



THESIS WRITING LIFE CYCLE

An Open House Collaboration Model for Point-of-Need Services to Graduate Students

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Introduction

Library services complement those offered by other university departments leading to a natural collaboration that can enhance support to graduate students through an integrated approach. This chapter discusses collaboration and relationship building with other departments at the University of Manitoba resulting in an innovative open house event for science graduate students that is a culmination of collaboration. This open house event provides a personalized experience for graduate students and is a model for an interdepartmental graduate student help-hub within the library.

Background

The University of Manitoba is a member of the U15 universities in Canada, a collective of Canada's leading research-intensive universities. The University of Manitoba offers more than 100 programs spanning many different subject areas.

Graduate studies in the sciences include the disciplines of biological science, chemistry, computer science, microbiology, mathematics, physics, astronomy, and statistics. In the fall of 2017, there were 406 graduate students in the Faculty of Science. The University of Manitoba has several support services available to graduate students, but they are scattered among various buildings across campus. Some of these support services include the Student Advocacy office, the Academic Learning Centre, which offers graduate student writing support, the Copyright Office, and Student Counseling Services as well as the libraries. The Sciences and Technology Library provides support to the Faculty of Science students and faculty.

At the University of Manitoba, library services for graduate students have historically been the responsibility of liaison librarians for their respective subject areas. Services included workshops primarily on reference management software and literature searching. In 2005, the Sciences and Technology Library piloted a Thesis Writing Toolkit workshop series for graduate students in the Department of Physics and Astronomy. The series was designed to address the needs of graduate students during the early stages of their thesis writing, including course work, thesis proposal, literature searching, setting up alerts, literature review, reference management, and promoting an awareness of academic integrity. Librarians partnered with writing tutors (Academic Learning Centre) and student advocates (Student Advocacy). Student advocates represent students found to have engaged in academic misconduct. Preventing academic misconduct through academic integrity programming is a major focus of the Student Advocacy office. Student Advocacy and the Academic Learning Centre have partnered for several years on writing workshops for graduate students, including writing literature reviews and avoiding plagiarism through proper citing and paraphrasing. From the perspective of addressing student needs to help them get started with thesis writing, the collaboration of librarians with writing tutors and student advocates was a natural fit.

The Thesis Writing Toolkit workshops expanded to include the Faculties of Science, Agriculture, and Engineering, as these disciplines are within our scope as a library. However, graduate students from other faculties registered, which identified a need in social sciences and humanities. The Academic Learning Centre began organizing an annual Graduate Seminar series of presentations during a one-day event for all graduate students. Topics included library support and resources (librarians for sciences, social sciences, and humanities participated), thesis writing (Writing Tutors), research and citing (Student Advocates), challenges of graduate school (Faculty of Graduate Studies), working effectively with your advisor (faculty), and copyright (Copyright Office). To help support graduate students, a workshop series was developed by the Faculty of Graduate Studies in 2012 that partners with many of the service groups on campus. The

University of Manitoba Libraries have been involved with the workshop planning since inception, which has allowed the libraries to develop partnerships with these groups.

Thesis Writing Life Cycle and Student Needs

The Thesis Writing Life Cycle is a metaphor that represents developmental stages graduate students progress through as they complete their degrees. The stages include both hard and soft skills. Graduate student needs at different stages of their “life cycle” represent opportunities to effectively promote services at point of need. The different stages are shown in figure 29.1. A variety of support services are available to help facilitate graduate students toward completing their theses or dissertations that include both library services and those by other departments within academic institutions.

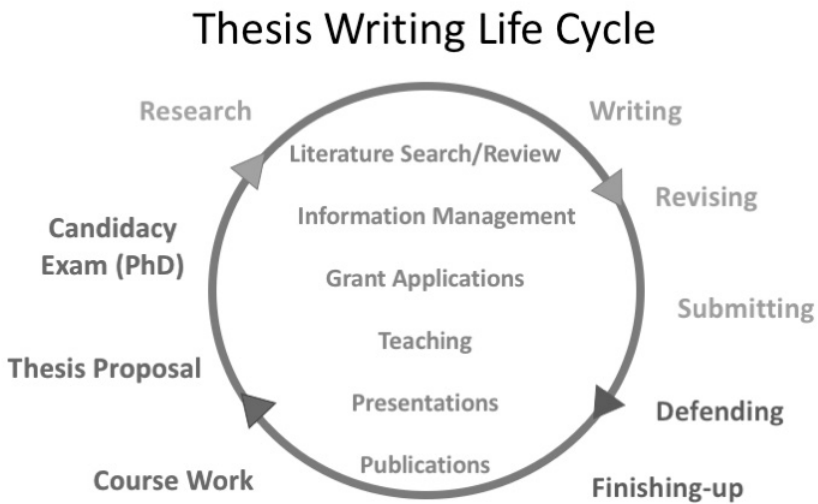


Figure 29.1

Stages of the thesis writing life cycle.

