2 Graduate School–Facilitated Peer Mentoring for Degree Completion: Dissertation-Writing Boot Camps

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Most of the existing research and literature on mentoring emphasizes the mentoring dyad and specifically the roles, responsibilities, effective functions, and potential pitfalls and dysfunctions in faculty–graduate student or senior faculty–junior faculty relationships.[1] There has been much less attention to peer mentoring as an effective means to provide academic and psychological support in the graduate student experience.[2] In this chapter, I will make a case for the important role that graduate students have as peer mentors, including the ways that peer mentors make distinct and unique contributions to the support and advancement of their fellow students. I also will describe ways that the Graduate School (and other central offices or disciplinary departments) can promote peer mentoring and peer support communities that facilitate degree completion. To a large degree, I base my comments and suggestions for peer mentoring programs on my faculty and administrative experiences with programs at the University of Tennessee, Columbia University, and Cornell University.

For several decades, since at least the 1980s, there has been general agreement and research evidence that graduate students are more successful when they have supportive and effective mentoring (Allen forthcoming; National Academy of Sciences 1997; Nicoloff and Forrest 1988; Ulke-Steiner, Kurtz-Costes, and Kinlaw 2000). Yet over the past decade or so, the increasing expectations for faculty teaching and student engagement, research, publishing, securing research funding, and engaging in university service and shared governance have continued to make it difficult for faculty to provide consistent and effective mentoring to all graduate students in their

programs. As a result, mentoring accessibility and effectiveness can be highly variable across individual faculty and programs.

Given the evidence that good mentors can have a critical impact on students' confidence, competence, degree completion, and career advancement, it is ironic that, at the point that students may feel the most anxiety and pressure to complete their degree—when they are tasked with the one responsibility, to write a thesis or dissertation, that students have never done before (save the very few who seek a second research master's or doctorate)—we as faculty send the message, "Now go away and write. Contact me when you have a chapter (or two or all of them) ready for me to read. Good luck with that." Whatever sense of community, camaraderie, and support that new student orientation events, or taking coursework with one's entering cohort, or passing the qualifying exams to enter into the ABD club have engendered, the independence expected of most students—especially in the humanities and social sciences—at the thesis and dissertation stage only increases the stress and isolation reported by graduate students as they begin to write, in the last months or years of graduate school.

The research and literature focusing on peer support that does exist has emphasized the psychological and social support provided by peers in graduate school. There has been little attention given to the role of peers in academic support and degree completion. Johnson and Huwe (2003), in their comprehensive book on mentoring in graduate school, describe peer mentoring as an "alternative mentor form." Peer mentoring is a "lateral relationship in which a fellow graduate student provides career-enhancing and psychosocial functions to another student" (179). Another alternative form, peer-group mentoring, consists in "a group of peers who agree to meet regularly for the purpose of providing role modeling, networking, and psychosocial support" (179). In what ways, then, do peers, as individuals or in groups, function in a mentoring role?

Peer Mentoring Contributions

Peers function as mentors by providing supportive relationships, empathizing through shared experiences, and offering social networks in ways that faculty cannot, especially in the ways described here.

Mentoring always involves a relationship that extends beyond simply an advising role (Allen forthcoming). And although a faculty

mentor can provide advocacy, guidance, and financial and other critical forms of support, many roles are beyond the boundaries of appropriate faculty-student relationships. For example, peers, whether as individuals or in groups, have far more opportunities for academic conversation and nonacademic socializing outside the classroom, office, and lab than would generally be considered appropriate for faculty-student interactions. Peers can go to restaurants and bars together. They are more likely to travel to and room together at conferences. They share offices and occasionally residences. In contrast, there are many fewer situations where faculty-student pairs engage and socialize in these ways and settings.

Peers provide lateral exposure and perspective. Peers experience in real time the same or similar issues related to the graduate school experience. Peers who share an advisor or the same program faculty can offer advice based on their direct experience with the work style, temperament, and expectations of the shared advisor and faculty. Further, even the most supportive, communicative, and empathetic advisor shares experiences and advice reflecting their own graduate school experience years or decades in the past, and most often at a different institution. To paraphrase Heraclitus, peers step in the same river.

Peers are important for the social network they provide beyond academic support. One of the many differences between the undergraduate and the graduate experience is that students' focus and work narrow in significant ways in graduate school. Especially beyond the coursework stage, graduate students have a much smaller academic world. At the thesis- and dissertation-writing stage, especially in the humanities and social sciences, students engage primarily with one faculty chair/director/sponsor. When that relationship is fraught with conflict or excessive expectations, students may forget one of the most important (but often uncommunicated) rules of graduate school: "You are *not* your thesis or dissertation. It is your *work*. It is *not you*. You remain a worthy person deserving of care and support. And this includes taking care of yourself." Even in constructive, healthy student-faculty relationships, students benefit from multiple sources of support and information.

Graduate students have multiple needs that multiple mentors can meet. Distinguishing the research on mentoring in business from research on mentors in higher education, Lyons, Scroggins, and Rule (1990) identified three functions in the "peculiar intimacy" of mentoring essential to a successful experience in graduate school.[3] First,

mentors transmit formal scientific knowledge and skills (see Reskin 1979). Second, mentors help their students understand and practice the "rules, values and ethics of the discipline, or what Phillips (1979) accurately called 'the lore and mysteries of the profession'" (Lyons, Scroggins, and Rule 1990, 279). And third, mentors praise and encourage their students to build confidence (Alleman, Cochran, and New 1984; Blank 1988). More recently, Johnson and Huwe (2003) identified additional functions of a mentor, listed comprehensively in Table 2.1.

