advisee participate in this service. Figure 4.7 shows this trend. The percentage of GF respondents who referred their advisees to these services is lower than their level of awareness of services in all categories but one.

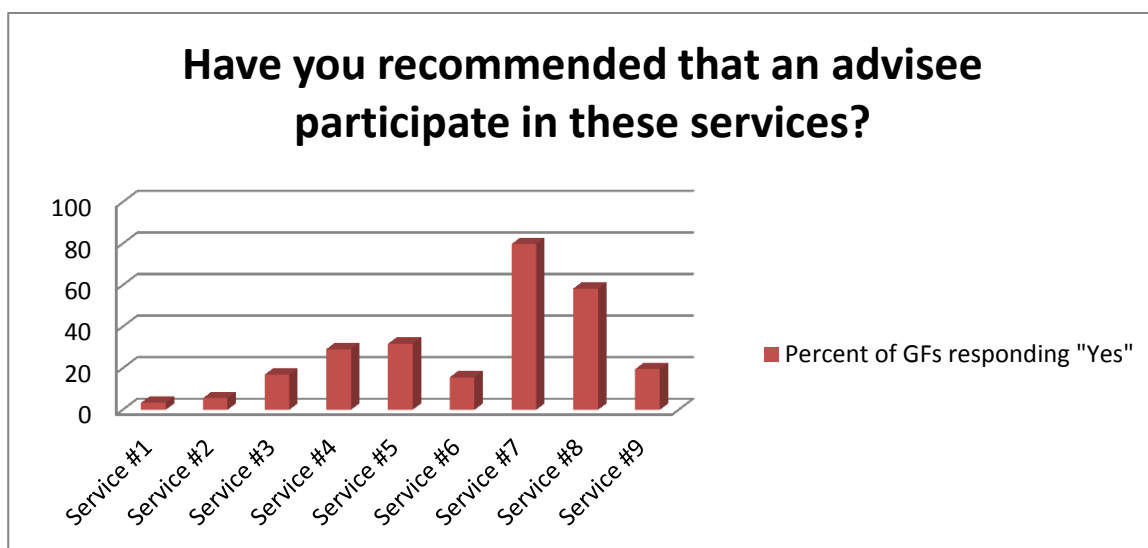


Figure 4.7: Percentage of GF respondents indicating they  
have recommended the specified services to advisees

This exception, a dissertation-writing retreat, provides interesting data in that 2.2 percent of GFs indicated that their institution offered the service, but 5.6 percent responded that they had recommended their advisees use the service. Again, several possibilities exist for this apparent inconsistency. First, if several GF respondents from the same institution recommend retreats for their DWP advisees, this would account for the lower overall

level of awareness regarding retreats. At the same time, GF respondents may seek and recommend external retreats because they know that their home institutions do not offer the service.

Another potential explanation is that GFs are referring their advisees for dissertation-writing retreats, but they know that their advisees are not participating in the retreats. In Table 4.7 all services receive an affirmative response rate in excess of 50 percent. These responses also indicate a very high level of support and imply a belief that dissertation-writing assistance and instruction services are valued. Figure 4.7 also shows that the only service receiving less than a 50 percent affirmative response was the “Other Services” category. The ambiguous nature of this category may account for its slightly lower affirmative response rate.

The third group of GF questions asked participants if they would recommend these services to their advisees if the services were available at the home institution. This time, GF respondents answered affirmatively for each service. In fact, in Table 4.6 most named writing services, excluding the “other” category, again received affirmative response rates of over 50 percent. While GF respondents were less likely to recommend boot camps and retreats—at 61.4 percent and 51.1 percent respectively—reasons for their hesitation may include the potential fees for participating in these services. Figure 4.8 reflects the expected trends: GF participants responded with extraordinary enthusiasm toward dissertation-writing workshops (80.7 percent positive response) and the opportunity to discuss writing strengths and weaknesses with individual major advisers (90.8 percent positive response) or committee members (86.2 percent positive response).

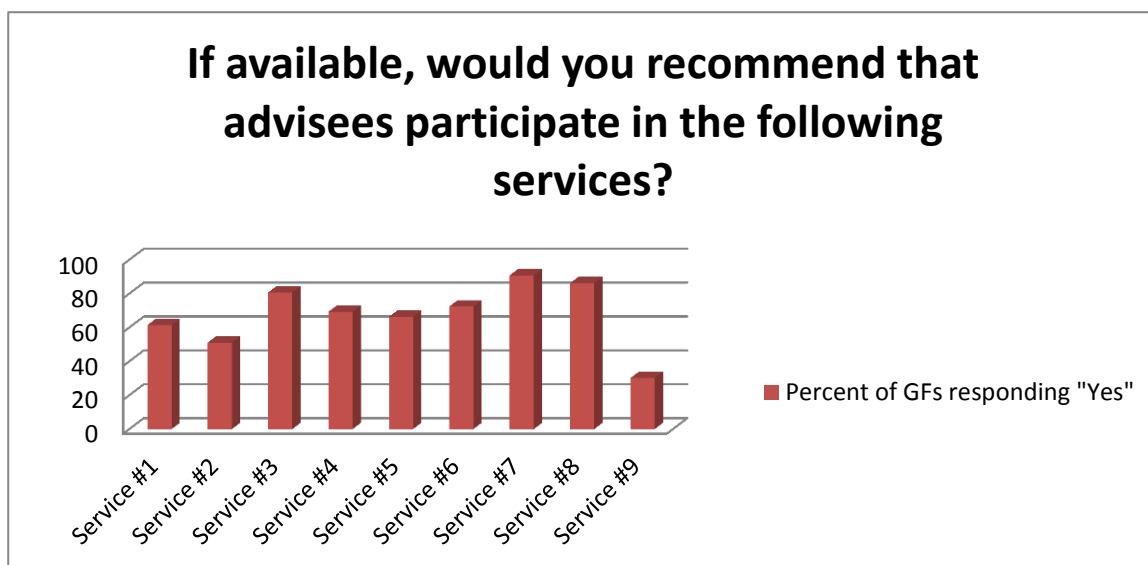


Figure 4.8: Percentage of GF respondents indicating they would recommend the specified services to advisees if available

This overwhelmingly positive support for implementation of writing services, shown in Figure 4.8, reflects a trend indicating that GF respondents place both a high value and a high level of desirability upon these writing services.

#### *Writing Center Administrators*

In the third survey, the WCA survey data reflect a disappointingly low response rate; thus, the data are invalid. While the researcher anticipated a comparatively low response rate, an odd trend appears in the data. A total of thirteen WCAs responded to at least one question in the survey, but only two WCA respondents completed most of the survey. Therefore, the response rates for all questions in the WCA survey are either 50 percent or 100 percent. Chapter Three discussed study reliability and validity, noting that a survey will capture only a momentary snapshot of respondents' attitudes and beliefs,

which will likely change over time as individuals and their circumstances change. A survey with two responses for most questions cannot accurately reflect the attitudes and beliefs across an entire population. The extremely low response rate for this survey may have resulted from the method of delivery. The researcher relied upon department chairs or heads to forward the invitation to participate. Because WCAs represent such a small portion of an institution's overall population, the chair or head might not have known the WCA, or might have believed that another administrator was delivering the invitation to participate.

As the researcher expected, the WCA respondents indicated that they are quite certain about which services are available at their home institution. In fact, WCA respondents also reported that all services, with the exception of a dissertation-writing seminar or lecture series, originated from their institution's writing center. In general, WCAs responded that students use the services, but the response was divided, with 50 percent agreeing and 50 percent disagreeing about whether or not DWP students participate in dissertation-writing-specific services.

### *Conclusions*

The results of this survey indicate that DWPs, GFs, and WCAs all reflect a very positive attitude toward dissertation-writing services for DWPs. DWP responses indicate a low level of awareness about existing services at their home institutions with a high percentage of "I don't know" answers. However, GFs provided much higher levels of awareness about the same services, with consistently high percentages of "Yes" or "No" responses. The next chapter discusses the significance of these results and contextualizes

the knowledge generated from this study within the larger discussions of composition studies and graduate student retention studies.

Several possible interpretations of these overall results exist. The cause for low DWP awareness of services does not necessarily indicate that services do not exist. Low DWP awareness could result from inefficient or ineffective outreach by the writing service hosts or a low level of support from faculty. Likewise, the high negative response to GF awareness does not indicate the absence of the specified writing services. Again, the hosting unit or units may not be actively publicizing these services. The researcher was not surprised that few DWP respondents indicated that they had participated in dissertation-writing services, but she was surprised at the very low percentage of GFs who had recommended such services. If the DWP population is unaware of services—and this possibility is supported by the survey results—then the researcher cannot expect a high rate of current participation. However, due to the GF population's higher level of awareness, that they had not recommended dissertation-writing services is surprising. The lack of active support for these services could result from a negative past experiences, poor description of the services and who provides them, or the fear that some services might prove too expensive for their DWP advisees.