The marketing literature describes “need states” as “a complex web of rational and, most often, emotional and subconscious triggers leading to a product choice. Importantly, they are a result of situations individuals find themselves in

at a particular moment in time, such as their mood, attitude and feelings but also, the dynamics around the circumstances or the shopping environment.”¹ For example, purchases can be aligned with items such as grooming products or snacks, or with objectives such as child care or preparing dinner.² Academic needs are a major focus for graduate students with a variety of obligations toward completing their degrees. The Thesis Writing Life Cycle model reflects academic needs as students progress through graduate school. Students also have needs outside of their academic focus, including social needs, entertainment and recreational needs, personal needs, travel needs, and rejuvenation needs.³ Libraries and universities provide services to meet many of students’ needs. However, student awareness and access can be variable.⁴ Student need states are affected by shifting moods and priorities, and libraries must plan to offer a variety of services and programing giving students more reasons to use our services and expertise. How we deliver the message is another factor in addressing student need fulfillment, and having a marketing and communications plan is essential. Libraries are more than a place to do research. They are a help-hub, a place to socialize and rejuvenate, and a place to collaborate.

Open House Events

Academic libraries often use the open house idea to inform undergraduate students about different library services in a fun way.⁵ An internet search on graduate student open houses in libraries indicates that many academic libraries do offer open house events for graduate students, but there are very few articles written on their experience. Evans highlighted the results of her internet search for graduate student open houses in her article on Midwestern University’s experience organizing a graduate student open house event.⁶ Many of the open house events described focused primarily on highlighting the library services available to the students. At Midwestern University Library’s Open House, graduate students met with librarians who highlighted various services such as creating alerts in databases or saving search histories, interlibrary loan, and other research tools. They also had a variety of different technological devices like e-readers and tablets that graduate students could try out. The Director of the Math and Writing Center was also invited to highlight the resources available for writing and citing. The open house was held for three years, and there was some disappointment in the number of students attending the event.⁷

Another example of a graduate student open house is the Teaching and Research Support Open House that was organized at George Washington University Libraries. Faculty and graduate students were invited to attend a type of conference poster session that highlighted services provided by different cam-

pus partners. Posters, marketing, and logistics were designed by library staff members.⁸

A Personalized Open House

Programs or events for graduate students at the University of Manitoba have focused on presentations to graduate students by librarians and experts from departments that provide services to them. Such a format presumes the information graduate students need to know without much input from them. Questions and answers are reserved for the end of each presentation. However, given the large group of students and limited time, it is not practical to answer all of their questions. As a result, student needs might not be completely addressed.

In order to increase awareness of expertise on campus and provide an opportunity for students to ask specific questions, an open house that gathers experts located across campus into one place was organized for graduate students in the Faculty of Science. The Thesis Writing Life Cycle was used as the theme for the open house. Students who are at different need states on the Thesis Writing Life Cycle can meet with experts face-to-face and have their specific questions answered. The first open house was offered in February of 2016. A second open house took place in October of 2017. The tables of experts and other resources were organized as follows:

- GradSteps: stand-alone computer for students to browse listings of workshops
- Who's Your Librarian: stand-alone computer for students to identify the liaison librarian for their department
- Searching and Writing: librarian and writing tutors
- Academic Integrity: reference management, copyright officer, and student advocate
- Grant Writing: research facilitator, Faculty of Science
- Publishing Options/Manage Your Data: librarian, open access, predatory publishers and data curation
- Data Collection and Analysis: statisticians, Department of Statistics (2017 only)
- Academic Metrics and Author ID: librarian
- Keep Your Life on Track: counsellor, Student Counselling Services

Experts were seated at tables located on the main floor of the Sciences and Technology Library (figure 29.2), with some experts grouped together within similar themes. For example, the “Searching and Writing” table

grouped together writing tutors with a librarian providing search expertise. The “Academic Integrity” table had student advocates, a copyright officer, and a librarian providing expertise on reference management software. Strategic grouping of experts facilitated referrals and serendipitous conversations among students and experts enhancing the information students received during their interactions. The face-to-face format permitted deeper conversations between experts and students. Experts also benefited from student feedback about the services they access. Face-to-face meetings, also known in market research methodologies as personal interviews, are quite valuable in tapping into the knowledge and opinions of target audiences.⁹ Experts have used student feedback from such interactions to update and refresh their services and programs.