Fischer and Zigmond (1998) have identified four areas of "survival skills" that graduate students must develop to succeed in graduate school and beyond. All four categories reflect information and skill-building that mentor are expected to provide to their students: (1) basic skills, including navigating and thriving in graduate school; (2) communication skills, including presenting and publishing research; (3) skills for finding employment; and (4) advanced skills (including teaching, writing funding proposals, and managing people). Central to all these skills is the core ability to act responsibly and professionally. No one faculty mentor has either the time or the ability to fulfill all of the various needs that students may require or expect. So students are encouraged to have multiple mentors for multiple purposes, offering information and expertise in different domains; this includes finding and using supportive, informative mentors among their peers.

Peers likely have no supervisory or evaluative function with other graduate students. Leadership and managing functions, yes. But supervisory and evaluative roles with their peers are appropriate only in extraordinary and controlled circumstances. So, as with secondary faculty mentors, students' boundaries with peers can extend beyond those with a faculty mentor who is also in the advisor/chair/sponsor role; peers can offer even more candid advice on a myriad of topics. One benefit of peer mentors over faculty members has been described in the context of students' community of practice (Wenger 2013). In writing support groups, peers have no authority or power over each other; to have an effect, they must negotiate and persuade their fellow writers: "The language of negotiation is simultaneously shaping the writer as other group members challenge her to defend her ideas, to respond authoritatively to questions about her work, and to position herself as a scholar. By responding … a writer is practicing for later engagement with the rest of her discipline" (Phillips 2012, 6). This safe

Function	Provided by Faculty Mentor	Provided by Peer Mentor
Is accessible and available	x	x
Provides encouragement and support	x	x
Shares mutual trust and respect	x	x
Offers essential information and advice	x	x
Models professional traits and behaviors in intentional, visible ways	x	x
Provides introduction to colleagues in the discipline and profession	x	
Willing to self-disclose	x	x
Is selective based on match of important factors (research topic and approach, work style, temperament, expectations, etc.)	x	
Provides constructive feedback, evaluation, and appropriate challenge	x	x
Advocates for student in the program, field, discipline, profession	x	
Provides help with navigating program politics	x	x
Helps to provide exposure and visibility of the student's work	x	
Provides protection and defense from challenges by others	x	
Provides acculturation/socialization into the discipline/profession	x	
Encourages student's development from protégé to independent scholar and colleague	x	

TABLE 2.1. Mentor functions. ***Sources:*** **Adapted from Johnson and Huwe 2003, Kram 1985, and Kram and Isbella 1985.**

environment with peers helps students to prepare for and transition into the role of independent scholar and researcher.

Peers can discuss the "underground folklore" of the graduate program. This information is seldom in writing, yet is as invaluable guide to graduate school success. As an assistant professor, one year away from my own graduate experience, I developed and gave my graduate students a one-page document called the "Underground Guide to Graduate School." It included all the tips and advice I wish I had known sooner than I did in graduate school—for example, "Submit your IRB protocol as soon as you can; even experienced researchers report that the approval process takes longer than expected." Each year my list grew longer as my graduate students added their own advice for new students. Within five years the underground guide had become a standard part of the department's graduate handbook (and retained its name for two decades to prompt students to read it). In addition, peers share advice on how to navigate departmental and institutional bureaucracy. And although information about faculty work styles, temperament, and eccentricities won't be codified in a departmental graduate student handbook ("Don't ask both Dick and Cheryl to be on your committee. They are close friends and always vote as a block. If one doesn't vote to accept your dissertation, it's guaranteed that the other won't either."), peers share information about departmental politics and personalities that faculty should never discuss with students.

Peers can refer their fellow students to university and other resources with greater ease, acceptance, and sometimes credibility. There are "dark sides" to mentoring. Sometimes there is a mismatch in work styles, expectations, or temperament. Some faculty neglect or exploit their students. Sometimes there are boundary violations, unwelcome attraction issues, or other conflicts. For students experiencing dysfunctional mentoring relationships, peers are often their first recourse for advice, support, and referral to campus resources (for example, the Ombuds office, Graduate School, or counseling center).

There are reciprocal benefits in peer mentor relationships, just as there are with faculty-student mentoring relationships. With peer mentoring, advanced students gain confidence by sharing their knowledge and experience with new graduate students; the former develop and refine their own skills as mentors in advance of completing their degree and beginning to mentor their own undergraduate and graduate students (or new colleagues).

To illustrate these roles and contributions of peers as mentors, I

describe below some peer mentoring models that vary from institution to institution based on student needs and institutional resources. These programs focus on academic success, psychological support, and degree completion, with peer mentoring as a central component. I first describe programs with which I have direct experience; I also describe programs at Stanford and the University of Pennsylvania, both among the first of their kind among U.S. graduate schools and boasting documented effectiveness. Finally, I conclude with recommendations for developing programs that encourage peer support and mentoring for degree completion.

