

Turning your dissertation into a book

mentor memo

NOVEMBER 2008

By Lorri Hagman, UW Press

This memo comes in response to graduate students' requests for information and advice about careers, professional development, mentorship, and related matters.

If you want to suggest a Mentor Memo topic, send your suggestions to MM editor, Jerry Baldasty.

It is often good to think about publishing your dissertation as a book, but recognize that you'll need to revise it extensively to appeal to a wider audience and to compete in the literary marketplace. Here are some guidelines to help you in this process.

Timeline

- Allow plenty of time!
- The review process can easily take up to a year, as it entails a peer review of your manuscript, potential revisions, further peer review, and then approval.
- The editing process can easily take a year to a year and a half; it entails copyediting, design, typesetting and proofreading, your preparation of the index, printing and binding.

Dissertations differ from books

- Dissertations are highly specialized, while books are geared to educated general readers.
- Dissertation audiences are usually under 100—books about 500 or more, in general.
- In a dissertation, the author's authority must be proven; in books, it is assumed.
- Dissertations contain extensive documentation (to prove authority) while books document to credit sources and help the reader.
- Dissertations can run long; books are often far shorter.

Elements that make a good book

- A title that is concise, memorable, intriguing, and includes essential key words
- Organization that is clear and effective
- A succinct introduction.
- Illustrations that enhance the text.
- Sections that are meaningful either alone or as part of the total book
- Navigational aids: chapter titles, running heads, subheads, notes, bibliography, index
- A voice (relationship of author to reader) that functions like an invisible tour guide or creative storyteller, and avoids sounding like a lecturer at a podium

 There's more...

The revision process

Basics

- Forget your dissertation. Forget your committee.
- Be bold!
- Clarify your modified topic and audience.
- Determine how to present it in a dynamic way.

Details

- Remove unnecessary references to yourself.
- Remove conspicuous chapter intros and summaries.
- Make style parallel in chapter titles, captions, chapter openings and closings, subheads.
- Revisit the Introduction and Conclusion.
- Remove unnecessary notes; condense or combine others.
- Remove most cross-references.
- Remove unnecessary examples and data.
- Make chapter openings strong, clear, and inviting.
- Add definitions of jargon, foreign terms, biographical and historical dates.
- Brainstorm several possible titles and subtitles.
- Tighten prose.
- Use active verbs.
- Begin and end sentences with words you want to emphasize.

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NOVEMBER 2008

By Bob Roseth, The Graduate School

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There are times when you will receive queries from reporters. Sometimes these reporters will find you on their own, having networked through their contacts in academic departments. Other times, you may receive a call from the campus news office, in which a public information officer is seeking your help in answering a reporter's questions. In some cases, you may actually seek media attention yourself – because you are seeking participation in a research project from the general public, or you have research findings that are of some significance that are about to be published.

If you receive a call directly from a reporter, feel free to call your campus news office and confer with one of the public information officers. They have extensive years of training and can help guide you through what for many may be new and unfamiliar territory, beginning with an assessment about whether you are the right person to answer the reporter's questions.

Reporters come in all shapes and sizes. Some have extensive backgrounds in the subject that they cover; others will know very little. You should assume that the reporter knows very little about the subject. Remember, you are not speaking to the reporter but to the reporter's audience, the readers, viewers or listeners, which usually represents a broad mix of the general public.

When a reporter calls, make sure you know which medium he/she represents. If it's not one with which you are familiar, you may want to call the news office to see what they know.

Find out what general areas the reporter wants to know about. It's perfectly OK to tell the reporter that you are not the right person to talk about that subject and refer them back to the news office.

If you decide to go ahead and talk to the reporter, you need not respond on the spur of the moment. Ask the reporter what his/her deadline is, and be sure to call before the deadline. Deadlines are sacred to reporters.

Take some time to think about the key points you want the reporter and the audience to know about the subject. For TV or radio, you will need to be very succinct. You will probably not have the opportunity to make more than two key points or observations that will end up in the final cut.

 There's more...

Speaking concisely with reporters

You can be a bit more expansive with a print reporter, but being concise and organized still matters.

You might ask yourself three questions:

- What are the most important findings from my research?
- How might those findings further human knowledge (for example, do they contradict what has passed for conventional wisdom) or affect people in their daily lives?
- What makes this research timely?