The final set of questions for both DWP and GF respondents indicates overwhelming support and desire for the specified writing services. Moving forward with this knowledge, several areas invite further investigation: 1) Why might DWP and GF populations be under-using available dissertation-writing services and what can be done to elevate visibility of existing dissertation-writing services; and 2) Who is responsible for providing dissertation-writing services across the disciplines, and how can these

services be integrated into campus services? Chapter Five responds to these questions as it looks toward the future of dissertation-writing services as a means of reducing Ph.D. completion times and attrition rates.

Table 4.1: Percentages of respondents answering  
 “Does your institution offer the following services?”

<b>Graduate Student</b>				
<b>#</b>	<b>Does your institution offer any of the following services?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>I don't know</b>
1	a dissertation-writing boot camp or jump start program	9.8%	54.6%	35.5%
2	a dissertation-writing retreat	9.3%	60.1%	30.6%
3	a dissertation-writing workshop	21.3%	48.6%	30.1%
4	a dissertation-writing seminar or lecture series	34.4%	39.3%	26.2%
5	a dissertation-writing single lecture	30.2%	40.7%	29.1%
6	a dissertation-writing coaching service	9.8%	47.0%	43.2%
7	an opportunity to discuss writing strengths and weaknesses with the student's major adviser or committee chair	67.0%	19.2%	13.7%
8	an opportunity to discuss writing strengths and weaknesses with the student's entire committee	52.7%	26.4%	20.9%
9	other services	6.5%	38.0%	55.4%

Table 4.2: Percentages of respondents answering  
 “Have you ever participated in the following services?”

<b>Graduate Student</b>				
<b>#</b>	<b>Have you ever participated in any of the following services?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>I don't know</b>
1	a dissertation-writing boot camp or jump start program?	2.8%	96.0%	1.1%
2	a dissertation-writing retreat	1.1%	97.8%	1.1%
3	a dissertation-writing workshop	7.2%	91.7%	1.1%
4	a dissertation-writing seminar or lecture series	14.0%	84.8%	1.1%
5	a dissertation-writing single lecture	13.0%	85.3%	1.7%
6	a dissertation-writing coaching service	4.5%	93.9%	1.7%
7	an opportunity to discuss writing strengths and weaknesses with the student's major adviser or committee members	45.8%	53.1%	1.1%



Table 4.3: Percentage of DWP respondents answering  
 “If available, would you participate in any of the following services?”

<b>Graduate Student</b>				
	<b>If available, would you participate in any of the following services?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>I don't know</b>
1	a dissertation-writing boot camp or jump start program	58.0%	29.3%	12.7%
2	a dissertation-writing retreat	49.4%	35.6%	15.0%
3	a dissertation-writing workshop	68.3%	20.0%	11.7%
4	a dissertation-writing seminar or lecture series	63.7%	23.5%	12.8%
5	a dissertation-writing single lecture	62.2%	24.4%	13.3%
6	a dissertation-writing coaching service	59.3%	24.2%	16.5%
7	an opportunity to discuss writing strengths and weaknesses with the student's major adviser or committee members	90.1%	5.5%	4.4%
8	other services	33.9%	21.1%	45.0%

Table 4.4: Percentage of GF respondents answering  
 “Does your institution offer any of the following services?”

<b>Graduate Faculty</b>				
	<b>Does your institution offer any of the following services?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>I don't know</b>
1	a dissertation-writing boot camp or jump start program	7.9%	78.7%	13.5%
2	a dissertation-writing retreat	2.2%	86.7%	11.1%
3	a dissertation-writing workshop	20.0%	72.0%	7.8%
4	a dissertation-writing seminar or lecture series	31.5%	61.8%	6.7%
5	a dissertation-writing single lecture	36.0%	58.4%	5.6%
6	a dissertation-writing coaching service	20.2%	65.2%	14.6%
7	an opportunity to discuss writing strengths and weaknesses with the student's major adviser or committee chair	82.2%	12.2%	5.6%
8	an opportunity to discuss writing strengths and weaknesses with the student's entire committee	64.4%	28.9%	6.7%
9	other services	32.1%	35.7%	32.1%

Table 4.5: Percentage of GF respondents answering  
 “Have you ever recommended that an advisee participate  
 in any of the following services?”

<b>Graduate Faculty</b>				
	<b>Have you ever recommended that an advisee participate in any of the following services?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>I don't know</b>
1	a dissertation-writing boot camp or jump start program?	3.4%	39.1%	8.6%
2	a dissertation-writing retreat	5.6%	78.7%	15.7%
3	a dissertation-writing workshop	16.9%	66.3%	16.9%
4	a dissertation-writing seminar or lecture series	29.2%	56.2%	14.6%
5	a dissertation-writing single lecture	31.8%	53.4%	14.8%
6	a dissertation-writing coaching service	15.7%	62.9%	21.3%
7	an opportunity to discuss writing strengths and weaknesses with the student's major adviser or committee chair	79.8%	15.7%	4.5%
8	an opportunity to discuss writing strengths and weaknesses with the student's entire committee	58.4%	27.0%	14.6%
9	other services	19.6%	37.3%	43.1%

Table 4.6: Percentage of respondents answering  
 “If available, would you recommend that your advisees  
 participate in any of the following services?”

<b>Graduate Faculty</b>				
	<b>If available, would you recommend that your advisees participate in any of the following services?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>I don't know</b>
1	a dissertation-writing boot camp or jump start program	61.4%	19.3%	19.3%
2	a dissertation-writing retreat	51.1%	33.0%	15.9%
3	a dissertation-writing workshop	80.7%	9.1%	10.2%
4	a dissertation-writing seminar or lecture series	69.3%	15.9%	14.8%
5	a dissertation-writing single lecture	66.3%	20.9%	12.8%
6	a dissertation-writing coaching service	72.4%	13.8%	13.8%
7	an opportunity to discuss writing strengths and weaknesses with the student's major adviser or committee chair	90.8%	4.6%	4.6%
8	an opportunity to discuss writing strengths and weaknesses with the student's entire committee	86.2%	8.0%	5.7%
9	other services	30.2%	14.0%	55.8%

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### *The Future of Dissertation-writing Ph.D. Students*

My starting point, then, is that the ability to write is unusually mysterious to most people.—Peter Elbow

The discussion of dissertation-writers at my home institution began in the UGA Writing Center when a group of Dissertation-Writing Ph.D. (DWP) students expressed concern that they might not be able to complete their degree requirements before departmental funding expired. While the loss of funding from the home department or program does not in itself signal attrition, the data from Chapter Two indicate that the probability of degree completion significantly decreases for several reasons. First, DWP students who remain in programs through the sixth year are those most statistically likely to complete, and those whose enrollment exceeds six years become increasingly less statistically likely to complete. Second, when DWP students lose funding, they must choose between seeking other funding sources, such as full-time employment, or leaving the program. Third, as DWP students remain enrolled, they also mature and take on outside responsibilities such as marriage, children, and employment. Finally, after DWP students spend several years (generally three or more) in the dissertation-writing phase of the program, they become more likely to suffer from emotional problems such as feelings of isolation and depression. Therefore, the loss of funding, while not a death-knell in

itself, foreshadows the likelihood that DWP students will not complete their degree requirements.

The Introduction describes the point of genesis for the Ph.D. dissertation as the moment when Aristotle's idea of philosophy as the epistemic search in an ontological study meets his concept of rhetoric as the art of persuasion. The result is the belief that humankind now possesses a method for clearly documenting the originality of his discoveries and communicating this new knowledge to others. In Chapter One, James Berlin claims that writing is more than a means of conveying information; writing, or the immediate interplay between *writer, reality, language, and audience* is the genesis of knowledge. Berlin recommends a New Rhetoric writing pedagogy that insists upon the real-time interplay of *writer, reality, language, and audience* because the interaction produces knowledge. Because the discovery of new knowledge and communicating that discovery are at the core of the Ph.D. dissertation, associated programs and institutions should begin to provide writing assistance and instruction for their DWP students that emphasize the equal exchange among *writer, reality, language, and audience* that New Rhetoric offers.

In the same chapter, I discussed Berlin's New Rhetoric pedagogy, which addresses the primary goals of DWP students: 1) to situate themselves among scholars through the discovery of new knowledge; and 2) to communicate and share this discovery with others. Berlin explains that a New Rhetoric approach focuses on the interplay of four elements of writing: *Truth or Reality, Writer, Language, and Audience*. While the primary difference between New Rhetoric and other pedagogical approaches is limited to the emphasis on only one or two of these elements, Berlin notes that New Rhetoric views

each element as equally important. Rather than attending to only the *audience* or only the *language*, New Rhetoric draws attention to the active generation of new knowledge that arises from the interactions between the *writer*, her use of *language*, her *audience*, and the *truth/reality* that they generate collaboratively. The act of a writing center-oriented consultation embodies the practices of collaborative genesis.