Developing Future Faculty as Teacher-Scholars at the University of Tennessee

For me, the idea of peer mentoring for degree completion came about quite by accident. In 1996, my colleague at the University of Tennessee, Sky Huck, and I founded and directed for six years the Developing Future Faculty as Teacher-Scholars Program, an interdisciplinary, campus-wide mentoring program for master's and doctoral students who held Graduate Teaching Assistant and Graduate Teaching Associate positions. The former served as TAs working with a faculty member; the latter were responsible for their own classes. Each year in the mentoring program, we formed mentoring teams of six to ten graduate students, facilitated by a faculty member from a department different from that of any member of the team. The primary focus was on professional development and support for students' instructional roles and responsibilities. In addition, the faculty mentor for each team also facilitated discussions and provided resources to help students prepare for making fellowship applications and grant proposals, writing and publishing their research, making effective conference presentations, addressing ethical and legal issues in higher education, and entering the academic and professional job market. The program began with five primary objectives: (1) to improve the quality of instruction provided to undergraduates by graduate students; (2) to elevate the status of teaching in the minds of graduate students who would soon join faculty ranks; (3) to increase team-building skills among graduate students regardless of whether they would become faculty members or take positions in business, private research, NGOs, the government, or elsewhere; (4) to provide a year-long mechanism through which faculty who are recipients of the university's Outstanding Teaching Award can share their insights about teaching,

learning, and student engagement with graduate students; and (5) to develop and share the model with other colleges and universities to adapt and use (Gaia, Corts, Tatum, and Allen 2003).

In our initial plans for the mentoring program, the goal had been to find outstanding faculty, with strong credentials in both teaching and research, who were known to be effective graduate mentors. They would guide their teams, share their knowledge and experience, and inspire their graduate students for future faculty and professional roles. What we never anticipated was the peer mentoring and support that developed among team members. Students shared their own knowledge and experiences about teaching undergraduate students, securing graduate funding, getting papers and conference presentations accepted, and resolving challenging situations with their advisors and mentors. When a faculty mentor had to miss a bimonthly team meeting, the students provided the necessary facilitation and leadership for their team. At the end of the first year, as we prepared to select another 100 or so students for the next year's mentoring program, students from our inaugural group began to ask, "Wait, are you cutting us loose? We want to continue in the program." So some of the teams continued to meet beyond their first year, facilitated by one or more of the group members. In addition, our plans for the subsequent years of the program included the co-facilitation of each team by a faculty member and a mentoring team member from the previous year. These Mentoring Fellows served as peer mentors and provided some of the strongest, most effective contributions to the program for its duration.[4]

Dissertation- and Proposal-Writing Boot Camps at Columbia University

At Columbia University, beginning in 2008, doctoral students were invited to participate in an intensive week-long dissertation-writing boot camp.[5] Our boot camps were designed, using Simpson's (2013) later terminology, to be "outward-focused" rather than "inward-focused" activities. The former are part of a more comprehensive effort to provide writing support across programs and through multiple approaches, while the latter often "lack strategic planning and explicit discussion of program goals with students and university stakeholders" (Simpson 2013, 2).[6]

Our specific goals at Columbia were to

- help students identify and use effective strategies to become

more productive writers;

- encourage students to develop a strategic plan that includes daily goals, effective writing habits and strategies, interim deadlines, and a target completion date;
- provide an environment conducive to writing, with space for individual writing and team meetings, with food and beverages throughout the day;
- create a writing support community for students that would continue to provide peer support and coaching beyond boot camp.

Twelve to fifteen students, each from a different doctoral program, were assigned to a boot-camp group. Throughout the year we offered three-day, five-day, six-day, and eight-day versions of the boot camp during semester, spring, and summer breaks. We provided distraction-free writing space from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM, with team meetings, facilitated by the Graduate School associate dean for PhD programs, at the start and end of each day. During lunch we offered optional presentations by the facilitator and professional development staff. The day after the first boot camp ended, one of the participants emailed: "My entire team met today at an undisclosed location and wrote all day long." Another student wrote: "It was an incredible experience that continued for us once the official boot camp ended. We're gathering to write and use the good habits we learned in boot camp."

From both the formal assessment and anecdotal information, we knew that our boot camp had been successful. Students reported that while the advice and encouragement, guest speakers over lunch, and nonstop food buffet were all appreciated, the most valuable part of boot camp was the opportunity to be part of a writing community that continued the conversations and support. Following the first boot camp, we began to schedule weekly "Write-In" events, where students could return and write together as a group. As word spread, we opened the Write-Ins to all graduate students who wanted a quiet writing space, not just those who had participated in boot camp.

In designing and implementing our Columbia boot camps, we were helped by developers of two of the programs that preceded us and who also have reported outcome data. The University of Pennsylvania is credited with having the first dissertation boot camp, developed collaboratively by Penn's Graduate Student Center, Graduate School of Education, and Weingarten Learning Resources

Center in 2005. The creators describe their two-week event as one that "motivates students using intense, structured writing time" combining "components of structure, accountability, advising, comfort, and community" (Mastroieni and Cheung 2011, 4). Writing is mandatory from 9:00 in the morning to 1:00 each afternoon, with optional writing time until 5:00 PM. On the first day of the event, Learning Resources Center staff present a workshop with tips on time management and staying on schedule. Up to 25 students participate in each boot camp. A 2008 survey of Penn Boot Camp alums revealed that 70% of the "campers" felt the event helped them to meet their writing goals; the majority of respondents had a dissertation defense within three months of their boot camp participation (Mastroieni and Cheung 2011, 6).