Whenever possible, illustrate your findings with examples. Try to simplify your statements. Things that are very heavily qualified tend to be left out of stories, or the qualifications are minimized—nuance is very hard to convey.

Remember, everything you say is on the record and can end up in the final story. Do not make any statements or comments that would make you wince if they were in the public domain.

Your campus news office is available to help at any time in the process, including providing tips for working with television reporters, how to help you reach the general public when you need participation in a project, or what to do when you are involved in a potential media crisis.

Building your Network: Finding Mentors

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NOVEMBER 2008

The Graduate School

This memo comes in response to graduate students' requests for information and advice about careers, professional development, mentorship, and related matters.

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What do mentors do?

Mentors help you learn, they share common topical, methodological, or conceptual interests. They also are available and work with you in a professional and sometimes a personal manner. Mentors understand you, see potential in you and help you develop that potential. They inspire you and challenge you.

What you need to know about finding mentors:

Multiple Mentors

Create a broad network of support. Find multiple mentors for the multiple parts of your career. You can have different mentors for research, teaching, and other forms of professional development.

Who can be a mentor?

Anyone can be a mentor; the key is: can you learn from this person? Mentors can be faculty, staff, other students, and people outside your department or even outside of the University of Washington.

Helping with your career

Mentors oftentimes possess the willingness to share the "insider" perspective on your field. This means they could give advice on how to network with other faculty within and outside of your department, give you advice on attending conferences, or send you pertinent information about job listings, internships, Post-Doctoral positions, or fellowship opportunities. Your mentors can also help you build professional experience, giving you advice on research projects and conference papers. Additionally, your mentors can include you in their research projects and provide you with the opportunity for co-authorship on published papers in professional journals.

 There's more...

Working with a mentor

Setting Boundaries

Mentors serve as a “realist” and help you put ideas and priorities into the larger context of your academic career.

- Learn to accept criticism: Your mentors’ advice should challenge you; do not take criticisms personally and do not get defensive when your work is criticized.
- Respect time limits: Mentors can be very busy, so schedule appointments and watch the length of your meetings.
- Be aware of different mentoring styles: Recognize that some mentors will want to keep the relationship professional and will not desire a personal relationship.

What You Can Do

- Seek out mentorship: Create your own network of mentors that fits you best.
- Show up on-time and prepared for your meetings: This will maximize your time with your mentors.
- Read your mentor’s work and ask questions: Reading your mentors’ work can also give you good ideas on how to approach your scholarship.
- Conduct informal interviews: Ask questions about your mentors or potential mentors’ interests and their style of mentoring.
- Invite mentors to paper presentations for feedback

Finding a Mentor

- Mentors can be anywhere: Faculty and staff within your department, outside of your university, and even other graduate students.
- Be proactive: Take the initiative on scheduling meetings with your mentors and following up on those meetings.
- Seek out mentors who have careers of interest to you: For those interested in becoming faculty or administrators, find mentors in those positions and ask questions on how to maximize your graduate school experience.

“Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction.”

~John Crosby

Taking General Exams

Taking general exams can be physically, psychologically, and intellectually grueling. Although many people initially think of “taking generals” as four days of nothing but writing, it is much more complicated and involves considerable planning. Below are some things to consider as you plan for this momentous undertaking.

Choosing your areas

Deciding the areas in which you’d like to become an “expert” is not easy. For your exams, you can’t be an expert in all matters related to technology and society, nor should you strive to become an expert in one single technology. It is important to find areas of research that are sufficiently broad, can provide sufficient novelty, and can offer viable trajectories of research.

Sometimes students choose areas based on the topic or the faculty members whom they’ve asked to serve on their committees. It typically is a good idea to have taken a class with the faculty member writing a given question, although this does not always happen.

Determining your reading lists

Reading lists do not emerge from out of the blue. Rather, they derive from numerous discussions between you and the faculty member writing the question. Some faculty members might ask students to base their reading list from a class syllabus; others will ask students to generate an initial list, and edit the list as necessary. Sometimes students will be asked to provide an annotated bibliography. The final reading list, which might emerge after numerous iterations, must be approved by the corresponding faculty member and constitutes the “syllabus” for COM 600.

