



## CHAPTER 31

# TEAMING UP WITH YOUR GRADUATE SCHOOL FOR ACADEMIC AND CAREER SUCCESS

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## Introduction

During graduate school, students must complete significant milestones to attain graduation and their first professional positions. The Toulouse Graduate School (TGS) at the University of North Texas (UNT) has identified three milestones in the academic life cycle where graduate students often falter, needing encouragement and support to move forward: (1) writing the dissertation or thesis proposal, (2) completing the writing of the dissertation or thesis, and (3) developing an elevator speech for potential employers. This chapter describes how the Library Research Support Services Department (LRSS) of the UNT Libraries has collaborated with TGS to support graduate students through the process of achieving these milestones. Starting with the formation of LRSS, the chapter chronicles the development of graduate student programs and the department's expanding relationship with TGS.

## Library Research Support Service Department

In 2014, the Public Services Division of the UNT Libraries had seven open positions. The Associate Dean for Public Services and the Dean of Libraries used the opportunity to reconsider the structure of the division, in particular, how to best organize and manage a large unit of subject librarians. The Academic Associate Vice Provost of TGS, Dr. Joseph Oppong, was simultaneously requesting more tailored library services for graduate students. The library administration responded with an approach that was new to the UNT Libraries by implementing an audience-based service model with two departments focused on different segments of the population: the Library Learning Department for undergraduates and the LRSS Department for graduate students and faculty.

Founded on the idea that graduate students and faculty have unique needs that cross disciplinary boundaries, the LRSS Department promotes research and teaching success by offering targeted services to both audiences throughout their academic careers. The new department brought together three experienced librarians serving as subject liaisons to colleges and departments where they already had strong connections to graduate students: the sciences, math, art, theatre, dance, and education. After conducting a national search, the libraries brought in a new department head to lead this team. Her enthusiasm and ideas coupled with their institutional knowledge and dedication to serving students helped the department get off to a strong start and build momentum quickly.

## Eagle Dissertation Boot Camps

Dr. Joseph Oppong requested facility support from the UNT Libraries for the first Eagle Dissertation Boot Camps in 2011. He wanted to increase the graduation rate of doctoral students by offering them three days of uninterrupted time in a quiet space to write their dissertations. The UNT Libraries agreed to provide space for the camps, usually in the main library's largest meeting room. During the spring 2011 and fall 2011 semesters, TGS held two boot camps over three-day weekends. Dr. Oppong's administrative assistant from TGS was responsible for registration, setting up the room and checking the technology on each morning of the camp, arranging catering for meals, and coordinating visits by support services for graduate students. The library's involvement was limited at this point. A public services librarian checked in with the group once or twice daily for facility needs and library questions, but only on weekdays of the camps.

In August 2014, the head of the newly formed LRSS Department assigned support for the boot camps to the subject librarian for art, theater, and dance, who had a long record of service to graduate students. She added significant value to the library's existing support by observing unmet needs of the attendees and responding to them resourcefully. Initially, the art librarian improved the space for the students and camp organizers. Because the room was open to the UNT community at night, she began arriving at least one hour before the camp started to rearrange the furniture, clean the room, and reset the technology to suit the boot camp activities. The art librarian also made herself available to the camp administrators and students for assistance with the room for the duration of each camp day, including weekends. She increased monitoring of the room to multiple visits per day.

The art librarian noticed technology challenges at the dissertation boot camps and worked to improve the situation for the graduate students and the camp organizers. The libraries' Technology and Computing Operations Department did not have weekend hours, so the librarian asked for training from one of the technicians so that she could fix any technology problems. She also noticed that the campers' tables had to be crowded closely around the four pillars in the room because they were the main source of electrical outlets. To remedy this situation, the art librarian requested the purchase of power strips, which allowed the students to set up to work anywhere in the space. Dr. Oppong and his assistant informed her that some students did not have laptops they could bring to the camp every day. The art librarian worked with the Head of Access Services to provide uninterrupted laptop checkout to campers for the duration of each boot camp day through the 24-Hour Computing Lab in the main library. She facilitated the checkout by sharing the boot camp roster with both departments when she received it from TGS.

