

Dissertation Coaches and ETD Submissions: A New Form of Non-Institutional Academic Support

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OBJECTIVE: Doctoral students have at least one academic advisor at the institution where they are enrolled for graduate study. They also have an academic library with both print and online research collections. In spite of the normal University sources of academic support, the challenges facing a doctoral researcher are substantial: balancing career with the necessary time to conduct and analyze research, monitoring other emerging research in the field, even finding the time to meet with their advisor and mentor. Doctoral students' procrastination is multifaceted, with cognitive, affective, and behavioral factors influencing its likelihood. Enter a new emerging profession: the Dissertation Coach. A Dissertation Coach can provide encouragement, feedback, strategic individualized planning, and motivation to move doctoral candidates toward completion of their thesis. A Coach is not enabling plagiarism or providing dissertation content, in contrast to online businesses that market dissertation writing and completion services, or even offer completed theses for purchase. In the age of electronic thesis and dissertation (ETD) academic submission and publishing requirements, what do these independent Dissertation Coaches know about ETD submissions and publishing processes at the academic institutions of their clients? A survey of English-speaking Dissertation Coaches will address this question.

METHOD: Using the www.duckduckgo.com search engine, 38 independent Dissertation Coaches were identified by their business websites, along with contact information. During the identification process, potential candidates that offered either partial or complete thesis writing (potentially fraudulent) were not considered for the study. The Kean University Institutional Review Board exempted this research from review, as no questions of a sensitive or personal private nature were asked AND where the data cannot be linked back to individual subjects. The self-identified Dissertation Coaches were surveyed to investigate how much they encounter submission and ETD publishing requirements and choices for their doctoral student clients. The collected data is analyzed to present trends in this emerging field of non-institutional academic support.

FINDINGS: The responses received, ranging from 12 to 14 completed responses for particular questions, were aggregated to understand the demographics and trends in this emerging field. About 50% of the survey respondents have an individual coaching business, and another 25% are a partnership or team. The most identified common problems for clients include procrastination, time management, writing deficiencies, confidence building, and statistical analysis support. 75% of the respondents recalled that graduate students sought their opinion on university publishing requirements or depositing an ETD; 25% did not recall ever being asked about university publishing or ETDs. More than 80% recalled some questions about copyright or intellectual property. Nearly all respondents can recall frequent questions about citation or bibliography formatting. Survey respondents were equally divided about contacting their client's academic library staff or not. Some knowledge exists of the abbreviation ETD, though there was also uncertainty. Free and subscription ETD database sources were occasionally consulted by coaches..

Keywords: Dissertations, Coaching, Graduate Students, Student Support, Careers

INTRODUCTION

A dissertation is a representation of a research work done by a student in a systematic manner, starting from a hypothesis approved by an advisor. Writing a thesis has multiple steps, and some steps mandate acquiring new skills, such as citation management, statistical analysis, or video post-production. Students are being advised regarding organization of chapters, formatting text, checking for plagiarism, reference styles, obtaining approvals for conducting ethical research,

and how they want the University to publish their result. In the pursuit of PhD, there is so much time and effort involved over the course of years, and a researcher can at times question her or his own abilities.(Green 1997; Izawa et al. 2007) Feelings of isolation and frustration are common.(Erichsen and Bolliger 2011; Green 1997) Some students simply do not conduct research and writing effectively during the process of writing, then defending, a dissertation.(Caffarella and Barnett 2000) Causes may include health conditions, social pressures, occupational pressures, and frustrations in harnessing technology, balancing time, and even the perceived non-availability of research resources.(Appel and Dahlgren 2003; Stubb, Pyhältö, and Lonka 2011) Many symptoms of poor doctoral performance can also fall under the popular category of procrastination, the inability to meet and conform to deadlines.(Golestaneh, Rafiee, and Hoseini 2016; Lauren Reiss 2016; Taura 2017) Doctoral students' procrastination is multifaceted, with cognitive, affective, and behavioral factors influencing its likelihood. In spite of the normal University sources of academic support, the challenges facing a doctoral researcher are substantial: balancing career and research time, monitoring emerging research, even finding the time to meet with their advisor and mentor. Enter a new emerging profession: the Dissertation Coach. A Dissertation Coach operates an independent business to provide encouragement, feedback, individualized planning, and motivation to move doctoral candidates toward completion of their dissertation. A coach is not enabling plagiarism or providing dissertation content. In the age of electronic thesis and dissertation (ETD) submission and publishing requirements, what do dissertation coaches know about ETD submissions and publishing processes? A survey of English-speaking Dissertation Coaches and an analysis of their responses will address this question.