In constructing a given reading list, students should keep in mind that the list should not – and most likely will not – cover all readings in a given area. Don’t aim for full chronological coverage; similarly, don’t feel compelled to read in this order. Rather, determine which books or articles are considered the “classics,” then turn to state-of-the-art literature reviews, and go back to fill in the major gaps. Sometimes you won’t be able to find literature to fill in those theoretical or methodological lacunae. That’s not a bad thing – it only means that you have unanswered questions to answer!

 **There’s more...**

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NOVEMBER 2008

By Patricia Moy

This memo comes in response to graduate students’ requests for information and advice about careers, professional development, mentorship, and related matters.

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Processing the readings

Reading for generals involves much juggling. It is imperative that the student not get bogged down in details, but to know the details and still see the larger research picture. For theoretically oriented articles, what are the main questions and issues being addressed? For empirically based works, what are the main findings? Do they mesh with other findings? What conceptual and/or methodological decisions may have attributed to these findings?

In reading, students should focus not only on the article/book itself, but also how it relates to other works. Sometimes the relationships may not be easily identifiable. Students should be able to review, synthesize, and critique the literature.

Writing the exams themselves

Regardless of your particular working style (four eight-hour days or two all-nighters, early birds vs. night owls), successful essays, first and foremost, answer the question posed with accurate information and insight – in the allotted space. The goal of writing is not to regurgitate everything you've read, but to distill from and synthesize the relevant literature. You might even be asked to speculate on relationships you've not necessarily thought about; if that is the case, be sure to provide a strong rationale as to why you believe this to be the case.

Preparing for the defense

Within two weeks after you've submitted your written exams, you will convene with your committee to defend your responses. There is very little to do in preparation other than to reread your essays. The committee might ask you – among other things – to clarify ideas, draw linkages, or reconcile inconsistencies. This two-hour meeting is nothing more than a non-hostile conversation in which your committee assesses your level of readiness to take on a dissertation project.

After your generals

The knowledge and insight you've gained from the general exams process do not end as you officially become a doctoral candidate. Take advantage of what you've learned to create research proposals and projects, especially your dissertation prospectus. Convert an essay to a theory paper to submit to a conference or journal. Think about your generals as a new chapter in your academic career, and start thinking about how best to forge ahead with your dissertation research!

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Danielle Endres, Ph.D. 2005

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Many of you are in graduate school because you would like to eventually get a job as a faculty member at a college or university. Now that I have been in a faculty position for about two and a half years at the University of Utah, it's a good time to reflect on how to prepare for faculty life.

1. Reflect early and often on the type of faculty position you want.

- You don't have to decide this right away, but be aware of the need to have a plan.
- Ask yourself questions like: Do you prefer research or teaching? What are your priorities for a career or life?
- Talk to people in the faculty positions you are considering. If you are well-informed, you are the one who knows what type of faculty position will work best for you and you should be the one to make a decision.

2. Think about your research as a trajectory or program as opposed to a series of class essays.

- Articulate how you see yourself fitting in the field and to what conversations you think you will be contributing. My advisor recommended I reflect on my view of rhetoric, my role in the field, and the conversations to which I wanted to contribute before starting the dissertation and before going on the job market.
- Having an idea of your research trajectory will help you to choose projects, classes, class papers, and conferences that support your trajectory.

3. Publish at least one essay in a peer reviewed journal.

- Wherever you teach, you will need to have some sort of publication record for promotion and tenure.
- You will be much more prepared for your job as a faculty member, especially if you choose R1, if you have been through the process of revising and publishing.

4. Conferences.

Go to them, but don't go overboard. Too many conferences can distract you from publications, your dissertation, etc.

Choose conferences for the opportunities to network and present and receive feedback on your work.

Look for smaller, field specific conferences that allow you to meet people.

Think of conferences as a step toward eventual publication.

 **There's more...**

Preparing for faculty life

5. Make your teaching experiences match your goals.

- If you want a job at an R1, you do not have to teach every class in the department.
- If you want to be a communication generalist at a teaching school, then you might benefit from a more diverse set of classes taught.
- Think strategically about your teaching. Teach classes you have already taught when working on your dissertation or when you anticipate that you will be busy.

6. Time management and knowing your limits. This is essential!

- Figure out a system that works for you to manage your time.
- Know your limits, how much you can do, what you can do easily and what will be difficult for you. Use this understanding to say “yes” or “no” to requests.
- Try to control your commitments as much as possible.
- Keep track of how much you say yes or no. This will allow you to figure out your priorities, and when you need to say yes or no. If you have said no to non-crucial things, you will be able to say yes to that fabulous opportunity.