The art librarian also improved reference help for the graduate students at the boot camps without disrupting the quiet writing time desired by Dr. Oppong and the participants. Before each camp began, she requested the roster from TGS and sent personalized letters to the subject librarians to let them know they had students in the upcoming camp, and when and how to contact them. She monitored the request sheets for library help several times during the day. If a participant signed up, then she would meet with the student at the next break or outside the room so as not to disturb the other campers. If the student needed subject-specific expertise, then the art librarian would alert the appropriate subject librarian that a student in the boot camp needed assistance.

The TGS administrative assistant distributed a support services packet to the graduate students at each Eagle Dissertation Boot Camp. The art librarian realized that the library handout was badly outdated, so she created a succinct, current handout for the camps. The new handout, "UNT Library Resources for

Graduate Students,” is a one-page, double-sided document (figure 31.1) that includes images and information about how to accomplish the following research tasks:

- find and contact a subject librarian
- identify, find, and search subject-specific databases
- find books in the UNT Libraries catalog and WorldCat
- find dissertations and theses
- order items through interlibrary loan
- use reference managers

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UNT Libraries

### UNT Library Resources for Graduate Students

**Your Subject Librarian:**  
Librarians are here to help you with your research! To find your subject librarian, see: [www.library.unt.edu/staff-directory/librarians](http://www.library.unt.edu/staff-directory/librarians). Email your librarian or arrange an appointment with them by filling out this form: <http://tinyurl.com/nc3qjpa>

**Journal Articles:**  
To find journal articles, go to the UNT Libraries homepage: [www.library.unt.edu](http://www.library.unt.edu), and choose the tab "Databases".

**START YOUR RESEARCH**  
Search for a Database

**If you know the title of the journal database that you need to search, then select it from the drop down menu of A-Z databases in the "Select a Database" search box and click to "Go" button.**

**If you don't know the name of the database you need, use the drop down box in the "Browse by Subject" box and then click the "Go" button.**  
*If accessing off campus, you will be asked for an EUID and EUID password.*

**Books from the UNT Libraries:**  
Search the UNT Library Catalog <http://jll.library.unt.edu/> to find books.

**Books Published on Your Topic Beyond the UNT Libraries:**  
To find more books published on your topic, search the WorldCat. To get to the WorldCat, go to the UNT Libraries home page: [www.library.unt.edu](http://www.library.unt.edu), choose the "Databases" tab and then click on WorldCat from the drop down menu in the "Select a Database" box. Any books that don't have the UNT logo beside them can be requested to be borrowed from Interlibrary Loan (ILL) by clicking on the UNT Interlibrary Loan link in the record, and then you will be taken to the ILL Login page.

**Interlibrary Loan:**  
Books, book chapters, journal articles and dissertations/theses not owned by the UNT Libraries can be requested through our borrowing program Interlibrary Loan. <http://tinyurl.com/gyam81p>  
If you don't have an Interlibrary Loan account, create one online in minutes here: <http://tinyurl.com/9emec68>

**Dissertations and Theses:**  
Search the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global database to find dissertations and theses. Coverage is 1861 to the present. Most dissertations written from 1997 to the present are full text. This is a great database to search to find out what dissertations have already been written on your topic and to see bibliographies of other authors. Dissertations and theses that are not full-text can be requested through Interlibrary Loan.  
To get to ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, just choose the "Databases" tab and then click ProQuest Dissertations from the drop down menu in the "Select a Database" box. Use the "Advanced Search" for additional search options such as: author, date, advisor, and school.

**RefWorks:**  
RefWorks is a free citation manager offered to UNT Students from the UNT Libraries. RefWorks can make organizing citations and creating a bibliography for your dissertation much easier.  
To get to RefWorks, choose the "Databases" tab and then click RefWorks from the drop down menu in the "Select a Database" box.  
RefWorks Library Guide: <http://guides.library.unt.edu/refworks>. This guide includes short videos on how to make a RefWorks account, and install and use Write N Cite. Write N Cite lets you insert in-text citations while writing.