Photographs by Kira Koop

Figure 29.2

Various tables at graduate student open house.

Participation Incentives

A prize drawing was offered to encourage students to register for the event. In 2017, a \$25 gift certificate sponsored by University of Manitoba Student Union to businesses in the student union building was offered as the prize.

The Faculty of Science Dean's Office sponsored a refreshment table with a variety of beverages and snacks. Experts were also provided lunch sponsored by the University of Manitoba Libraries since the open house extended through the noon hour. Students were given BINGO cards corresponding to tables where experts were seated to encourage interaction. On the back of the BINGO card was the Thesis Writing Life Cycle model, and students were asked to circle where on the Life Cycle they presently are. Completed BINGO cards were entered into a second prize drawing for a \$25 gift certificate to student union businesses sponsored by Science Librarians. Attendees also received a selection of promotional items that were solicited from library vendors.

A total of sixty students attended the event in 2016, and seventy-one students attended in 2017. Students were encouraged to preregister for both events. Approximately 50 percent of students decided to attend without registering, and some students that registered did not attend. Although more student participation was desired, in reality it would have been difficult to accommodate more students due to the face-to-face format and the fact that there were students standing in line during peak periods.

Communication

A save-the-date announcement was sent out to all Faculty of Science graduate students via email two weeks before the open house. A reminder email was sent out one week ahead with a link to the event website, which included details about the event and a registration link. Students were asked to register for the event and be entered for a door prize of a \$25 gift certificate. The registration numbers were lower than desired, so an email was sent out every day for four days prior to the event. Each email had a different message about the event. One email highlighted the types of questions that could be asked at the open house. For instance, one question was how a reference manager could be used with LaTeX document preparation system, which prompted several students to stop by the Reference Management table for assistance.

Graduate chairs in each department in the Faculty of Science were asked to encourage their graduate students to attend the open house. A webpage for the open house provided event details including prize drawings, a link to a registration form, topics covered, and information about participating experts. Print posters (figure 29.3) were placed within the library, Faculty of Science departments including the main offices, and graduate student lounges. Digital displays within the library also had information about the open house.

Thesis Writing Life cycle



Graduate Student OPEN HOUSE

WHERE: Sciences and Technology Library
Main Floor, Machray Hall

WHEN: Thursday, October 5, 2017
Drop in between 10AM – 2PM

ALL THE EXPERTS IN ONE PLACE

Connect with UM professionals who can help you throughout your Thesis Writing Life Cycle.

DISCUSSION TOPICS:

Searching and Writing The literature review process, effective search strategies, staying current & writing tips and advice.

Academic Integrity Citing and managing your references. Understanding copyright and avoiding plagiarism.

Grant Writing Write effective fellowship and grant proposals.

Publishing Options Understand open access and predatory publishers.

Data Collection and Analysis Designing your experiment, analyzing data and interpreting results.

Manage Your Data Keep your data safe and secure.

Academic Metrics and Author ID Make your research discoverable and maximize your academic productivity metrics with an author ID.

Keep Your Life on Track Time/stress management and successful interpersonal relations.

Grad Steps Workshops to hone the skills needed for academic and career success.

PRIZE DRAWS, FREE STUFF & REFRESHMENTS!

Figure 29.3

Poster promoting the 2017 graduate student open house.

Survey

A survey was circulated after the event to all of the science graduate students, including those that did not attend the open house. In 2016 there were twenty-three responses to the survey, and in 2017, twenty-two responses were received. Some of the responses were from students who did not attend the event. The survey questions asked about the department they were from, how they found out about the open house, the best time of year to attend an open house, the best time of day, the length of time recommended for the open house, whether or not they connected with the open house theme “Thesis Writing Life Cycle,” which tables they visited, and if there was an expert not available that they would like to see. Students also rated their experience at the open house, and open-ended questions asked about what they liked best about the open house and how the open house could be improved. Not all of the survey respondents answered each question, particularly the questions toward the end of the survey.