METHODOLOGY

Using the Duckduckgo ("DuckDuckGo" 2018) search engine, 38 independent dissertation Coaches were identified. Potential candidates that offered potentially fraudulent services were not considered for the study. The Kean University Institutional Review Board("IRB & Research Compliance | Kean University" 2018) approved and exempted this research project from risk monitoring. An online survey of demographic and subject-related questions was created with the Kean University institutional Qualtrics ("Qualtrics" 2018) subscription and sent to the identified dissertation coaches. When an email address was not available, the coach's business website inquiry form was used to introduce the project and provide a survey link. The survey included questions about ETD publishing and formatting requirements.

FINDINGS

The responses (32-37% response rate) were aggregated to understand the Dissertation Coach model of non-institutional academic support. There was a wide normal distribution of ages in the survey sample, with the average age being between 50 and 60. More than 67% of the survey sample are women. Only three countries were represented: Australia, Ireland, and the United States, with 80% based in the United States. About half of the survey sample have an individual coaching business; 25% are a partnership or team. More than 67% of the sample have been doing this at least 10 years. All respondents claimed to have completed their own doctoral dissertation. Over 50% claim to be coaching more than 30 clients in the past year. The most common problems causing graduate students to approach a Dissertation Coach include procrastination, time management, writing deficiencies, confidence building, and statistical

analysis support. Minor problems included oral defense, writing productivity, and issues with dissertation supervisors.

Figure 1.
Most Common Problems that Cause Graduate Students to seek a Dissertation Coach

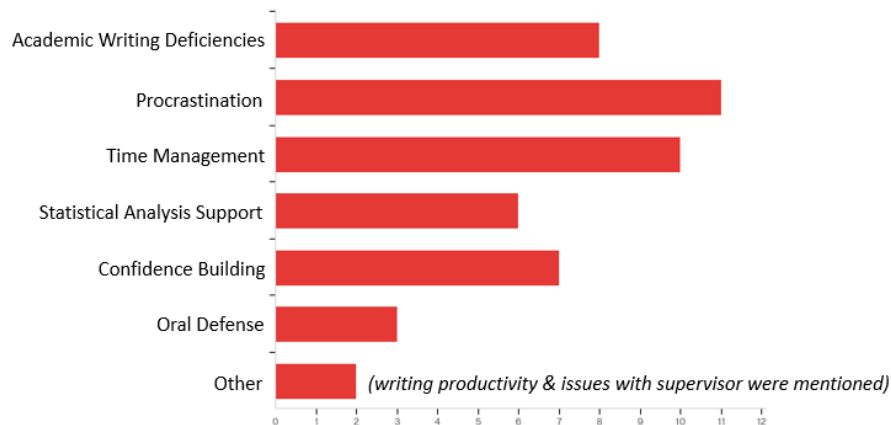


Figure 1 Greenberg, Narang. ETD2018 26-Sept-2018

More than 80% of the responses indicated sometime or more often student anxiety involving statistical analysis. With question 10, the survey became increasingly relevant with electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs). 75% of the respondents recalled that graduate students sought their opinion on university publishing requirements or depositing an ETD; 25% did not recall ever being asked about university publishing or ETDs. When asked to recall questions about copyright or intellectual property, more than 80% recalled some questions. Nearly all can recall frequent questions about citation or bibliography formatting. Survey respondents were equally divided about contacting their client's academic library staff or not; the library's management of an institutional repository does not automatically convey the notion that libraries are involved in publishing. Some knowledge exists of the abbreviation ETD, though there was also measured uncertainty. When asked how databases were used to locate ETDs, all suggested free online database sources received votes, led by Google Scholar. ("Google Scholar" 2018) Multimedia assistance was not requested by the students of the responding coaches. Writing a dissertation in a second language is sometimes a concern for the students of our coaching cohort, who all cited some difficulties for their clients. The majority of responding coaches prefer to call their services a supplement to normal academic services, with some calling it complementary.

CONCLUSIONS

The majority of the survey sample (75%) do get their opinion sought on university publishing requirements or depositing an ETD. The majority of the sample (80%) also recall questions about copyright or intellectual property. Nearly all (92%) can recall frequent questions about citation or bibliography formatting. The emerging Dissertation Coach professional activity aligns closely with academic scholarly communication activities involving publication of ETDs. Dissertation Coaches could be invited to promote ETD best practices for student authors, as well as invited to refer their clients to academic libraries and become individual members of NDLTD("Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations" 2018).

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