Stanford University followed the University of Pennsylvania in 2008, with a Dissertation Boot Camp (DBC) focusing on "reinforcing the writing process through opening and closing workshops, scheduled follow-up discussions, individualized one-hour tutorials, daily writing logs, and multiple check-in points" (Lee and Golde n.d., 2). Stanford's DBC events are intended to help students write more and develop greater awareness of the writing process. A 2010 survey of former Stanford participants revealed that over 30% reported that their boot camp experience helped them finish their dissertation one or more quarters sooner than anticipated, which reflected actual dollars saved by the students in tuition or by their department in tuition and stipend costs. A majority of students also reported that their writing skills and practices had improved as a result of their DBC experience. The authors attributed the DBC's effectiveness to writing consultations that were available to students during DBC and to helping students understand the "collaborative and community-based" nature of writing rather than pursuing writing goals in isolation. Students benefit from multiple forms of collaboration, such as "conversations with advisors and writing consultants and feedback given by writing support groups, peers at conferences, reviewers in journals, and book editors," (Lee and Golde n.d., 4).

Boot Camps for Dissertations, Theses, and Proposals at Cornell University

Cornell University began offering dissertation-, thesis-, and proposal-writing boot camps in Spring 2013. (Details about those events are

included in Appendix A; Figure 2.1 below shows the daily schedule for a six-day event.) In addition to facilitators from the Graduate School, we utilize writing consultants, statistical consultants, and data/information management consultants who are available to meet with boot campers during the event. Concurrent with each on-site boot camp, we also offer a concurrent "Virtual Boot Camp" for students away from campus. And incorporating Stanford's model, there are also "After Dark Boot Camps" for students with lab, teaching, and employment responsibilities during the day.

Following each boot camp, there are regular follow-ups via email to offer support and encouragement. We host monthly "Re-Boots" that provide space, food, and additional support for the ongoing community of writers who attended boot camp. Coinciding with our first boot camp, the Graduate School began funding a Graduate Writing Consultant program through Cornell's Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines, which offers one-hour consultations (individual sessions or a series) by trained graduate peers. We also offer a daily Write-In (8:00 to 11:00 AM, Monday through Friday) at Cornell's Graduate Student Center so that students working on any writing project can write in a designated space with free coffee and tea. Finally, as part of this suite of writing support mechanisms for graduate students, we send out biweekly emails with writing strategies, advice, and encouragement to over 10,000 graduate student subscribers through our Productive Writer listserv.

What the Organizers Learned at Boot Camp

From the initial Dissertation Boot Camp at Columbia to subsequent events at Cornell, I have come to recognize a number of outcomes, some expected and some unanticipated, about boot camp.

Students recognize and appreciate the *diversity of disciplines and programs* represented among, for instance, the mentoring teams at the University of Tennessee, where groups were populated with no more than one member from any one graduate program. For several reasons students find value in this. One rule of boot camp is, "What Happens at Boot Camp Stays at Boot Camp!" We promise confidentiality in our discussions. Facilitators and graduate student peers in the group agree at the outset that we will not report or repeat participants' comments to their advisor or program faculty. Students can speak candidly about their struggles, fears, or problems, even those concerning their advisor, and their comments

Day One (Friday)

7:30–9:00	Breakfast available; optional writing time
9:00–11:30	Orientation and introductions
11:30–12:30	Lunch available
11:30–3:30	Writing time (Students are encouraged to write in 45- to 90-minute blocks without interrupting their writing.)
3:30–4:00	End-of-day check-in group meeting
4:00–7:00	Optional writing time

Day Two (Monday) and Day Three (Tuesday)

7:30–9:00	Breakfast available; optional writing time
9:00–10:00	Group meeting to share daily goal and any obstacles
10:00–12:00	Writing time
12:00–1:00	Lunch
1:00–3:30	Writing time
3:30–4:00	End-of-day check-in group meeting
4:00–7:00	Optional writing time

Day Four (Wednesday) and Day Five (Thursday)

7:30–9:00	Breakfast available; optional writing time
9:00–9:30	Group meeting to share daily goals and any obstacles (optional for individuals; facilitator included if/as needed)
9:30–12:00	Writing time
12:00–1:00	Lunch available (optional mini-lecture and discussion on related topic: managing stress, maximizing time and energy for greater productivity, tools for managing data and notes, thesis/dissertation submission guidelines)
1:00–3:30	Writing time
3:30–4:00	End of day check-in group meeting (optional for individual students; facilitator included if/as needed)
4:00–7:00	Optional writing time

Day Six (Friday)

7:30–9:00	Breakfast available; optional writing time
9:00–9:30	Group meeting to share daily goals and any challenges (if needed)
9:30–12:00	Writing time
12:00–1:00	Lunch (with celebratory cake and ice cream) Awarding of completion certificates and T-shirts
1:00–2:00	Group meeting to finalize plans for “Taking Boot Camp Home” (i.e., to maintain writing pairs, small group, or large group writing support beyond Boot Camp)
2:00–5:00	Optional writing time

FIGURE 2.1. Six-day boot camp schedule.

remain within the group. Students also report their surprise at how many of their own experiences and struggles are shared by other students in different disciplines. Music and psychology students have the same anxiety about never finishing. Engineers and historians alike have advisors who don't make their expectations clear. Both art historians and anthropologists don't know when to stop writing. And almost none of the students anticipate how long getting feedback can take. At boot camp we frequently hear, "I didn't know anyone else had *my* problem." Many of the writing pairs or small groups that splinter into permanent writing communities maintain this interdisciplinary composition, for the support and confidentiality that non-departmental peers provide.