Overall, the majority of respondents acknowledge that untrained or under-prepared dissertation-writers contribute to the problem of slow completion times and high attrition rates. Chapter Two discusses the significance of the Ph.D. Completion Project (PCP), hosted by the Council of Graduate Schools, and the studies of Lovitts and Golde. The PCP shows that as many as 25 percent of Ph.D. students who begin a program either remain in the program for as long as a decade, thus increasing the average completion times, or they leave the program before completion, contributing to high U.S. attrition rates. Both slow completion rates and high attrition rates, note Lovitts and Golde, present costly harms to the individual DWP, the GF, the program, the institution, and the discipline at large (Golde, “How to Grade” 1; Golde, *Envisioning the Future* 685). In short, the U.S. system of producing Ph.D. students is flawed, and the literature indicates that a primary area of concern should be Ph.D. students’ inadequate preparation for composing their dissertations. The rest of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of two implications resulting from this study and two corresponding recommendations that emerged from the synthesis of current literature and study results.

### *First Implication of the Study*

Because the writing center discussion became the catalyst for important discussions about program and department policies, we began closing the UGA Writing Center every week for Wednesday Lunch. Regular attendees initially brought lunch and high spirits, but occasionally the conversation drifted back to the original topic, the problem of DWP students completing within program funding guidelines. As it became evident that the dissertation-writing phase was key to our DWP population, I wondered why none of these dissertation-writers were seeking assistance from the Writing Center, the locale of our conversations. As the results in Chapter Four indicate, this is not a localized trend. When asked to indicate whether they had participated in services, such as boot camps, retreats, workshops, seminars, lectures, or coaching services, DWP participants overwhelmingly responded that they had not. However, when asked if they would participate in these services if available, they overwhelmingly said that they would. Even more interesting was the fact that GF respondents followed similar trends. Findings from the GF survey showed that GF respondents had not recommended these services to their advisees, but if such services were available, they would make the recommendations.

Chapter Four reported that DWP and GF respondents enthusiastically responded that the named services were considered valuable and desirable.<sup>8</sup> However, high levels of value and desirability do not correlate with high levels of usage. The results that help explain why DWP and GF respondents have not been using services appear in the questions detailed in Tables 4.1 and 4.4. Table 4.1 shows that DWP respondents simply

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter Four for a description of the manner in which value and desirability are determined for this survey.



cannot answer with certainty whether or not their home institution offers the services, and Table 4.4 shows that GF respondents are certain that their home institutions do not offer the services. These findings present several possibilities. First, the services may exist at the DWP respondents' institutions but have very low visibility. Second, the services may not exist at the DWP respondents' institutions. Third, the services may exist at GF respondents' home institutions but have very low visibility. Fourth, the services may not exist at the GF respondents' home institutions. Fifth, the services may exist at both the DWP and GF respondents' institutions, but the available services may not be perceived as reliable or capable of meeting the needs of these two stakeholder groups.

*Recommendation One: Promote Dissertation-writing Services Hosted by the Campus Writing Center*

One of the most interesting questions to arise at a Wednesday Lunch was “Why is there no assistance for dissertation-writers?” The researcher found this question puzzling because various forms of assistance exist within our home department. Not only do most faculty advisers provide one-on-one conferences with their advisees, but the writing center offers one-on-one writing consultations and coaching services for dissertation and thesis writers. In fact, many Wednesday Lunch attendees were or had been writing consultants trained in writing center pedagogy and employed by the UGA Writing Center.

*What is Writing Center Pedagogy?*

Muriel Harris, the long-time director of the Purdue Online Writing Lab, is easily the Mother of Writing Center Pedagogy. The website for the International Writing Centers Association, the dominant professional organization for writing center administrators and staff, identifies the work of Harris as authoritative on most writing center topics (IWCA). Harris acknowledges that much of writing center pedagogy originates in more familiar and more general writing pedagogy, which was introduced in the Chapter One discussion of James Berlin.

In describing the expectations for writing centers, Harris explains that there are no typical writing centers, activities, or discussions:

The work of a writing center is as varied as the students who stream in and out of the doors. A writing center encourages and facilitates writing emphasis in courses in addition to those in an English Department's Composition program; it serves as a resource room for writing materials; it offers opportunities for faculty development through workshops and consultations; and it develops tutors' own writing, interpersonal skills, and teaching abilities. Moreover, writing centers, by offering a haven for students where individual needs are met, are also integral to retention efforts, are good recruiting tools, provide a setting for computer facilities that integrate word processing with tutoring, are rich sites for research, and by their flexibility and ability to work outside of institutionalized programs are free to spawn new services and explore new writing environments. (Harris 27)

To some, this description may indicate that writing centers possess no structure, that they offer inconsistent services, and that they have no overarching goals. However, this is not Harris's intent. In "Writing from the Middle," Harris describes the expectations for writing centers, as well as their actual functions. The fundamental expectation is that the writing center will provide any service that writers and writing instructors require when they desire it. Consequently, Harris's message is that writing centers are sites of institutional power, even if they are not always honored as such. By connecting writing center work to institutional goals (e.g., retention and recruitment), Harris argues that writing center resources offer programs and institutions distinct advantages such as the ability to integrate technology into consultations or tutoring sessions, the ability to maintain resources, the ability to serve both student and faculty populations, and most importantly, the ability to attend to the individual's needs. The final service, individual attention, presents writers with a distinct advantage over and supplement to the typical classroom experience.

In addition to Harris, composition scholars such as Stephen North, Peter Elbow, and Chris Anson have long recognized that writers need feedback and grow when they receive it. Additionally, a recent study from emerging scholar Christina Armistead indicates that peer reviewers who provide thoughtful feedback may generate new and exciting knowledge for both writer and reviewer (Armistead). While the findings from these scholars' research speak to the significant contributions that individualized writing center feedback offers undergraduate students, there is evidence that even advanced writers benefit from feedback.

In a study conducted in Australia, Brian Paltridge investigated forms of useful advice for dissertation-writing students. In particular, the study compared the students' perceived benefits from dissertation-writing advice books to the actual practices of dissertation-writing students. Overall, study participants did not dismiss the advice books because they offered a variety of structural and formatting tips that students might not have known to ask about. However, the tips that students found most helpful in producing the dissertation emerged from peer-to-peer or faculty-to-advisee discussions and conferences. While this study did not include any U.S. dissertation-writing Ph.D. students, this work is relevant to the problem of U.S. DWP students because the research questions inquired into general writing practices and did not investigate stylistic differences among types of dissertations. Thus, valid and reliable data regarding writing practices for the same types of writers may be generalized from one nation to another. However, if the survey questions had specifically addressed writing practices for the Australian dissertation in Economics, the results could not be so generally applied to other DWP groups.

Likewise, in a study conducted in the United Kingdom, Mark Torrance, Glynn. V. Thomas, and Elizabeth J. Robinson asked dissertation-writers to complete a survey that focused on four areas of their dissertation-writing practices: "1) questions relating to the students' writing strategy; 2) questions relating to the students' experience of writing and particularly whether or not they found writing problematic; 3) questions designed to assess the students' productivity; and 4) background information" (381). Findings indicated three types of writers: Planners who think then write, Revisers who think while they write, and Mixed Strategists who rely on both techniques while writing. Results for

Revisers show that they initially produce work more slowly, but their approach of constant revision may save them time in the long-term. Additionally of significance to a more general DWP population is the fact that Revisers who take time to review their work while writing may also be receiving feedback during the composition process.

Emerging scholar Christina Armistead's recent study on peer feedback notes that it is generally quite positive—in fact, much more positive than feedback provided by faculty.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, in a study of student peer review content, Armistead discovered two categories of peer feedback not previously noticed. First, she describes “Mitigating” feedback as comments that offer the writer praise, but balance this praise with a suggestion for improvement. The other category, “Invention,” describes peer comments that also include praise, but more importantly, capture the reader's engagement with the text (Armistead). The latter types of peer comments describe something that the reader has discovered within the text. By documenting the discovery, the peer not only communicates new knowledge, but also continues the dialectic and invites the writer to generate further knowledge. The obvious advantage is that both writer and reader are repeatedly, through the written text, generating and conveying new knowledge, building independently and collaboratively the precise sort of exchange Berlin describes. This embraces both the philosophical ideals of the ancients and the academic ideals of the contemporary Ph.D. writer.

Scholars in the U.S. are also exploring the writing practices and problems of DWP students. Robin Queen and Lauren Squires, a Ph.D. committee member and her student, respectively, began writing about what they considered dominant issues for

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<sup>9</sup> Armistead's study involved only First-year Composition student writers and peer reviewers, and because peer feedback is also valuable for dissertation-writers, her work invites other scholars to investigate the content of dissertation-writing peer feedback.

dissertation-writers: “developing topic ideas, setting project parameters, dealing with unexpected problems, and receiving and giving feedback” (Queen and Squires 300). They advise that all writing projects, and especially dissertation-writing, should begin with open communication among the individuals producing and reading the document. Including feedback from the reader and an opportunity for the writer to respond “constitutes one of the most substantial and important elements of dissertation writing. It is also one of the most valuable experiences in one’s scholarly career” (Queen and Squires 300). The description that these authors offer for feedback suggests that its value lies within the reciprocal nature of feedback. This connects their anecdotal evidence to the value of a New Rhetoric pedagogy in which the writer and her reader generate knowledge through the process of reading and writing together. In spite of their perception of feedback as an interconnected act, Queen and Squires view the give-and-take of feedback as a fundamental resource for the writer’s ability to gain confidence in her own research and move toward independence and the skills that will allow her to provide useful feedback to others.