7. The grass is not greener on the other side, it’s a different shade.

- Faculty jobs are just as difficult as being a graduate student. I love my job....but I look back very fondly on the days when I was just writing my dissertation. All faculty jobs are hard work.

8. Find mentors early and use them.

- Mentorship is crucial to success in a faculty position. Your circle of mentors should be wide and cross institutions. I still call or email my mentors from Washington for advice (particularly Leah Ceccarelli—thank you!).
- Develop mentor relationships with people at different universities in your area of research. These mentors can help you navigate publication in journals, meet other people in the area, and give advice on your role in the scholarly conversation.
- Keep in mind that mentors are guides who are giving advice, but that you are the one who should make decisions about your career.

9. Create a cohort of junior faculty.

- As a new faculty member: Reach out to other junior faculty members who are going through the transition to faculty life.
- If you do not have other junior faculty at your department, stay in touch with your graduate school friends who are also faculty or look for people in other departments at your college or university.
- Plan periodic (weekly, monthly, yearly, etc.) get-togethers with your cohort for talking through the process or having fun.

10. Choose a faculty position that will allow you to have the type of life you want to have outside of academia.

- Yes, there is a life outside of academia! Decide what is important to you outside of work and try to choose a type of position or place to work that will allow you to pursue your love for punk rock music, or passion for hiking, or whatever.

Balancing Research, Teaching, Service Life

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By Leah Ceccarelli

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Balance is defined as “maintaining a steady state on a narrow base”; in the case of academic life, the narrow base is you, and the trick is to keep your various responsibilities from crashing down around you.

Research

As a student, you are judged primarily by your research, so this should take up the largest portion of your time. This includes the work you do for graduate seminars, as you study for exams, write your thesis or dissertation, prepare conference papers, and develop research for publication. UW assumes that students spend 3 hours per week per credit, so if you take 10 credits in a quarter, the time you spend on those credits (including class meeting times) should be 30 hours per week.

Teaching

The UAW/UW ASE contract specifies that you cannot be required to work more than an average of 20 hours per week, or 220 hours over the course of a quarter (including 10 weeks of classes and 1 week of final exams). There are some weeks when you might be asked to work up to 30 hours, but your teaching supervisor must ensure that other weeks have smaller time requirements so that the average is no more than 20 hours per week. It is important that you keep track of your teaching hours, as the daily demand of student learning makes it very easy for this part of academic life to become unbalanced.

Service

Departmental, university, professional and public service are educational and rewarding. Participation in student government, or on a committee, or as a paper reviewer, or as a community volunteer can provide good experience and looks good on your vita. But in the overall balance, this should take the smallest amount of your time as a graduate student.

Life

There will always be new milestones (finishing the quarter, getting the degree, securing tenure, achieving that next promotion, etc.), so delaying life in favor of work can only take you so far; you should learn how to maintain balance before the weight of one results in the collapse of the other. Multitasking is one way to fit too many responsibilities into too little time (e.g., planning the structure of a paper while washing dishes, studying with friends, finishing your reading during an unattended office hour). But there are also times when you need to get away from your responsibilities as an academic and take a hike, enjoy a sunbreak, or sip coffee while listening to music. This too is necessary to maintain balance.

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By Lisa Coutu

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Boundaries

Almost everything you, as a graduate student, need to accomplish during your program involves interacting with faculty members. Negotiating the boundaries between graduate students and faculty can be a somewhat complex task. And, it's a complex task that has consequences for the quality of your relationships with faculty. There are several factors to consider: (1) Personalities, (2) Context, (3) Roles, and (4) Goals.

Let's take each of these in turn.

Personalities

None of us is exactly alike. Just as graduate students vary in their levels of formality, so do faculty members. Don't assume that everyone shares your personality. Take the time to figure out the preferences of the people you are interacting with. And, in the meantime, err on the side of formality over informality. It's always easier to invite someone to be more informal than it is to ask someone to be more formal.

Context

Where are you interacting? In an undergraduate classroom? The hallway? A seminar? A national convention? A private office? Successful interactions require that everyone involved recognize what can and cannot be shared in each venue. In general, there should be a direct correlation between the public nature of the context and the formality of the interaction between graduate students and faculty.