Another kind of diversity among the team members is that students are at different stages of dissertation writing. With more resources we might have created different events for students at the beginning, middle, or close to the end of writing. As it turned out, students benefit from this mix. Students at the beginning of writing learn from their more experienced peers, who discover they have advice to share, which serves as a confidence-booster.

And finally, students appreciate the opportunity to socialize, beyond boot camp and apart from their academic writing, with peers outside their graduate programs. When students are in the final months or years of their degree program, they are hesitant to be seen socializing by their program peers. Taking time away from research and writing with boot camp peers helps students to maintain much needed life-work balance.

Students report that the best part of boot camp is what happens after the intensive experience ends. Five- or six-day events seem to provide the optimal amount of time for students to really bond as a *support group and writing community*. I usually see this group formation and bonding by day three or four in the boot camps. In the most recent session, I saw the supportive community emerge within the first few hours. As students were introducing themselves, giving a two-minute presentation of their research and describing the obstacles and challenges they face, one student began to describe her struggles with her dissertation writing and conflicts with her advisor. After a few minutes of listening to her anguished description of her lack of progress, one of the other students in her group said, "We've got this. We'll help you get through this. We'll find a way out of this for you." (At the end of the boot camp, the congratulatory cake had a new inscription: We've got this!)

Our first Dissertation Boot Camp at Columbia University taught us the value of ongoing *communal writing space* for graduate students. We began to reserve a room for "Write-Ins," advertised first to our boot camp alums. But some students, because of work schedules or family commitments, were never able to attend a week-long event, so we soon invited the entire graduate student population to join the Write-In community. For these come-and-go sessions, we asked students to sign in with their name and writing goals. On their way out, they indicated how long they wrote and whether they accomplished their goals. We wanted this simple sign-in/sign-out procedure to create accountability to this ad hoc writing community and underscore their commitment to writing and degree completion.

Multiple approaches and models can be effective. Some elements of boot camp are difficult to plan for and some student needs can't be anticipated. In some boot camp models, space is reserved, food is provided, and students write for the duration of the event. Other models engage campus writing consultants to meet with participants during the event; consultants work with participants on organization, thesis statements, shaping arguments, presenting evidence, sentence structure, voice and style, and editing strategies. At Cornell, we also schedule time for statistical consultants and for data/information management specialists to come to our events and meet with students by their request. And on the last day, in a session we call "Taking Boot Camp Home," students commit to a writing schedule and strategies, including continuing to write with a virtual or in-person writing buddy or group as they work to complete their thesis or dissertation.

Careful consideration should be given to the size of the group. We try to admit as many students as possible to our events, yet eight to twelve students seems to be the optimal group size to allow introductions on the first day and sharing of goals, strategies, and obstacles during the team meetings. Maria Gardiner at Flinders University in Australia hosts a wonderful two-day writing productivity program and deals with the issue of group size by having half of the students introduce themselves, their research, and their challenges on the first day, while the others introduce themselves on the second day. Although the purposes of this event are somewhat different from a week-long boot camp, at Cornell we have divided a group of 20 into two groups of 10 and staggered the start times, one in the morning and one in the afternoon; this works well to support

bonding and group formation, insofar as it promotes an authentic rather than a hurried and obligatory exchange.

A skilled facilitator contributes to the development of the peer community. The facilitator welcomes the group of boot camp participants by email prior to the start of the event. These messages set expectations, explain some of the logistics, and, for our events, prompt students to begin a productivity and reflection log at least a week before the start of boot camp. During the event, the facilitator welcomes participants, guides the introductions and orientation to the program, and continues to facilitate the daily goal-setting and check-in meetings, at least through the second or third day. The facilitator then checks with the group members to decide when they are ready to meet, guide, and support each other in their group times without the facilitator's help.

Among the Graduate Schools hosting boot camps, some use staff from the Graduate School or writing center as facilitators. In some cases facilitation teams include two or more assistant/associate deans, writing instructors, and consultants. In my experience as facilitator, I draw heavily on my 20 years as a faculty member advising and supervising graduate students as well as what I have learned from students across dozens and dozens of disciplines and programs in my role as a graduate school associate dean for 15 years. And selfishly, I enjoy boot camp for many reasons, not the least is that each boot camp is like a six-day focus group: I learn a great deal about students' experiences as graduate students as well as about the careful and effective mentoring by our faculty.

At Cornell we have recently begun to invite advanced graduate student "alumni" of previous boot camps to facilitate one of the boot camp groups (usually the proposal- or thesis-writing students). Students have been both enthusiastic and effective in their facilitator role. There are, of course, pros and cons to using faculty, administrators, and students. It can be an enormous time commitment for all. And because students are paid or given an honorarium for their time (faculty and administrators are "volunteers"), advanced students create an extra expense—though one that is well worth the cost, because students identify with their peer-facilitator, and advanced students are developing and using valuable skills in managing groups, on-the-spot problem-solving, and providing appropriate encouragement and support for (sometimes) struggling students. I believe students can feel intimidated by or be less candid with faculty than with Graduate School staff or other students;

however, when Cornell's Director of Graduate Studies in History hosted a semester-break boot camp for students last year, and invited faculty to participate and write for the week along with the doctoral students, the faculty "jumped right in" to share their struggles and obstacles in the group meetings. And often the students were the ones offering their advice and support to the faculty!