Finally, twenty years ago at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in San Diego, Judith Powers gave a paper titled “Helping the Graduate Thesis Writer through Faculty and Writing Center Collaboration.”<sup>10</sup> Prompted by a 100 percent increase in writing center conferences for graduates over the course of a single year, Powers and her staff sought a writing center pedagogy that incorporated valuable feedback for advanced writers who arrived with needs that differed from their more common population of undergraduate students. Specifically, graduate students 1) came to

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<sup>10</sup> Although the title does not include the word “Dissertation,” the article’s content addresses a variety of graduate writers, including dissertation-writers, graduate non-native speaker-writers, and thesis-writers.

appointments with documents that were too long to discuss in a thirty-minute conference; 2) wanted the center staff to edit for them; 3) brought faculty advisers annotations and revision directions that were difficult to read; and 4) asked for assistance with technical discipline-specific material that the center staff often could not understand (Powers 1). Powers and her staff developed a unique approach for serving graduate students that offers significant implications for this researcher's study. The solution was to design a triangular conversation called a "Triologue." Powers notes:

By making initial contact with the adviser before beginning to conference with the students, center staff were able to bring together all major pieces of the research writing context and thus counsel students how they can effectively produce good writing suited to their fields. (3)

The strength of a triologue lies within the double dose of feedback. First, the writer receives the adviser feedback that the current study shows both DWP and GF respondents value and desire. Even though adviser feedback may not be entirely focused upon writing, a writing center session with a consultant whose comments are informed by the adviser's feedback does focus on the incorporation of technical discipline-specific content into the writer's work. Through a New Rhetoric lens, the doubling of feedback in the triologue (one feedback opportunity between writer and adviser and another between the writer and writing center consultant) literally doubles the number of generative encounters among the *writer, reality, language*, and her *audience*. However, the *informed* doubling (the feedback occurrence in which the writing center consultant's feedback is *informed* by the adviser's initial feedback) further elevates the level of interplay so that the increased value of feedback becomes incalculable.

Aside from a meeting with an adviser, the university writing center offers the only opportunity for dissertation-writers to receive crucial feedback for their dissertations. Even though writing center consultations provide the valuable one-on-one feedback that writers, particularly dissertation-writers, need to progress and improve, inclusion of the trialogue offers DWP students the opportunity to receive even more valuable feedback. Furthermore, the trialogue is an excellent approach that presents crucial one-on-one feedback through New Rhetoric pedagogy.

### *Second Implication of the Study*

Another significant finding became obvious: the issue of academic transfer. In this case, students, even trained writing consultants, are unable to transfer basic writing knowledge from their roles as instructors of First-year Composition students to their roles as dissertation-writers. Ironically, the absence of transfer was at the root of many Lunch discussions, even though we did not possess the theoretical vocabulary to recognize this. Perhaps that realization is even part of the transfer issue.

Over the last year, Wednesday Lunch has become an unofficial support group for graduate students in our home department. Topics include course work, what we are writing, what we should have written, and what comes next. Although it certainly was not by design, this midweek break offers advanced Ph.D. students the opportunity to reflect upon their doctoral program experiences and share lessons learned with newer graduate students. In theoretical terms, Wednesday Lunch has become a time to discuss academic transfer. Generally accepted as the ability to apply skills acquired in one context to another, transfer is gaining attention, especially in the field of Rhetoric and Composition



(Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey; Wardle, “Mutt Genres”; Wardle, “Understanding Transfer”; Nelms and Dively 217). Evidence for this heightened interest and awareness appears in the Fall 2012 issue of *Composition Forum*. The special topic for that issue is academic transfer skills as they apply to writing, and many of that issue’s contributors are also participants in the Elon Research Seminar, a three-year program with the goals of understanding transfer theory and designing writing curricula with embedded transfer skills.

### *What is Transfer?*

The earliest studies of academic transfer originate in the work of E. L. Thorndike, Dirk C. Prather, and Douglas K. Detterman (1901) in the field of Education. In these studies, conducted within research environments, the results suggested that the transfer of knowledge and skills from one academic context to another is purely accidental; however, these studies did not “explore transfer in contexts more authentic and complex than those simulated in a laboratory” (Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey). More recent studies, such as Perkins and Salomon in 1992, however, have attempted to replicate real-life academic transfer. Moving the exploration of transfer from a laboratory to field environment, or a different setting in which the desired transfer might organically occur, allows scholars to conduct research that is likely to produce both valid and reliable data (data that accurately provide the information sought and research that generates similar results when repeated).

The work of Perkins and Salomon is quite important to the study of transfer, not only because their results indicate that transfer occurs at a higher than “accidental” rate,

but also because they begin to systematize transfer theory. These authors gather the generally accepted terms for transfer and attempt to synthesize the information.

According to Perkins and Salomon, “One important albeit rough contrast concerns *near* transfer versus *far* transfer” (Perkins and Salomon). *Near* transfer occurs when knowledge from one area is carried over and used in another closely related situation.

Writing a paper with a strong and supported thesis for an upper-level history class demonstrates the transfer of writing skills learned in a first-year composition course to a writing project in the history course, and this is an example of *near* transfer. When a physician considers how to discuss a frightening medical condition with an elderly or very young patient, she is thinking about her audience and how to generate a particular response from them. This thought process demonstrates the speaker’s attention to audience and exemplifies the use of appeals, a fundamental principle of introductory-level speech and writing courses. Because the physician’s office is so far removed from the classroom where rhetorical appeals were learned, this is an example of *far* transfer.

While these examples may appear clear-cut, the authors note a concern with the *near/far* binary. First, near and far are such vague terms that they imply a gray area and cannot truly be considered opposites. Second, *near* and *far* describe indistinct locations, which prevent the development of universal definitions for either term (Perkins and Salomon).

In a related discussion, these authors also introduce the terms *transfer* and *learning*, but they find the distinction between the terms troubling. Just as *near* and *far* fail to identify two unique points, Perkins and Salomon cannot determine where *knowledge* ends and *transfer* begins. For instance, if I learned to knit at a friend’s home, I should be expected to transfer that knowledge and continue knitting in my own home. Is

this an example of a general, learned skill? If I could not knit after leaving my friend's home, we might guess that I had not truly learned to knit. However, the lighting, furniture, and design of both homes are quite different, and these dissimilarities support the theory of transfer. According to Perkins and Salomon,

Transfer begins where minimal learning ends. Another way to make the point would be to extend the near-far contrast to speak of *very near transfer*, and transfer, and *far transfer*. 'Very near transfer' is simply normal learning. Given normal learning, then comes the question whether we see transfer, or even far transfer. (Perkins and Salomon)

Therefore, the authors look for ways of describing transfer that provide a stronger contrast between how and why some information is transferable and other information is not.

Noting that transfer "can do mischief as well as good," Perkins and Salomon discuss positive versus negative transfer (Perkins and Salomon). Within the context of transfer theory, these terms refer to the individual's actions rather than her character, much as we would tell a child, "I love you, but I do not love your current behavior." When reading newspapers and popular magazines, we learn that an article does not necessarily end at the bottom of a page; if we turn the page, the article may continue. This knowledge also serves us well when we move to the computer, where websites often require readers to look for continued information beyond the initial screen. This knowledge transfer that enables computer-users to scroll down a page or follow a link is considered *positive transfer* because shifting the knowledge to a new setting will result in a positive outcome. I know that I can take an evening walk alone in my community, and I

will be quite safe. However, I might not be able to enjoy such a carefree walk in a larger city. In this case, the knowledge transfer would be a *negative transfer* because it holds the potential of a negative outcome.

Still unsatisfied with the ways in which researchers have discussed transfer, Perkins and Salomon begin to think of transfer in terms of science and art. They justify viewing transfer as a science because “historically, transfer has been a frequent concern of educational psychologists. However, it has not so much occupied the attention of practitioners” (Perkins and Salomon). Within a scientific context, the authors present three additional transfer theories, which they identify as: 1) Bo Peep Theory of Transfer; 2) Lost Sheep Theory of Transfer; and 3) Good Shepherd Theory of Transfer. The Bo Peep theory emerges from long-term educational practices: “Year in year out, we teach as though transfer takes care of itself” (Perkins and Salomon). Like the nursery rhyme, “Leave them alone, and they will come home,” Bo Peep is the theory that stored knowledge and skills appear when the individual needs them. For Bo Peep theory, transfer occurs only in quite similar situations. For example, my knowledge of tying sneaker laces might transfer to boot laces or even hair ribbons; however, the knowledge would probably not transfer when I need to wear sneakers with a Velcro closing or a hair clip. Bo Peep theory, though “implicit in the way we behave in the classroom,” suggests that transfer does not occur spontaneously (Perkins and Salomon). Unfortunately, the lack of spontaneous transfer severely limits our expected outcomes to occasions when transfer has been taught and prompted in some way.