**How to Do a Literature Review:**  
<http://guides.library.unt.edu/litrev>

**Graduate Writing Help:**  
The UNT Libraries have a partnership with the UNT Writing Center and UNT Learning Center to provide graduate writing help and tutoring in the Willis Library. Check the link below for hours: <https://www.library.unt.edu/services/public-services/writing-center>

**Workshops from the UNT Libraries:**  
The UNT Libraries offer several workshops for graduate students, including: Introduction to RefWorks, the Proposal Preparation Workshop for Humanities and Social Sciences, and one for STEM students. The workshops are listed on the Towhose Graduate School's events calendar: <https://tinyurl.com/unt-grad-events>

**Weekly Dissertation Writing Group (WDWG)**  
Room 250K on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Willis Library is reserved every Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. for students working on their thesis or dissertation. To join the WDWG email list, contact gradwriting@unt.edu.

**Your Library Account:**  
Log into your library account to see a list of books you have checked out and to renew them online. <http://www.library.unt.edu/accounts/login>

RB Last updated 2/6/2018

**Figure 31.1**

## UNT Library Resources for Graduate Students

The demand for the dissertation boot camps grew as awareness increased among graduate students and their advisors due to library marketing and word of mouth. TGS and LRSS responded in the 2015–2016 academic year by increasing the frequency of boot camps to their current level of one per month, except in May and December. Again in response to student requests, TGS opened the boot camps to master's level students working on theses. Students also inquired about having additional weekly writing space to keep up the momentum they had gained in the boot camp. The art librarian helps with this ongoing effort by reserving library space for the Weekly Dissertation Writing Group.

The Eagle Thesis and Dissertation Boot Camps continue to be in high demand, and the art librarian continues to collaborate with TGS to improve this vital service for graduate students. With her keen observations and dedication to customer service, the art librarian took the library's small role in the boot camps in 2011 and developed it into a relationship of trust and respect between TGS and LRSS. Dr. Oppong and his administrative staff have expressed their appreciation of her contributions to the camps and seek her input on enhancements. The art librarian cultivated goodwill that led to more involved collaboration on future projects.

## Proposal Preparation Workshops

The Proposal Preparation Workshops for graduate students grew out the foundation of trust built between TGS and LRSS through the diligent work of the art librarian at the Eagle Dissertation Boot Camps. In June 2015, Dr. Oppong requested a meeting with LRSS to discuss a challenge earlier in the academic journey of graduate students. In this case, the graduate school invited LRSS to collaborate on a graduate student service from its inception. TGS's statistics indicated many students completed their course work and comprehensive exams, then stalled before starting their proposals for dissertations or theses. The dilemma was how to encourage students to commence their proposals and proceed to a timely graduation.

Dr. Oppong sought the expertise of the subject librarians in LRSS in the areas of literature searching and organizing effective programming. TGS already offered a one-and-one-half-hour workshop on writing a proposal, but the associate vice provost surmised that a daylong "mini-boot camp" would give the students the confidence and commitment to start their proposals, as the boot camps had for students in the writing stage of their theses and dissertations. LRSS supported this approach, and discussion led to the identification of four areas where the students needed the most help. The schedule offered two sessions in the morning led by teaching faculty followed by two sessions led by library faculty:

1. How to develop a strong research question.
2. How to write a dissertation or thesis proposal.
3. Which subject-specific databases to use for literature searches.
4. How to use a reference manager to increase productivity.

The team decided to offer the workshops to students in all disciplines, as the purpose was to give general information and encouragement, rather than

duplicate guidance received from the students' departments.

On this collaborative project, LRSS did the majority of work; however, TGS provided some key components to make the workshops successful. The group decided LRSS would

1. Recruit presenters for the four sessions at the workshops.
2. Provide space for workshops.
3. Provide continental breakfast and lunch for the students.
4. Coordinate administrative coverage, such as registration confirmation, checkin, and attendance.