While deciding who has the expertise and availability to facilitate, consider other important qualities of effective facilitators. First and foremost, facilitators "think on their feet." When students describe their challenges, the facilitator responds with a solution or strategy. "I find that what works for many students is…." "How do you think your advisor would respond if you…?" "Here's a strategy to try; if it works for you, make it a habit." When students express fear or anxiety, facilitators are prepared with stress-reducing suggestions or referrals to campus resources. This dialogue will continue throughout boot camp, and the facilitator's ability to help students move forward in the face of anxieties and other obstacles is one of the most critical, and daunting, responsibilities. Simultaneously, effective facilitators are able to hold back when needed and instead of offering advice, ask, "Does someone have a strategy to suggest or a similar experience to share? What works for some of you?"

Different institutions use various boot camp models (briefly described in Appendix B), with shared goals: to create intellectual and psychological support within a peer-writing community to promote degree completion. Writing boot camps provide much-needed community-building and, even more, an opportunity for graduate students to reflect on their skills and identity as writers and scholars. We emphasize that being the *authors* of their dissertations gives them the *authority* to critique, argue, and write with a confidence perhaps not heretofore available or possible for them. And we provide a set of strategies to develop their confidence and skills as both authors and scholars.

There are positive outcomes, both planned and unplanned, at boot camp. Each event provides new information for the planners that can be incorporated into future events, resources, and training. Our boot camps at both Columbia and Cornell have prompted individual academic programs to create writing space and communities for their own students. For example, as mentioned above, Cornell's History program started a winter break boot camp for history and anthropology doctoral students (the two programs share

the same building). These events, both campus-wide and program-specific, build writing and support communities, offer training in writing and other skills needed for successful academic and other professional careers, and encourage and develop peer mentors to both competently and confidently serve as sources of academic and psychological support for fellow graduate students.

Notes

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2. Throughout the chapter I used the term *graduate student* to refer to both graduate and professional students, i.e., those in doctoral, research master's, and non-research master's and other professional programs.

3. The phrase "peculiar intimacy" is from Phillips 1979.

4. A detailed guide to program elements and outcomes can be found in Gaia et al. 2003, and in Allen, forthcoming.

5. Following our second boot camp, during which one of the humanities doctoral students announced, "I wish I had known all this when I was writing my dissertation proposal three years ago," we added proposal-writing boot camps for students at the proposal/prospectus stage.

6. Lee and Golde (2013) have proposed a comparable model of "Writing Process" as opposed to "Just Write" events. In the former, students have the opportunity to consider their writing process, identify and use effective strategies, and overcome the challenges that delay progress in conversation with fellow boot campers, facilitators, and writing consultants. "Just Write" events, conversely, support students' writing productivity by providing space, food, and structured time. Other support, such as writing consultants, presentations on writing topics, and encouragement to reflect on the writing process, is minimal.

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APPENDIX A: Creating, Implementing, and Evaluating Boot Camp

Preparing for Boot Camp

Several months before the start of boot camp, identify appropriate space. The environment should include writing space with one or two students per table. (We prefer tables that can accommodate two students; these pairs often end up continuing as writing buddies, virtually or in person, after boot camp ends.) Comfortable chairs can't be overrated. At one of our boot camps, students suggested we replace the end-of-event T-shirt with a seat cushion and suggested that, instead of the "I Survived Dissertation Boot Camp" slogan on the shirt, it would not be inappropriate to embroider the seat cushions with "Keep Your Butt in this Seat and Write!" (We agreed with the need for the cushions; we remain undecided about the proposed slogan.) Space is needed for group meetings of 12 to 15 students, plus facilitator(s). There also should be space for food service (breakfast and lunch, as well as refreshments throughout the day). Some students prefer to work through meals; they get their food and return to their table to continue to write. Other students

want the break for eating and socializing. (It's only during these breaks that students are allowed to use phones and check email.) For about half the days of boot camp, we schedule a group lunch and offer a 20- to 30-minute presentation and discussion on a pertinent topic, such as developing editing skills, working with advisors, managing time, or staying healthy. We include a visit from the thesis/dissertation manager or a reference librarian who talks about information management tools relevant to students' work. These lunchtime group meetings are optional; students may also use the time to write.

In addition to individual work and group meeting spaces, and space for buffet-style food service, we created a "Stress-Free Zone" with "Re-charge Stations" to our most recent boot camp. The Zone was simply a corner of the room that included de-stressing activities: Play-Doh, crayons and drawing pencils, small hand weights, and craft materials. And because there is evidence that people who are appreciative or grateful for something or someone are more resilient and healthy, we provided cards, envelopes, and postage to encourage our boot campers to write a thank-you note during their break from writing. Posted signs indicated, "No Stressful Conversations Here," "Just Breathe," and "Relax … Take a Break." Some students found the Stress-Free Zone very helpful. (We added the Zone when, during the initial orientation, as students were talking about the struggles and challenges they were facing, the student seated next to me leaned in and whispered, "Listening to this is making me so anxious, I think I'm going to throw up.")