The students who responded to the survey found out about the open house primarily by email (figure 29.4). Some comments in 2017 indicated that the students thought there were too many email messages sent. Word of mouth was also important.

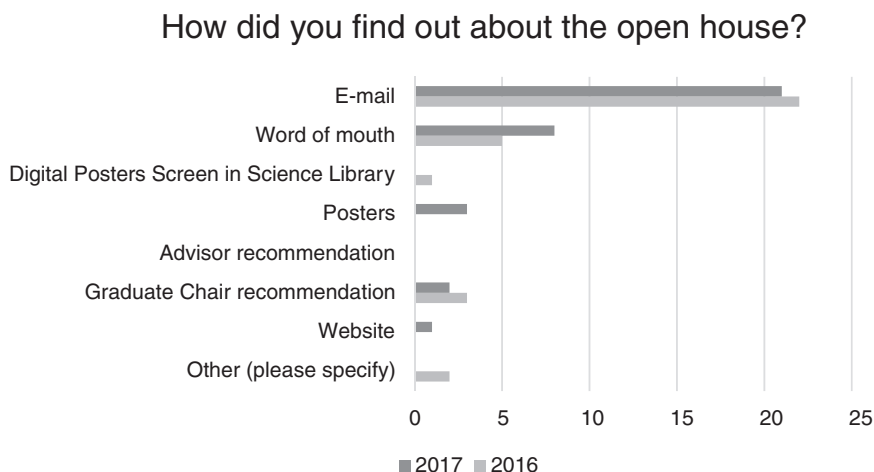


Figure 29.4

Answers to “How did you find out about the open house?”

When asked what they liked best about the open house, attendees stated they liked being able to access different experts in one location, the free food, and the atmosphere. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents who attended the

open house over the two years indicated that the open house theme connected with their experiences. One of the students who did not connect with the theme indicated that it was not possible to navigate the tables in sequence so the theme did not resonate.¹⁰ However, the student did not think that this issue detracted from the open house experience. One student was not aware of the theme, and one student indicated that they might not see the value in the same open house in another year or two. When asked whether there was an area of expertise not represented at the event, one student responded with career counselling, but the majority of students did not provide any comments. Attendees were surprised by the information they received during the open house. One person commented that the open house “was far more useful than I expected, some areas I didn’t know anything about, and some other I improved the knowledge I had (for example, I learned how to better search for literature [*sic*] on web of science or Scopus).” Another student indicated, “There is a lot of information and resources presented that really you have no idea exist!!” Other comments received indicated that students liked the personal approach, “I liked how it was a very personal 1-1 conversation with people”; the layout, “The way the tables were set up in themes made it very open and inviting”; and the consolidation of experts, “Very easy to have questions answered without having to go searching for offices or through websites.” Some of the suggestions for improvement included having more space with the experts, increasing the space for the open house (rectified in 2017), and having more tables. Comments received from the students who did not attend indicated that the students were busy either with class, lab work, or other expectations that are required of graduate students.

In addition, a survey was sent to the experts who participated in the event. Survey questions included the best time of year for them to participate, the best time period and length of time to offer the open house, comments on the open house theme, and suggestions for improvement. Comments received from the experts were very positive. They liked having different experts together in the same location. Several comments were received that indicated they liked being grouped together with other departments. For instance, one respondent indicated, “We shared the table with a librarian. The grouping was appropriate to our work and student needs. I enjoyed the collaborative work!” Another expert commented, “We had a good grouping, in particular as students would ask us questions that we could easily refer to others at the table.” They also liked the personal approach: “The one-one conversations with students are very useful, helps them make a more personal connection to our service and therefore, may be more likely to use our service in the future.” This statement agreed with a student comment that was received. Some suggestions for future open houses included offering some kind of lecture series in the library computer lab as well and some time for the different experts to meet each other. The experts pre-

ferred holding the open house during the October Reading Week or the February Reading Week, but the top preference for the graduate students was during the early fall term (figure 29.5). Graduate students and experts preferred the late morning to early afternoon time frame for the open house.