Perkins and Salomon also note that in light of studies indicating low rates of transfer, some psychologists believe that the individual’s failure to transfer knowledge

simply indicates that few opportunities for real transfer exist. The Lost Sheep Theory or Expertise Theory addresses individuals with expert knowledge, “knowledge quite specific to the particular character of the domain,” that cannot aid them in other situations (Perkins and Salomon). For example, an educational psychologist’s understanding of cognitive learning would not help her perform a task in an unrelated field, such as orthopedic surgery. Recent investigation into Lost Sheep or Expertise Theory, however, indicates that reciprocal learning is possible. One study found that analytical reading instruction positively influenced the transfer of critical thinking skills to analytical writing; thus, they appear to disprove the Expertise Theory (Salomon, Globerson, and Guterman; Can and Walker). In light of these conflicting results, “Scholars should cautiously approach the Lost Sheep Theory until more and larger studies have been conducted” (Blythe, quoted in Taczak).

The final scientific theory of transfer, the Good Shepherd Theory, argues that transfer can occur, but not without dependence upon a good shepherd who guides the individual or student toward the desired transfer. This theory is further subdivided to include the categories of low-road and high-road good shepherding. In low-road situations, the individual receives only a low level of guidance from her shepherd. An example of low-road transfer occurs daily in the UGA Writing Center. Every writing consultant transfers her consulting skills from one student-visitor to another, asking questions like “What would you like to work on today? Have you already spoken to your instructor about this?” These consultants rarely require any administrative prompting. When a student arrives for writing help, the consultant instinctively understands how to approach the new situation. However, in high-road situations, the shepherd must provide

quite a bit of assistance to achieve the desired effect. Another example from the same writing center illustrates the high-road theory of consulting. Writing Center Administrators might discover that some consultants find difficulty transferring their consultation skills among particular types of visitors. For instance, one consultant mentioned that she had no trouble helping native speakers of English identify and revise error patterns in their writing; however, she instinctively wanted to perform the same revisions for her non-native speakers. After discussing the pedagogical implication, that the non-native speaker could not learn to identify and revise her own work, the consultant recognized that the same consulting techniques she used for native speakers could also benefit non-native speakers. Two factors speak to the high level of guidance required in this example. First, the consultant did not independently recognize the opportunity to transfer her techniques from one student to another. Second, the consultant only made the transfer after receiving an explicit description of how the technique could transfer. After reviewing the scientific theories, Perkins and Salomon find that transfer is most successful with a good shepherd, and they further determine that shepherding itself is not a science but an art, much as Aristotle believed that rhetoric was more an art than a science.

In describing the art of transfer, Perkins and Salomon explore two related practices of shepherding: 1) Teaching for Transfer by Bridging; and 2) Teaching for Transfer by Hugging. Bridging is where the shepherd, or teacher, first introduces a concept then invites her students to consider occasions to transfer that knowledge. For instance, in one class a composition teacher introduces the concept of supporting a main point with evidence. After her students can comfortably discuss techniques for integrating

and analyzing evidence, she could ask her students to discuss other examples of a main object or act that requires support. With some assistance, they may suggest a tower, a car, or a human walking. With further encouragement, the students can describe generalities about the nature of support, how the pieces must work or fit together and how the distinct parts also allow the whole to function. Another example of bridging is when individuals are guided toward metacognition of their work. A simple and effective two-step assignment might ask students to list the steps they would recommend a friend take to write a one-page essay. After writing the essay, students would be asked to review their recommendations and determine what was useful and what steps they would change for a similar assignment in the future. While transfer by bridging is a high-road method for guiding students toward consideration of how they might transfer knowledge, transfer by hugging removes the level of discovery from the transfer process.

Transfer by hugging is also a high-road method for encouraging transfer, but it attempts to adapt an unfamiliar situation or context to a more comfortable situation or context rather than allow the student to discover transfer possibilities independently. If an instructor wants to introduce the concepts of quotation selection and integration, one activity might allow students to review a worksheet containing several examples of quoted material embedded within paragraphs. The instructor would then ask students to note and revise the poor quotation selections and the incorrect forms of integration. While many teachers may employ this method, it does not allow the student to *hug* the experience. Because students will be eventually expected to produce an essay with quotations that they have selected and integrated, a strong assignment would not simply involve reviewing another person's writing. Instead, an assignment that requires students

to use the generative writing skills necessary for research writing would be for students to practice writing a short researched passage. By designing an assignment that is quite similar to future assignments within the writing classroom as well as in other contexts, the instructor is teaching students an awareness of transfer. The positive impact that both bridging and hugging have upon students' ability to transfer knowledge is generating academic excitement, particularly in Rhetoric and Composition.

*Recommendation Two: Embed Transfer Skills into Curriculum and Writing Center Practice*

A promising transfer dialectic has been occurring on the campus of Elon University. Taczak and Robertson are part of the Elon Research Seminar, a three-year-long study including thirty-eight other participants from four continents and some of composition study's elite scholars, such as Kathleen Blake Yancey and Chris Anson. They initially met "to discuss the challenges around the concept of transfer and the future of transfer research," but their meeting on the campus of Elon University during the summer of 2011 resulted in a much deeper exploration of transfer theory (Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey). In a discussion of significant terms related to transfer theory, Yancey explains that "terms there that show up [are] things like prior knowledge, metacognition, [and] explicitness" (quoted in Taczak). These terms—prior knowledge (knowledge gained from an earlier experience), metacognition (epistemological awareness), and explicitness (thoroughly detailed)—do appear frequently in transfer theory literature, but their implied epistemological nature also links them, through the



hugging mechanism just discussed, to the generative knowledge of New Rhetoric introduced by James Berlin and discussed in Chapter Two.

Yancey seems to understand this epistemological link as well when she indicates the relevance of Anne Beaufort's model of the five knowledge domains in writing, as she explains in a recent interview:

We might look at work like Beaufort. I think it's pretty well known that Beaufort's model has five knowledge domains to it, and so knowledge would be, even be a key term. But those knowledge domains, if I recall correctly, [are] composing, composing process knowledge, genre knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, content knowledge, discourse community knowledge. (quoted in Taczak)

Because she writes from the perspective of a longtime university writing professor and writing program administrator, Beaufort's model uses terms that are central to composition pedagogy as the titles for her five domains. Composing process is a term that emerged in the last half of the twentieth century as a move away from Current-Traditional Rhetoric. Instructors who teach process-oriented composition emphasize the importance of the writing process over the product. In process-oriented courses, students participate in peer reviews and produce revised drafts before the final product is submitted for a grade. This pedagogy presents a significant contrast to Current-Traditional Rhetoric courses, in which students often produce timed-writing samples and are rewarded for their speedy production of a grammatically perfect essay rather than one with interesting or complex content (Driscoll).

Beaufort's second domain, genre knowledge, refers to the type of documents students produce. Genres within the field of literary studies often include poetry, drama, and fiction, but with the ubiquity of online resources, genre has expanded to website creation, email, and social media writing such as texting, tweeting, and updating Facebook accounts. For each written genre, authors must recognize literary conventions and appeal to the appropriate audience. A reader of poetry will hold very different expectations from a Facebook friend. While a good short story includes realistic dialogue, the character's words are usually fully spelled out. In contrast, a text message, though also a form of realistic dialogue, is more likely to rely on linguistic shortcuts due to the electronic medium. Likewise, websites may even have two very different audiences, one who reads the content of the web pages and another who reads the coding used to design and format the display of content. A writer possessing genre knowledge, then, is one who clearly understands both the associated literary conventions and her audience's expectations for that genre.

This attention to both form and audience reminds us of Aristotle's early rhetorical teaching that persuasive rhetoric must appeal to the audience and be appropriate for the time and place (*On Rhetoric* 38; bk. 1, chap. 2). The third domain in Beaufort's model, Rhetorical Knowledge, or the ability of writers to recognize that different rhetorical situations require different types of knowledge, emerges from those teachings. Within composition studies, rhetorical knowledge, like genre knowledge, implies keen attention to audience, and it anticipates that authors will produce writing that is appropriate for the situation. For example, the character limitations of a Twitter post create a situation where concise writing is expected; however, a novelist composes her work in a situation that

allows the author to provide her readers with many details. The term Rhetorical Knowledge also implies a degree of expertise, much like the expert knowledge discussed in Perkins and Salomon's discussion of scientific transfer theories (see the discussion of Lost Sheep Transfer Theory earlier in this chapter). Rhetorical knowledge requires writers to develop specialized knowledge about audience and setting.