Along with the space considerations, we include amenities and accessories ranging from the essential to the thoughtful. Only once has our space included enough electrical outlets, so determine in advance if you'll need to bring extension/surge-protector cords. An environment where tables can be placed against the walls, rather in the middle of the room, helps to avoid tripping hazards from the maze of cords. We provide table tents preprinted with students' names and graduate programs; these remain in place to identify students' work space for the week. We place the name placards in dollar-store picture frames; students can keep the frames and insert their end-of-event certificate when boot camp concludes. And although we bring in breakfast and lunch each day, we also keep a large bowl of (mostly) healthy snacks on hand with several beverage choices throughout the day. An extra thoughtful touch is the presence of a massage therapist who gives hand and neck massages

midway through the event (boot camp becomes known as Dissertation Spa on that day).

Publicizing Boot Camp and Soliciting Applications

Through our Graduate School website (https://www.gradschool.cornell.edu/thesis-and-dissertation/cornell-proposal-thesis-and-dissertation-writing-boot-camps) and weekly email events calendar, we announce upcoming boot camp dates and the application deadline. After the first boot camp, word spread as students encouraged their colleagues, and faculty encouraged their students, to attend. In reviewing applications, we are especially interested in identifying students who are ready to begin writing or are already in the writing stage of their dissertation. A surprising number of students who apply are within a month or two of their deadline to submit a complete draft to their advisors or committees. As mentioned earlier, these students add "stage" diversity and are among the most highly motivated of our boot campers. We try to accommodate everyone who applies, including creating separate teams of 10 to 12 and staggering the start time or day; different groups work in the same space, share meals, and socialize during breaks as one large group.

At least a month before the event, we let participants know they have been selected to participate. We send logistical details (dates, times, and location), including the ground rules: We expect students to attend each day, to attend all required team meetings (usually once in the morning and again in the afternoon), and to submit paperwork (brief assignments, such as daily goals and progress) each day. We also ask participants to begin keeping a writing log at least a week before the start of boot camp, recording on a log sheet we provide their daily goals, daily word count, and thoughts about their writing process and progress as well as any obstacles they encountered. We let participants know that breakfast, lunch, and snacks will be provided, including vegetarian options, and that they are welcome to bring their own food as well. Following the practice at the University of Pennsylvania, we have experimented with requiring a deposit to reserve a spot in boot camp. At Columbia University we asked students to give us a $50 check in a sealed envelope, which we held. If students completed Boot Camp, we returned the sealed envelope. (Organizers at Penn now tell students that their account will be charged the deposit amount if they fail to complete boot camp.) At Cornell we don't charge a deposit; we keep a wait list in

case someone has to drop out prior to the start of boot camp, so we always have a full cohort of at least 12 in each group.

Boot Camp Week

Students consistently report that the best schedule involves starting boot camp on a Friday. The Friday introduction and orientation provides students with a good sense of what will be expected of them in their upcoming intensive week. They use the weekend to find and organize needed articles and books for their writing goals for the subsequent five days.

The first half-day of boot camp begins with the facilitator describing the purpose and goals of boot camp, previewing the week's schedule, and sharing expectations for students' engagement and commitment to their writing, progress, and peers. Students introduce themselves in three to five minutes (name, program, point in program, schedule for completion, and so forth). After this round of introductions, and following a short break (if needed), the facilitator asks students, one by one, to announce their writing goal for the day. Students also write their daily goal on an easel to make them public. The facilitator also invites students to share any obstacle or challenge they have encountered with their writing or progress to completion. The facilitator suggests strategies to address and overcome the obstacle (a tip sheet listing 30 such strategies, "The Boot Camp Way," is available from the author). After this session—two to three hours, depending on the size and engagement of the group—students are free to write.

Our daily schedule is shown in Figure 2.1 above. The groups proceed through the week based on individual and team needs. After the first day there is a daily minimum of four hours of writing, with extended optional hours each day. Most students write during all the available optional sessions. By the third day, groups decide how many group meetings each day they need (zero, one, or two) and whether the facilitator is needed to meet with them. Most often, groups choose to meet once a day and invite the facilitator to join them. On the last day, several important things happen. Cake and ice cream are served with lunch, to celebrate the productive week. Students are awarded certificates and T-shirts ("I Write Therefore I Finish" in Latin). Very important is the last group meeting, in which students complete a "Strategic Plan for Taking Boot Camp Home" and commit to maintain their good writing habits and progress,

using their peers for support and as resources. This support can take any of several forms. For example, our first boot camp of 14 participants (four of whom have graduated) includes a pair who continue to meet in a department office to write together three days a week. Another group of three meets every Friday afternoon, with one of them sharing pages in advance and then discussing what is working, or not, about his or her writing process; the other two provide feedback on the content.