TGS committed to providing two key mechanisms the libraries lacked: email access to graduate students, and a registration system. TGS was authorized to email all graduate students or subsets of that population. This solved the problem of how best to promote the workshops to the graduate students, who do use their university email accounts. TGS also has an online registration system connected to its events calendar. The communications channel and online registration were significant contributors to the eventual success of the workshops.

The organizers for the proposal preparation workshops were the science librarian from LRSS and the associate vice provost's administrative assistant. One expected challenge of initiating the workshops was recruiting presenters from among teaching faculty, who are extremely busy with course and research commitments. TGS shared a list of faculty who had previously taught the short workshops on how to write proposals. LRSS discovered that TGS's sponsorship of the full-day proposal workshop made recruitment easier than anticipated. Two faculty members from the Department of Public Administration volunteered for the first workshop in November 2015. The organizers assured the faculty members that they would alert the students to the general nature of the presentations and the need to consult with their own departments for proposal requirements.

Registration for the first Proposal Preparation Workshop was a bit rocky. TGS began promoting the workshop about a month before the scheduled date. The science librarian sent a promotional email to all subject librarians to share with faculty at their discretion. The organizers planned to cap registration at fifty students and reached that cap within two days. The science librarian started a waiting list, contacted registered students to confirm their attendance, and reported openings to those waiting for a seat. As the date approached, LRSS expected fifty students at the first workshop.

The team learned a lesson from the first workshop that would be consistent over the following workshops. Approximately two-thirds of the students

who registered eventually attended the workshop. The one-third who were absent generally did not notify the organizers. The attendance numbers were consistent in the first year with thirty-four students at the first workshop and thirty-three at the second in February 2016.

TGS already had a one-page workshop evaluation, and LRSS received permission to add questions specific to the proposal workshops. The added questions asked students about the value of the instruction on formulating the research question, writing a proposal, and using databases and reference managers. An open-ended question asked students to share how the workshop might be improved. The students requested the following in the first round of evaluations:

- a shorter workshop (it was initially eight hours long)
- focus on one or two disciplines, for example, a science and engineering workshop
- more discussion time in the session about writing the proposal
- workshops at the College of Engineering campus

These requests remained consistent in evaluations gathered after the February 2016 workshop, so TGS and LRSS planned to restructure the workshops for the next academic year.

The organizers planned two discipline-specific workshops per long semester: humanities/social sciences and science/engineering for the 2016–2017 academic year. Splitting up the workshops by discipline immediately solved the problem of exceeding the cap of fifty students. An average of forty students per workshop registered in the fall semester and an average of twenty-five per workshop in the spring. The team also made additional changes for the fall semester:

- shortening the workshop by two hours by merging the sessions on developing a research question and writing the proposal
- dividing the session on writing the proposal into two sections led by faculty members from the two broad disciplines
- asking the teaching faculty to reserve thirty minutes out of the proposal session for discussion
- offering at least one STEM workshop a year at the College of Engineering campus

The biggest challenge in the second year was recruiting four times as many teaching faculty to lead the proposal writing sessions. The science librarian found the most effective approach was to start emailing faculty six weeks to two months in advance, concentrating on faculty recommended by subject librarians. The organizers have identified faculty who enjoy the workshops and will participate multiple times. Once these faculty have facilitated sessions at two

workshops, the science librarian gives them the opportunity to take a break and asks if they can recommend other faculty members. These steps have provided a fairly steady flow of speakers for the proposal writing session.

The second year of workshops went more smoothly. The workshop schedule ran from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on a Saturday, starting with a continental breakfast followed by a welcome from the Academic Associate Vice Provost of TGS. Students then split into two groups by discipline for two sessions with a break in between. Library faculty, students, and teaching faculty then enjoyed a forty-five-minute lunch and networking time. Finally, the two groups joined for the reference manager instruction session. The evaluations showed the majority of students were satisfied with the specificity of the workshops for their discipline and felt they had received information necessary to move forward with their proposals.