The fourth domain that Beaufort introduces is Content Knowledge. Like the first three domains, Content Knowledge implies that the writer has gained a degree of specialized knowledge in writing. Through the readings, discussions, and assignments in a composition course, students are expected to acquire knowledge about writing that students in math courses are not taught. For some scholars, the notion of expert status in writing seems to be at odds with Aristotle, who viewed Rhetoric as an art without subject matter. However, just as Perkins and Salomon demonstrated through practical and scientific studies that transfer theory possesses both artistic and scientific qualities, legions of rhetors may also provide evidence of the artistic and scientific aspects of rhetoric. Therefore, Beaufort is suggesting that in the fourth domain, writing students should gain a degree of specialized knowledge about writing.

Beaufort's final domain, Discourse Community Knowledge, is really a term that encompasses her first four knowledge domains. According to Erik Borg, a discourse community is a group with specific goals and purposes and whose members use written communication to achieve those goals (Borg 398). For a student in a composition course, the other members of the class compose the discourse community. To possess knowledge of the discourse community means to understand the goals and purposes of the composition classroom and to use written communication as a means for achieving those

goals. Within the discourse community of our imaginary composition classroom, an effective teacher will provide her students with knowledge of the composing processes that they are expected to use, knowledge of the genre or genres that they are expected to compose for, knowledge of their shared rhetorical goals and the techniques employed to achieve those goals, and knowledge of rhetoric's subject matter.

The acquisition of knowledge in Beaufort's five domains demands and also produces knowledge of the audience's expectations and abilities. In this manner, her model again returns us to Aristotle's emphasis on attending to the audience through three modes of appeal (i.e., ethos, pathos, logos). Additionally, Beaufort's own epistemological emphasis (she does call them the five domains of *knowledge*) inherently links her writing to: 1) early philosophers, such as Thales, Parmenides, Gorgias, and Aristotle; 2) their epistemological dialectic; and 3) the philosophy of the Ph.D. student's desire to discover and share new knowledge through writing. Finally, because we have long recognized writing as an epistemic act, Beaufort's model offers Rhetoric and Composition scholars the opportunity to invent a pedagogy that enhances our students' ability to transfer what they learn in the composition class to their major coursework and beyond.

Beaufort introduces her model of five knowledge domains in *College Writing and Beyond: a New Framework for University Writing Instruction*. This model of knowledge domains provides the overarching framework for the entire work, which follows "Tim" for his entire undergraduate experience and two years into his professional life.

Beaufort's results lead her to recommend: 1) changes in the ways universities design first-year composition curriculum; 2) the inclusion of activities and assignments that both teach students about transferring knowledge from one context to another and elevate

awareness of their ability to transfer knowledge; and 3) a redesign of the undergraduate major to include writing expectations throughout all levels of coursework (Beaufort; Driscoll).

### *What Does Embedded Transfer Look Like?*

These revolutionary recommendations have not immediately caught on, but some institutions are certainly moving toward Beaufort's paradigm. Simpson College in Indianola, Iowa completely redesigned their institutional approach to writing beginning in the fall of 2011. Eliminating first-year composition courses, they initiated their Writing Across the Curriculum approach with the first Simpson Colloquia. These seminar-style courses are taught by faculty from all disciplines, and topics represent the entirety of majors at Simpson College. Within each colloquium, students focus on seven Embedded Skills: Collaborative Leadership, Critical Thinking, Information Literacy, Intercultural Communication, Oral Communication, Quantitative Reasoning, and Written Communication ("Embedded Skills"). Keen observers note that these skills also allow teachers to incorporate Beaufort's model for each embedded skill from a different perspectives. The cross-disciplinary nature of a Simpson Colloquium demands students' awareness of the transferability of the embedded skills; thus, Simpson College sends a clear message that students are intended to transfer the identified (embedded) skills. The institutional-level integration of embedded skills situates Simpson within Perkins and Salomon's category of the high-road Good Shepherd. In courses, campus-wide lectures, and on the website, Simpson administrators and faculty clearly indicate an expectation of transfer, and they identify the skills to be transferred. To further approach the Beaufort

model and enhance transfer, Simpson College has also redesigned all majors to incorporate four writing-intensive courses (Griffith; C. Harrington; Doling). Ideally, students enroll in one writing-intensive course each year and build on writing in their chosen discipline each year.<sup>11</sup> Not only does this enable students to feel that the content of their writing courses is directly related to their area of concentration, but the implied carry-over of skills from one course to the next within the major reinforces the idea that skills should transfer and identifies precisely which skills are expected to transfer.

While the development of the Simpson Colloquium and the revised majors are certainly significant curricular changes, Simpson College is taking a further step toward highlighting writing as the medium for transfer skills. Their third step in developing a Writing Across the Curriculum approach is the creation of a new writing center to be located within the campus library. The writing center, not tied to any academic department or the library, exists under the purview of the Academic Dean, and is an optimal site for the type of writing center-oriented New Rhetoric approach that I recommend for DWP students.

### *The Next Step: Embedding Transfer into a New Rhetoric Pedagogy*

Chapter One presented a discussion of James Berlin's landmark essay "Contemporary Pedagogies: The Major Pedagogical Theories," which identifies four U.S. pedagogical approaches, ending with Berlin's belief that a New Rhetoric approach is best suited for the epistemological discipline of rhetoric. I concur that the free interplay among *writer*, *reality*, *language*, and *reader*, the definitive characteristics of New

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<sup>11</sup> The integration of writing into major courses began in Fall 2012, so no data exist demonstrating whether second, third, and fourth-year students will actually enroll in a writing-intensive course each year.

Rhetoric, promotes not only the generation of knowledge, but also transfer and transfer awareness, two skills that struggling DWP students may lack.

The inability to transfer writing skills from undergraduate and early graduate school coursework is a barrier to Ph.D. completion that is not currently being discussed or investigated in either higher education or composition studies, and I find several far-reaching implications for this discovery. First, we need to understand better how transfer works and why the most advanced and often the most capable students are not transferring skills toward this very important project, the dissertation. Second, we need to review our curriculum to determine what skills we want students to transfer to the dissertation and why they should be presented to our students. Third, if we expect our Ph.D. students to have been aware of the necessary skills to transfer from undergraduate work to the dissertation, the curriculum needs to reflect this expectation from undergraduate admission forward. Fourth, we need to determine who is best equipped for teaching students about the necessity of transfer and where these discussions should occur.

The Elon Research Seminar (ERS) is an excellent point to initiate a concentrated effort by experts in composition toward understanding transfer theory and the implications of a transfer pedagogy. At the 2011 meeting of the ERS, Kara Taczak, Kathleen Blake Yancey, Chris Anson, and others spent six days trying to determine how composition studies, in its broadest sense, can incorporate transfer theory to prepare students for upper-level courses and life beyond the classroom. I believe that their current and future work will show that embracing New Rhetoric as the pedagogical method for teaching both composition and transfer will accomplish the long-term goals of transfer

theory. The epistemic nature of New Rhetoric, that knowledge is constantly changing and constantly generated through the interactions of *writer, reality, language, and reader*, should be used to teach students several concepts. The first, and perhaps most important, concept is that knowledge transfers from one situation to another. Second, knowledge is transferrable through writing. Third, writing generates knowledge. This third concept, that writing generates knowledge about disciplines outside of writing, is a crucial element toward promoting student academic transfer.

If institutions begin to expect their students to transfer skills from one course to another and from one context to another, they must integrate this line of thinking into institutional policies and practices through major curricular changes. Transfer study results indicate that students are capable of transferring skills from one course or context to another, but they must be guided in order to do so. Curriculum changes, such as integrating writing into major courses or highlighting changes as embedded skills, alert students to the necessity of retaining and repurposing these skills. Thus, the integration of a transfer mindset will not be simple or quick. However, before we can make the necessary changes to curriculum, we must study our course goals and expectations to determine which transfer skills we are teaching and which ones we need to begin teaching.

Finally, because the conversation of transfer begins at the time of undergraduate admission, administrators and faculty need to identify the appropriate locale and method for integrating transfer pedagogy throughout the university experience and continue it through graduate school to the dissertation phase. Ideally, students' experiences throughout their academic careers will influence other experiences, allowing them to



build on prior knowledge rather than having to repeat or refresh their transferrable skills. Perhaps a more realistic and immediate approach would be to identify a central location, one that is tied to no academic department, and use that for elevating the awareness of and teaching transfer skills. Experts at this site will be responsible for collaborating with students in the generation of transferrable knowledge through New Rhetoric pedagogy. Ideally, writing should be the medium for this collaborative effort.

### *Conclusion*

This researcher will only attend a few more Wednesday Lunch sessions, but it is her hope that the tradition has been firmly established and will be continued by future instantiations of the UGA Writing Center staff. Discussions of pedagogy, curriculum, transfer, and university policy inform our academic practices, and receiving feedback in these areas develops our confidence and competence as we grow into independent scholars. Through her work as a dissertation coach and through her friendship with struggling dissertation-writers, this researcher has come to understand the magnitude of the current U.S. Ph.D. student completion and attrition problem.