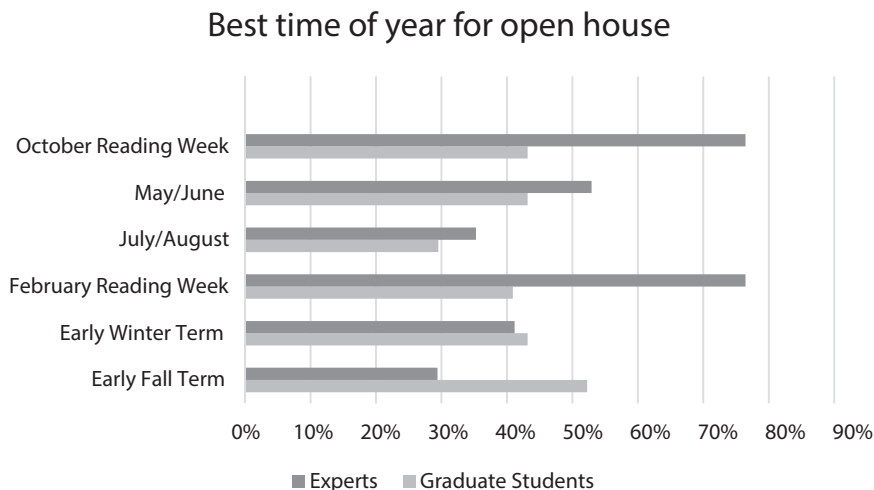


Figure 29.5

Preferences of graduate students and experts for the open house time of year.

Conclusion

The Thesis Writing Life Cycle Open House event highlights in one place the services and experts that are available across campus to help graduate students as they complete their program of studies and research. This supports the findings of Rempel, Hussong-Christian, and Mellinger that “graduate students need cross-campus efforts to support them in their multiple roles of student, researcher, teacher and future academic or professional.”¹¹ The face-to-face format of graduate students meeting with experts facilitated a very productive and meaningful exchange of information specific to an individual student’s needs. In turn, experts had the opportunity to talk directly with students about their experience accessing and using expert’s services. The open house is a proof of concept for a help-hub centered in the library where students, at point of need, can book appointments with experts. As Rempel, Hussong-Christian, and Mellinger stated, “Librarians and library administrators may be well-positioned at the ‘center’ of

campus academic life to engage graduate schools and other appropriate campus administrators in collaboratively addressing graduate student needs.”¹² Networking opportunities between experts and between students were apparent at the latest open house, and future planning will seek to create opportunities to facilitate more networking.

Notes

1. Alison Leith and Nicky Riley, “Understanding Need States and Their Role in Developing Successful Marketing Strategies,” *Journal of the Market Research Society* 40, no. 1 (1998): 26–27.
2. Brian Scott Mathews, *Marketing Today's Academic Library* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2009), 25.
3. Mathews, *Marketing Today's Academic Library*, 26–28.
4. Carlette Washington-Hoagland and Leo Clougherty, “Identifying the Resource and Service Needs of Graduate and Professional Students,” *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 2, no. 1 (2002): 125–43, <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2002.0014>; Melanie Greene, “Come Hell or High Water: Doctoral Students’ Perceptions on Support Services and Persistence,” *International Journal of Doctoral Studies* 10 (2015): 501–18.
5. Ellysa Stern Cahoy and Rebecca Merritt Bichel, “A Luau in the Library? A New Model of Library Orientation,” *College and Undergraduate Libraries* 11, no. 1 (2004): 49–60, https://doi.org/10.1300/J106v11n01_06; Cristina Caminita et al., “Let Them Eat King Cake,” in *Innovative Solutions for Building Community in Academic Libraries*, ed. Sheila Bonnand and Mary Anne Hansen (Hershey PA: IGI Global, 2017), 179–99, <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-4666-8392-1.ch010>.
6. Karen Evans, “Show Them What They Need to Know (It’s For Their Own Good!): Our Adventure in Creating a Library Open House for Graduate Students,” *Codex: The Journal of the Louisiana Chapter of the ACRL* 3, no. 3 (2015): 10–24.
7. Evans, “Show Them What They Need to Know.”
8. John Danneker and Robin Delaloye, “Faculty and Graduate Student Outreach through a University-wide Collaborative Event,” PowerPoint slides, accessed May 1, 2018, <http://lis.cua.edu/res/docs/danneker1.pdf>.
9. Mathews, *Marketing Today's Academic Library*.
10. The theme and corresponding model were intended to raise awareness of student needs and not to be used in a sequential manner because the nature of student need states tends to change.
11. Hannah Gascho Rempel, Uta Hussong-Christian, and Margaret Mellinger, “Graduate Student Space and Service Needs: A Recommendation for a Cross-campus Solution,” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 37, no. 6 (December 2011): 482, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2011.07.004>.
12. Rempel, Hussong-Christian, and Mellinger, “Graduate Student Space,” 484.

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