In their third year, the workshops have become predictable and routine, to the point where planners are considering transferring more administrative aspects to paraprofessional staff. Engineering students have requested instruction in BibTeX/LaTeX to create references, which the team hopes to add in the future. Many students have requested samples of successful dissertation and proposals, which a confusing variety of faculty and department staff currently archive. To make access more straightforward, LRSS has initiated discussions with the Digital Libraries Division to create a work flow to request proposals from students who have successfully completed their dissertations and theses for deposit in UNT's institutional repository.

Finally, LRSS and TGS plan to start a study of the impact of the Proposal Preparation Workshops on graduate students' progression through the rest of their academic journey. The team plans to distribute a follow-up survey to the attendees to get their perspective on the workshop's impact. Based on this assessment, the team will have data to demonstrate whether the graduate students perceive the workshops as being crucial to their success in the stage of writing the dissertation or thesis proposal in the graduate student life cycle.

The collaboration between LRSS and TGS became more complex and interdependent over the years the team developed the proposal workshops. TGS relied on the librarians for their expertise in research skills and reference managers, as well in programming. In turn, LRSS depended on TGS's experience with promotion and registration channels. The team communicated constantly about the status of issues and how to improve future workshops. The mutual respect and appreciation developed during the Proposal Presentation Workshops led to another joint endeavor.



## Three Minute Thesis Competition

The Three Minute Thesis (3MT) is a competition for graduate students established by the University of Queensland in 2008.<sup>1</sup> During the competition, students working on master's or doctoral degrees have three minutes and one slide to present their research and the importance of that research to society. The competition challenges students to condense their research in a way that is engaging and understandable. The purpose of the competition is to advance the communication and presentation skills of graduate students. The 3MT concept spread to numerous universities and eventually grew into an international competition.

Dr. Oppong first encountered the 3MT concept while attending an annual meeting of the Council of Graduate Schools.<sup>2</sup> In it he recognized a possible support program for another milestone in the life cycle of the graduate student: securing a professional position after graduation. Dr. Oppong knew that graduate students struggle with networking, presenting their research, and communicating their research to potential employers. He believed the program might strengthen the “elevator speeches” of UNT graduate students and improve their chances of being hired in their chosen fields, as well as raise the profile of the graduate school.

Dr. Oppong reached out to several people across the UNT campus, including the head of LRSS, to collaborate in developing and launching the 3MT competition. The trust that the LRSS librarians had built up working with TGS in the past led to their playing a major role in the 3MT implementation. Once again LRSS was included based on the department's willingness to make facilities arrangements at the library for the program. More importantly, LRSS was invited to participate in this instance in recognition of the librarians' advocacy for graduate students and understanding of presentation skills and scholarship.

TGS and its collaborators initiated the 3MT competition at UNT in 2015. The competition is composed of preliminary rounds with judges selected from UNT faculty and staff, followed by a final round with judges selected from high-profile community members. The larger meeting rooms in the main library serve as the locations for the preliminary rounds of the competition, giving students practice using a microphone and presenting to an audience in front of a large screen. During both preliminary and final rounds, judges score students on a number of factors and provide specific constructive feedback to help students improve their communication skills. At the preliminary rounds, the judges give oral feedback immediately after the presentations. Total scores determine which students move on to the finals and the top two winners. The 3MT competition has a people's choice winner to increase audience engagement. This adds an incentive for students to invite friends, family, professors, and others to support

them in the final round of the competition. Cash prizes provide another incentive, with the winner, runner-up, and people's choice all receiving prizes donated by various local businesses and community members.

The TGS invited the LRSS librarians to be judges during the preliminary rounds, in recognition of their broad subject knowledge and expertise in presentation skills. During the feedback sessions, both teaching faculty and staff judges were able to witness the scholarly abilities of librarians and how they can contribute to graduate student success. The 3MT preliminaries also gave the librarians the opportunity to see the breadth and quality of research occurring at UNT, which enables the fine-tuning of library services for graduate students and faculty. As 3MT enters its third year at UNT, LRSS has invited other librarians to participate in the preliminary judging to give them the occasion to highlight their comprehension of the scholarly process and presentation skills, plus support of graduate student development. This collaboration is yet another example of how building trust with the graduate school led to participation in new high-profile initiatives that not only leverage partnership resources, but also result in recognition of the UNT Libraries' role in graduate student success.