A new cohort of Ph.D. students has already received their acceptance letters, and Fall semester 2013 is just over three months away. Literature in the field of doctoral program retention reports that by 2023, fully 25 percent of these bright and hopeful students, frequently the best students that their undergraduate institutions produce, will leave their programs without completing (Bowen and Rudenstine; Lovitts, “Who is Responsible”; Bell; Willis and Carmichael 192). In the end, just under 50 percent will ever complete the dissertation and be awarded the Ph.D. (Bowen and Rudenstine; Lovitts,

“Transition to Independent Research”; Nelson and Lovitts). With the odds stacked so highly against them, why do they seek a Ph.D.? How can their families allow, even encourage, them to pursue a goal when so few succeed?

The singular answer to these questions, according to Aristotle, is that “all men by nature are actuated with the desire of knowledge”—that is, human beings are born and live the entirety of their lives asking *What is?* (*Metaphysica* 1; bk. 1, chap. 2, 980a). Ontological pursuits did not begin with Aristotle, Gorgias, Parmenides, Thales, or anyone else we can name. However, these were the men who documented their desire to learn, and this desire, Aristotle explains, is human nature:

It is through wonder that men now begin and originally began to philosophize; wondering in the first place at obvious perplexities, and then by gradual progression raising questions about the greater matters too, e.g., about the changes of the moon and of the sun, about the stars and about the origin of the universe. Now he who wonders and is perplexed feels that he is ignorant (thus the myth-lover is in a sense a philosopher, since myths are composed of wonders); therefore if it was to escape ignorance that men studied philosophy, it is obvious that they pursued science for the sake of knowledge, and not for any practical utility. The actual course of events bears witness to this; for speculation of this kind began with a view to recreation and pastime, at a time when practically all the necessities of life were already supplied. Clearly then it is for no extrinsic advantage that we seek this knowledge; for just as we call a man

independent who exists for himself and not for another, so we call this the only independent science, since it alone exists for itself.

For this reason its acquisition might justly be supposed to be beyond human power, since in many respects human nature is servile; in which case, as Simonides says, “God alone can have this privilege,” and man should only seek the knowledge which is within his reach. (*Metaphysica* 1; bk. 1, chap. 2, 982b)

Whether the desire to understand *What is?* is a natural response to living in a universe too large to comprehend, man’s appetite for power, or man’s divine aspirations, Aristotle believes that man will continue to ask and seek answers to *What is?* In the same way, despite the unlikelihood that even half of an entering cohort will complete, we continue to pursue the Ph.D., the academic sign that we have earned our place among prior scholars.

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## Appendix A

October 05, 2012

Dear (Name of Contact),

My name is Beth Beggs, and I am a doctoral candidate working under the direction of Dr. Christy Desmet, Director of First-year Composition, at the University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in my research study entitled: *Cross-Sectional Survey of U.S. Dissertation and Thesis Writing: Can a New Rhetoric Writing Pedagogy Help Reduce Doctor of Philosophy and Master's Program Completion Times and Attrition Rates?*. The purpose of this study is to determine if advanced writing instruction will assist students in completing capstone program requirements, the traditional research-based dissertation and thesis. This **EXEMPT** status research request (University of Georgia Internal Review Board Project Number 2313-10090-0) complies with the guidelines of the (Participating Institution Name) office of (Name of Internal Review Board).

Participation in this study is important to our disciplines, our institutions, our programs, our faculty, and our students. I appreciate your assistance with this project, and I appreciate the time that I am asking you, your graduate students, your graduate faculty, and your writing center administrators to devote. The findings from this project may provide information that helps reduce the completion times and attrition rates of graduate students. Please forward this email to the graduate students, graduate faculty, and writing center administrators at (Name of Participating Institution). The survey begins today and continues through October 19, 2012.

The link for the (Name of Participating Institution) Graduate Student survey is: [<...>](#)

The link for the (Name of Participating Institution) Graduate Faculty survey is: [<...>](#)

The Link for the (Name of Participating Institution) Writing Center Administrator survey is: [<...>](#)

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Ms. **Beth Beggs** at 706-542-2119 or [bbeggs@uga.edu](mailto:bbeggs@uga.edu) or Dr. Christy Desmet at 706-542-1261. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602; telephone 706-542-3199; email address [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu).

Best,

Beth Beggs  
Assistant Director, UGA Writing Center  
66 Park Hall  
Department of English

University of Georgia  
Athens, GA 30602  
706-542-2119

## Appendix B

October 15, 2012

Dear (Name of Contact),

I am writing to remind you of an important study and to request your participation. I am a doctoral candidate working under the direction of Dr. Christy Desmet, Director of First-year Composition, at the University of Georgia. The online survey portion of my study, *Cross-Sectional Survey of U.S. Dissertation and Thesis Writing: Can a New Writing Pedagogy Help Reduce Doctoral and Master's Program Completion Times and Attrition Rates?* closes on October 19, 2012. Please forward this information to your graduate students, graduate faculty, and writing center administrators.

If you have not already done so, please follow this link to participate in the study by completing a survey:

The link for the (Name of Participating Institution) Graduate Student survey is: <...>

The link for the (Name of Participating Institution) Graduate Faculty link is: <...>

The Link for the (Name of Participating Institution) Writing Center Administrator survey is: <...>

Participation in this study is important to our disciplines, our institutions, our programs, our faculty, and our students. I appreciate your assistance with this project, because I recognize that I am asking you to devote several minutes to the completion of this survey. The findings from this project may provide information that helps reduce the completion times and attrition rates of Doctoral and Master's graduate students.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Ms. Beth Beggs at 706-542-2119 or [bbeggs@uga.edu](mailto:bbeggs@uga.edu) or contact Dr. Christy Desmet at 706-542-1261.

Best,

Beth Beggs, Assistant Director  
UGA Writing Center 66 Park Hall  
Department of English  
University of Georgia  
Athens, GA 30602 706-542-2119



## Appendix C

January 14, 2013

Hello,

My name is Beth Beggs, and I am a doctoral candidate working under the direction of Dr. Christy Desmet, Director of First-year Composition, at the University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in my research study entitled: *Cross-Sectional Survey of U.S. Dissertation and Thesis Writing: Can a New Rhetoric Writing Pedagogy Help Reduce Doctor of Philosophy and Master's Program Completion Times and Attrition Rates?*. The purpose of this study is to determine if stakeholders—graduate students, graduate faculty, and writing center administrators—believe that advanced writing instruction will assist students in completing capstone program requirements, the traditional research-based dissertation and thesis. This EXEMPT status research request (University of Georgia Internal Review Board Project Number 2313-10090-0) complies with the guidelines of the (Name of Participating Institution) office of (Name of local Internal Review Board).

This is the second wave of recruitment, and participation in the study, **conducted January 14, 2013 through January 27, 2013**, is important to our disciplines, our institutions, our programs, our faculty, and our students. I appreciate your assistance with this project, and I appreciate the time that I am asking your students to devote. The findings from this project may provide information that helps reduce the completion times and attrition rates of graduate students. Please forward this email to the graduate students, graduate faculty, and writing center administrators in your department at \_\_\_\_\_ University.

The link for the (Name of Participating Institution) Graduate Student survey is: <...>  
 The link for the (Name of Participating Institution) Graduate Faculty link is: <...>  
 The Link for the (Name of Participating Institution) Writing Center Administrator survey is: <...>

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Ms. **Beth Beggs** at 706-542-2119 or [bbeggs@uga.edu](mailto:bbeggs@uga.edu) or Dr. Christy Desmet at 706-542-1261. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602; telephone 706-542-3199; email address [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu).

Best,

Beth Beggs

Assistant Director, UGA Writing Center  
66 Park Hall  
Department of English  
University of Georgia  
Athens, GA 30602  
706-542-2119

## Appendix D

Hello,

I am writing to remind you of an important study and to request your participation. I am a doctoral candidate working under the direction of Dr. Christy Desmet, Director of First-year Composition, at the University of Georgia. The online survey portion of my study, *Cross-Sectional Survey of U.S. Dissertation and Thesis Writing: Can a New Writing Pedagogy Help Reduce Doctoral and Master's Program Completion Times and Attrition Rates?* closes on January 25, 2013. Please forward this information to your graduate students, graduate faculty, and writing center administrators.

I appreciate your assistance with this project, and I appreciate the time that I am asking you and your students to devote. The findings from this project may provide information that will help reduce the completion times and attrition rates of graduate students. Please forward this email to the graduate students, graduate faculty, and writing center administrators in your department at \_\_\_\_\_ University.

The link for the (Name of Participating Institution) Graduate Student survey is: <...>

The link for the (Name of Participating Institution) Graduate Faculty link is: <...>

The Link for the (Name of Participating Institution) Writing Center Administrator survey is: <...>

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Ms. **Beth Beggs** at 706-542-2119 or [bbeggs@uga.edu](mailto:bbeggs@uga.edu) or Dr. Christy Desmet at 706-542-1261. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602; telephone 706-542-3199; email address [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu).