Assessing Boot Camp Effectiveness

We evaluate our boot camp planning and implementation in several ways. Midway through boot camp we offer a one-page "taking stock" opportunity for students to let us know (anonymously) what is working and not working for them during boot camp. We request more comprehensive feedback at the end of the event. As part of the application, we ask students to share their expectations for boot camp and indicate the degree to which they struggle with setting and meeting deadlines, overcoming procrastination or perfectionistic tendencies, staying motivated, avoiding writer's block, and getting timely and useful feedback on their writing. We tailor a final evaluation form using the expectations the students conveyed in the application. We also ask students to indicate (on a Likert scale) which aspects of boot camp were most effective in helping them to manage or overcome the challenges above (setting and meeting deadlines, overcoming procrastination, etc.) The final evaluation also asks students to describe changes in their writing approach, habits and attitudes that they believe will support their writing and degree completion. This instrument is distributed on the final day of the event, and most students complete it thoroughly. We then send it electronically to students a month later, asking if they have additional insights and feedback to share as they have tried "to take boot camp home" and continue their writing productivity and accomplishments.

Appendix B: Dissertation-Writing Boot Camps and Retreats

Boston College, Office of Graduate Student Life (since 2011)
http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/offices/gsc/about/programs/dissertation-boot-camp.html

Dissertation Boot Camp at Boston College is a three-day event each semester for ten doctoral students. The event includes "intense,

focused writing time" with "structure and motivation to overcome typical roadblocks in the dissertation process."

Claremont Graduate University, Writing Center (since 2007)
http://www.cgu.edu/pages/8913.asp

Claremont offers weekend events once a month, with all-day "quiet space with no distractions or interruptions" as a "writing retreat for graduate students who must balance their dissertation writing with the demands of home and work." Claremont also offers a week-long boot camp with "guest faculty, peer speakers, and 35 hours of quiet writing time."

Lehigh University, Graduate Life Office (since 2008)
http://gradlife.web.lehigh.edu/programs/boot-camp

Lehigh offers a two-day (weekend), "entirely distraction-free" event for up to 25 students. The $25 cost includes "four meals, a refocusing yoga exercise, chair massages to reduce stress, and all supplies." A 10-minute motivational speech on the first morning is designed to increase students' focus and productivity.

Loyola University Chicago, Graduate School (since 2008)
http://www.luc.edu/gradschool/pcap/dissertationbootcamp/

Loyola offers two week-long sessions each summer for doctoral students. The two facilitators, a faculty member and an assistant dean, "coach Ph.D. candidates on strategies for writing success, offer tales from those who made it to the other side … and support hard work and time devoted to writing."

New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, Writing Center (since 2011)
http://www.nmt.edu/academic-affairs-section-list/344-title-v-ppoha/4586-boot-camp

New Mexico Tech offers a week-long event, twice a year, for 12 students writing their theses or dissertations. Coffee and snacks are provided, as well as a "focused writing environment with an element of peer pressure [that] motivates better than writing alone."

Northwestern University, Graduate School and Writing Center (since 2011)

http://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/documents/professional-development/Boot_Camp_CFP_2012_December.pdf

Northwestern offers a two-week event with "required writing from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM, optional lunchtime workshops, and optional individual writing consultations."

Princeton University, Writing Center (since 2009)
http://www.princeton.edu/writing/university/graduate/

Princeton provides "quiet space and the camaraderie of a writer's community" that includes workshops and debriefing sessions for doctoral students.

Stanford University, Writing Center (since 2008)
https://undergrad.stanford.edu/tutoring-support/hume-center/writing/graduate-students/dissertation-boot-camp

Stanford offers 10-day events (four hours per day) for up to 12 students working on a dissertation, thesis, or other academic writing project. The program helps them "learn to write more productively and often to produce better writing" by providing space, routine, peer motivation, and writing consultants. Stanford also offers "After Dark" (5:00 to 9:00 PM) and "Before Dawn" (7:00 to 11:00 AM) versions of their boot camps.

University of Chicago, Graduate School (since 2011)
http://grad.uchicago.edu/training_support/dissertation_writing_skills/dissertation_write_in/

Chicago's Dissertation Write-Ins are five-day workshops for up to 20 graduate students, "to help break through personal procrastination habits and make good progress on writing." Participants write four hours a day with an additional three hours of optional writing time. During spring break there is a concurrent Thesis Write-In for master's students.

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Writing Center (since 2010)
http://writingcenter.unc.edu/dissertation-boot-camp-resources/

UNC–Chapel Hill offers a week-long event (9:00 AM to 1:00 PM) to help students "set writing goals, practice disciplined writing habits, learn new strategies, and connect with other dissertation writers."

The cost to students is $20.

University of Pennsylvania, Graduate Student Center (since 2006)
http://dissertationbootcampnetwork.wordpress.com/dissertation-bootcamps/

University of Pennsylvania's boot camp, credited as the first in the nation, "was developed to help students progress through the difficult writing stages of the dissertation process." The biannual, two-week long events for up to 20 students provide "structure and motivation to overcome typical roadblocks in the dissertation process."

University of Wisconsin, Graduate School and Writing Center (since 2011)
http://grad.wisc.edu/pd/dissertation/bootcamp

The University of Wisconsin offers a week-long event for 18 students selected on the basis of their "anticipated time to degree completion, the importance of boot camp at stage of project, and broad disciplinary representation." (The first boot camp drew 84 applications.) The event includes "structured writing time for at least six hours a day, one-to-one conferences, daily writing exercises, and optional lunchtime workshops."

West Virginia University, Writing Center (since 2011)
http://tlcommons.wvu.edu/GraduateAcademy/WritingAndResearch/

West Virginia University offers two one-week events each summer, one for students in the humanities and social sciences and another for students in the physical/life sciences and engineering. The program "combines workshops, peer review, individual consultations, and dedicated writing time."