## Lessons Learned and Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to show how the UNT Libraries' LRSS Department built its relationship with TGS over time. LRSS moved from providing support for what TGS offered graduate students to becoming partners and collaborators with TGS in developing and implementing new programs and services for student success. This section details some of the lessons learned and recommendations for how others might approach working with their graduate schools.

The LRSS Department found that extensive outreach prepared the librarians to collaborate with TGS. By attending various meetings and activities, especially those not obviously connected to the library, they were able to understand graduate students' unmet needs. The department head did most of this groundwork, attending graduate student town halls, graduate advisor meetings, faculty workshops, research group gatherings, and more to get the pulse of UNT graduate students. She initiated discussion with TGS and other campus units about how LRSS could be a partner in responding to obstacles to graduate student success.

Offering library space for graduate student programs is a small investment that yielded large dividends for LRSS. At UNT, most large meeting rooms that accommodate large numbers of students and allow catering have a rental fee. The UNT Libraries were able to offer TGS the space for the Eagle Dissertation Boot Camps without charge. Making that space available for the graduate school

and preparing the room to meet their needs started the long-term collaboration between LRSS and the graduate school.

Being faithful in performing seemingly small tasks and taking the initiative to troubleshoot is another lesson learned. The consistency and resourcefulness of the art librarian during the dissertation boot camps built the trust needed for TGS to rely on LRSS in more complicated future projects. Even when the tasks do not seem appropriate for academic librarians, such as arranging furniture or troubleshooting equipment challenges, their importance to a graduate school offering programs with a limited staff should not be underestimated.

The LRSS department made an impression on the Academic Associate Vice Provost at TGS because the librarians considered how the library could align with graduate student needs, rather than how students could align with current library services. For example, it is uncommon for the Public Service Division of the library to sponsor daylong workshops with catering on a weekend. However, LRSS was willing to do this because graduate students needed a full-day workshop to motivate them to start their proposals and could attend only on a weekend. Being flexible in approaches to service, as long as library goals are being met, made LRSS go-to partners for the graduate school.

Continual assessment of programs for graduate students helped LRSS and TGS to reach consensus on when to modify programming and perhaps discontinue it. At meetings each semester, the partners discuss attendance data and evaluation results and assess whether there is value in continuing the project. Often the decision is to extend a program for an additional semester or longer to determine whether different promotion or timing will increase attendance. In some instances, this agreement to not become discouraged too soon has resulted in successful programs.

The LRSS Department realizes that the UNT Libraries and graduate students are most fortunate in having a strong advocate in Dr. Joseph Oppong, Academic Associate Vice Provost at TGS. He understands the service ethic of librarians from his past experience with subject librarians and knows he can turn to them for creative solutions for obstacles to student success. Dr. Oppong is highly dedicated to supporting graduate students and gathers all collaborators he needs to bring students closer to graduation. Not every academic library will have a Dr. Oppong but by following the above lessons can gain the trust of and build a partnership with graduate school administrators.

An unexpected benefit of the LRSS collaboration with TGS has been heightening the profile of the library. The popularity of the Eagle Dissertation Boot Camps and Proposal Preparation Workshops, and the visibility of the 3MT Competition, have increased interest and attendance at all library programs and workshops for graduate students. The graduate school's acknowledgement of LRSS's efforts on behalf of the students has resulted in the UNT Libraries' ad-

ministration granting monetary and other support to the programs. The administration's commitment has boosted the strength and sustainability of the library and graduate school collaboration. These actions send a clear message that the LRSS Department and the UNT Libraries support graduate students and their success through the academic life cycle and beyond graduation.

## Special Acknowledgement

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## Notes

1. "Three Minute Thesis," University of Queensland, accessed November 16, 2017, <https://threeminutethesis.uq.edu.au/home>.
2. Council of Graduate Schools homepage, accessed November 16, 2017, <http://cgsnet.org/>.

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