Best,

Beth

Beth Beggs  
Assistant Director, UGA Writing Center  
Department of English  
Athens, GA 30602  
(706) 542-2119

## Appendix E

*Survey of U.S. Graduate Students: Can a New Rhetoric Research-Oriented  
Writing Pedagogy Help Reduce Program  
Completion Times and Attrition Rates?*

The Survey Research Center at the University of Georgia is assisting Ms. Beth Beggs, a Ph.D. student under the direction of Dr. Christy Desmet, in conducting a research survey about writing instruction programs at research universities, and you have been selected to participate in the study. Your participation is very important! It is anticipated that the survey will take no more than 15 minutes of your time to complete.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. All individually identifiable information that you provide will be kept strictly confidential, and you may choose not to answer any questions you do not want to answer. No risk or discomfort is anticipated from participation in the study, and there are no individual benefits from participating in the research. Please note that Internet communications are insecure and there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology itself. However, once your responses are received, standard confidentiality procedures will be used. The results of the research study may be published, but your name and the name of your institution will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format. All records from this study will be kept in a password-protected computer to which only the researcher has access.

Thank you in advance for your assistance in this research study.

By completing and submitting the survey, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project.

To begin the survey, please click on the **‘START SURVEY’** link below.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask now or at a later date. You may contact Beth Beggs, CO-PRINCIPAL investigator, at 706-542-2119 or [bbeggs@uga.edu](mailto:bbeggs@uga.edu) or Dr. Christy Desmet, Principal Investigator, at 706-542-1261 or [cdesmet@uga.edu](mailto:cdesmet@uga.edu) with any questions.

Thank you for the invaluable help that you are providing by participating in this research study.

Sincerely,

Beth Beggs  
Assistant Director, UGA Writing Center

Department of English  
Athens, GA 30602  
(706) 542-2119  
[bbeggs@uga.edu](mailto:bbeggs@uga.edu)

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to the Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia, 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address: [IRB@uga.edu](mailto:IRB@uga.edu).

Appendix F  
DWP STUDENT  
Survey

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Choose not to answer

What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the name of your program? \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the following best describes your current academic status?

- ☐ Enrolled in Master's Program
- ☐ Enrolled in combined Master's/Doctoral Program
- ☐ Enrolled in Ed.D. Program
- ☐ Enrolled in J.D. Program
- ☐ Enrolled in Ph.D. Program
- ☐ Other (PLEASE DESCRIBE)

How long have you spent/do you anticipate spending in coursework?

Please enter in Years \_\_\_\_\_ and Months \_\_\_\_\_

How many years have you spent/do you anticipate spending in preparation for exams?

Please enter in Years \_\_\_\_\_ and Months \_\_\_\_\_

Will you conduct research for and write a thesis or dissertation for your anticipated degree?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Choose not to answer

Have you taken a graduate course that provided writing instruction?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Choose not to answer

Does your program offer a graduate course in writing instruction?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Choose not to answer

Does your program of study offer out-of-class writing instruction?

- ☐ Yes

- ☐ No
- ☐ Choose not to answer

Does your institution offer out-of-class writing instruction?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Choose not to answer

Do graduate students at your institution have access to writing consultants or writing tutors?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Choose not to answer

Does your program offer any of the following services?

<b>?</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>DON'T KNOW</b>
Thesis or Dissertation writing-intensive jump-start or boot camp	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation writing-intensive retreat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation writing-intensive workshop	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or dissertation-writing seminar or series of lectures (Multiple events)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or dissertation-writing lecture (Single event)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation coaching service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation discussion of your specific strengths and weaknesses with Major Professor/Adviser	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation discussion of your specific strengths and	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

weaknesses with Committee Advisers			
Other Thesis or dissertation-writing Service (PLEASE DESCRIBE)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Have you participated in any of the following?

?	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Thesis or Dissertation writing-intensive jump-start or boot camp	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation writing-intensive retreat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation writing-intensive workshop	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or dissertation-writing seminar or series of lectures (Multiple events)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or dissertation-writing lecture (Single event)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation coaching service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation discussion of your specific strengths and weaknesses with Major Professor/Adviser	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation discussion of your specific strengths and weaknesses with Committee Advisers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Thesis or dissertation-writing Service (PLEASE DESCRIBE)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



If available, would you participate in any of the following?

?	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Thesis or Dissertation writing-intensive jump-start or boot camp	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation writing-intensive retreat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation writing-intensive workshop	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or dissertation-writing seminar or series of lectures (Multiple events)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or dissertation-writing lecture (Single event)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation coaching service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation discussion of your specific strengths and weaknesses with Major Professor/Adviser	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation discussion of your specific strengths and weaknesses with Committee Advisers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Thesis or dissertation-writing Service (PLEASE DESCRIBE)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Would you like to provide any additional information about graduate student writing?

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That completes the survey. Thank you for your time and insight into writing instruction programs at your institution.

- ☐ Submit my data
- ☐ Discard my data

## Appendix G

## GF Survey

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Choose not to answer

What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the name of your program? \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the following best describes your current academic status?

- ☐ General Faculty
- ☐ Graduate Faculty
- ☐ Other (PLEASE EXPLAIN)
- ☐ Choose not to answer

How many years have you been teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your area of specialization? \_\_\_\_\_

How many Master's students do you advise? \_\_\_\_\_

How many Doctoral students do you advise? \_\_\_\_\_

How many other graduate level students of any other kind to you advise? \_\_\_\_\_

How many total courses do you teach per year? \_\_\_\_\_

How many graduate courses do you teach per year? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you provide writing instruction as part of the coursework when you teach Graduate Students?

Yes

No

Choose not to answer

Does your program offer writing instruction courses for Graduate Students?

Yes

No

Choose not to answer

Does your institution provide a writing center?

Yes

No  
 Don't know  
 Choose not to answer

Does your program offer out-of-class writing assistance to Graduate Students?

Yes  
 No  
 Don't know  
 Choose not to answer

For the next few items, please define completion as the first day of enrollment until graduation.

Please estimate the average number of years your Master's Students take to complete their degrees. \_\_\_\_\_

Please estimate the average number of years your Doctoral Students take to complete their degrees. \_\_\_\_\_

Please estimate the number of your Master's Students who have officially left the program. \_\_\_\_\_

Please estimate the number of your Doctoral Students who have officially left the program? \_\_\_\_\_

Will you conduct research for and write a thesis or dissertation for your anticipated degree?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Choose not to answer

Have you taken a graduate course that provided writing instruction?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Choose not to answer

Does your program offer a graduate course in writing instruction?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Choose not to answer

Does your institution offer out-of-class writing instruction?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Choose not to answer

Do graduate students at your institution have access to writing consultants or writing tutors?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Choose not to answer

Does your program offer any of the following services?

?	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Thesis or Dissertation writing-intensive jump-start or boot camp	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation writing-intensive retreat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation writing-intensive workshop	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or dissertation-writing seminar or series of lectures (Multiple events)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or dissertation-writing lecture (Single event)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation discussion of your specific strengths and weaknesses with Major Professor/Adviser	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation discussion of your specific strengths and weaknesses with Committee Advisers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Thesis or dissertation-writing Service (PLEASE DESCRIBE)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Appendix H

WCA  
Survey

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Choose not to answer

What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the name of your program? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your title? \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been in your current position? \_\_\_\_\_

Does your writing center offer any of the following services?

?	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Thesis or Dissertation writing-intensive jump-start or boot camp	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation writing-intensive retreat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation writing-intensive workshop	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or dissertation-writing seminar or series of lectures (Multiple events)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or dissertation-writing lecture (Single event)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation coaching service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation discussion of the	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

student's specific strengths and weaknesses with a consultant or tutor			
Thesis or Dissertation discussion of the student's specific strengths and weaknesses within a group consultation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Thesis or dissertation-writing Service (PLEASE DESCRIBE)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do you anticipate that your program or writing center will make available any of the following?

?	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Thesis or Dissertation writing-intensive jump-start or boot camp	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation writing-intensive retreat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation writing-intensive workshop	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or dissertation-writing seminar or series of lectures (Multiple events)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or dissertation-writing lecture (Single event)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation coaching service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis or Dissertation discussion of the student's specific	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

strengths and weaknesses with a consultant or tutor			
Thesis or Dissertation discussion of the student's specific strengths and weaknesses within a group setting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Thesis or dissertation-writing Service (PLEASE DESCRIBE)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Would you like to provide any additional information about graduate student writing?

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That completes the survey. Thank you for your time and insight into writing instruction programs at your institution.

- ☐ Submit my data
- ☐ Discard my data

## Appendix I

Broad Fields	Taxonomy Fields
<b>Engineering</b>	Biomedical Engineering Chemical Engineering Civil Engineering Electrical and Electronics Engineering Mechanical Engineering Chemical Engineering
<b>Life Sciences</b>	Biology Genetics, Molecular Genetics Microbiology and Immunology Molecular and Cellular Biology Neuroscience
<b>Mathematics and Physical Sciences</b>	Chemistry Computer and Information Sciences Mathematics Physics and Astronomy
<b>Social Sciences</b>	Anthropology and Archaeology Communications Economics Political Science Psychology Sociology
<b>Humanities</b>	English Language and Literature Foreign Languages and Literature History Philosophy

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