Roles

The boundaries between you and a particular faculty member will change depending on the roles each of you has in a given situation. For instance, you might be a TA, an RA, a student in a course, an advisee, or a union representative. The faculty member may be a course instructor, a research coordinator, a teacher, an advisor, the PDC/UPC/GPC, or chair. Interactions may, in fact, span multiple roles. Recognizing which role you are playing should help you determine the boundaries most appropriate in a specific context.

Goals

What are you and the faculty member trying to accomplish? Are you working collaboratively on a project? Are you requesting a set of twenty letters of recommendation for a job search? Is the faculty member looking to you for specialized assistance? Let the goals of the participants help determine the appropriate boundary settings.

These four factors work together. As the context changes, so do the roles. As the personalities vary, so might our goals. The key is to be thoughtful about our interactions with each other. All of our interactions occur within a larger institutional context of hierarchy, where faculty have power and influence over graduate students. Of course, faculty should also be mindful of an ethical responsibility to exercise their power fairly, always giving primary consideration to the student's academic needs. It's prudent for all of us to be reflective in our relationships with each other, and respect each other's boundaries in ways that enhance the quality of our interactions.

A day in the life of a professor

One of the biggest challenges in the faculty-graduate relationship is the unavoidable mismatch of expectations. While faculty have all been graduate students (admittedly a long time ago for some!), graduate students have rarely been faculty at a large research university. This means that it's often harder for grad students to know where they "fit" in the schedule of work commitments faced by their advisors, mentors and instructors. It also means there's often a lot of mystery, misunderstanding and, sometimes, frustration.

Contrary to many people's impressions, faculty seldom spend the day reading and writing. Many will tell you that the last time they had the luxury of "just" or "really" reading was during their doctoral studies. There's certainly very little weighty intellectual banter happening around campus – outside of dedicated seminars, colloquia and conferences, that is. In fact, during the teaching year, faculty really struggle to prioritize their research unless they have a sabbatical (once every seventh year), a fellowship, or a university-sanctioned Intensive Research Quarter. Most faculty find that their research/writing gets done on weekends and during the un-salaried summer months.

To make things a little more transparent, here's an insight into a typical working week for a full-time faculty member – based on an ad hoc survey of one week's worth of teaching, research, service work from current Department of Communication faculty. What follows is a sample of the sorts of regular activities faculty try to get done during any typical working week; the hours/days listed are indicative of how long each activity usually takes.

Teaching/mentoring-related activities

- prepping for lectures for one course (4 hours)
- reading/reviewing a graduate dissertation prospectus (3 hours)
- grading undergraduate papers for one course (20 hours)
- course-related office hours (2 hours)
- course lectures (6 hours)
- lecture preparation and administration (6 hours)
- reading/reviewing a dissertation chapter (3 hours)
- examination and coursework grading (6 hours)
- writing a letter of recommendation (1 hour)
- helping with a graduate fellowship proposal (2 hours)
- meeting with graduate students (4 hours)
- meeting with undergrad thesis students (2 hours)

 **There's more...**

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By Crispin Thurlow

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Processing the readings

Service-related activities

- reviewing a journal article/conference paper (3 hours)
- reviewing a book for a publisher (5 hours)
- journal editorship/board-membership work (5 hours)
- monitoring and replying to email correspondence (5 hours)
- attending a faculty meeting (2 hours)
- professional association committees/correspondence (2 hours)
- reading one graduate application with writing samples (4 hours)
- writing a letter of recommendation (1 hour)
- reviewing promotion case for another professor (4 hours minimum)
- conducting a TA/loR evaluation or peer observation (2 hours)
- serving on a promotion committee (1 hour)
- attending a campus lecture/event (3 hours)
- reviewing another department's external review (2 days)
- participating on and/or chairing a UW committee (2 hours)
- participating on and/or chairing a departmental committee (2 hour)
- writing a Mentor Memo (5 hours)

Research-related activities

- writing an initial draft for a grant application (3 days)
- revising and resubmitting an article (2 days)
- editing a book manuscript (4 days)
- attending a colloquium presentation (1 hour)
- writing a grant application draft (5 hours)
- reviewing proofs of an article (2 hours)
- supervising/meeting with a Research Assistant (1 hour)
- preparing a talk or keynote presentation (1 day)
- preparing and revising an IRB proposal (2 hours)