

Helping Professors Grow as They Teach and Advise Graduate Students

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The purpose of this article is to share ideas from professors who are teaching graduate courses and advising graduate students. Also, the information could benefit graduate students and anyone who is thinking about earning a graduate degree. Each of the professors stated that an experience during their graduate studies helped them develop their teaching and advising style. Professors discussed the importance of including ethical behavior in their graduate courses and described approaches for including the information. One professor discussed obtaining a graduate degree completely online. The need to meet frequently with graduate students when they are working on their theses or dissertations was noted. Whether or not an adviser should include their graduate students as authors on their own publications was discussed.

Keywords: dissertation; ethics; graduate student; mentor; teaching online; thesis

DESCRIBE AN EXPERIENCE WHEN YOU WERE A GRADUATE STUDENT. HOW HAS THAT EXPERIENCE INFLUENCED YOUR TEACHING?

Alice Spangler: One experience stands out vividly. I was a first-year graduate student and had written a proposal for my master's degree research. I considered myself an excellent writer and expected glowing remarks when my advisor returned the written proposal. I was shocked to find that every sentence had been rewritten by my advisor! Eventually, I came to understand (and accept) that scientific writing was far different from the standard prose which had been my customary style. I took time to study and analyze this newly introduced writing style so that I could continue successfully as a graduate student/researcher. In later years, when I was working with graduate students'

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research proposals and theses, I was patient and thorough in reading and revising, regardless of the time and effort required. I appreciated the effort and time my advisor had given me in my early years. I also tried to be perceptive to the students' feelings about the written feedback, providing them with encouragement and sometimes sharing my own personal story.

Melissa Wilmarth: In my first year of graduate school, I was challenged more than I had ever been challenged before. While the courses were more demanding than the courses I took in my undergraduate education, I had to learn to manage my time differently. I had to learn that graduate work was learning the material in a way that mattered more than just earning a grade. It has influenced how I interact with graduate students as a mentor and professor. I purposefully discuss grades versus knowledge with graduate students. I often have discussions with students during their first year in graduate courses, especially after their first semester. For me, this was a time I had to learn to work differently to achieve the knowledge I needed both inside and outside of the classroom.

Young-A Lee: One of my most important experiences of being a graduate student was to engage with many faculty members within the department. During any occasion (e.g., research group meeting), they treated me as their future colleague and listened to my perspectives and ideas. They challenged, criticized, encouraged, and nurtured me during my graduate student journey. They created an open and safe environment, which allowed me to fail and learn from there. These memories influenced my teaching philosophy in graduate courses. I believe as an instructor and students, we need to be inclusive of different experiences. My role in graduate courses is to promote the students' intellectual discussions in a free and safe environment considering them as my future colleagues.

Mari Borr: I took my doctoral classes 270 miles away from the institution that I attended. The institution realized that we, as adult learners, needed to be met where we were at and we needed to accommodate for the fact that we all had full-time jobs. Most of the classes were face to face, but instead of us going to the institution, the instructors came to us (a cohort of about 20). Also, the classes were in the evenings, on weekends, and in the summer. If the experience had not been structured like this, I would not have been able to pursue my PhD at that time (online was not very popular yet). My takeaway was that adult learners have a lot of "life" going on and we need to be cognizant of the need for flexibility. Also, it is important to hold students responsible, but reasonable accommodations can be made. For example, If you feel you will not complete an assignment on time, you must let me know before the assignment is due and you must propose a new deadline for when you will be able to turn in the assignment. Another possibility is to explain that students will not receive full credit for late assignments, but that all assignments must be completed to pass the class. This gives the student a choice of turning it in late for fewer points.

Sophia Anong: One of my important memories and lessons was when my first dissertation proposal was turned down after presenting it officially to my committee. I had to start over. I try to impress on my students today that research can be messy and confusing and that's ok, it is part of the process. Finding focus and clarity is part of the learning especially at the graduate level. Pursuing a graduate degree is discovery, research is discovery and I try to help graduate students embrace the challenges of discovering who they are, what

their purpose is as they navigate advanced topics and methods in their classes and research.

WHEN SHOULD A PROFESSOR FEEL THAT HE OR SHE HAS SUFFICIENT RESEARCH EXPERIENCE TO TEACH GRADUATE COURSES AND ADVISE GRADUATE STUDENTS?

Sharon DeVaney: Many assistant professors will find themselves teaching graduate-level courses very early in their career. This could be a result of the need to cover all of the courses that the department offers. Also, the recent completion of statistics and methodology courses could be an important consideration.

DO YOU REVISE YOUR CURRICULUM EACH YEAR AND, IF YOU DO, HOW DO YOU DECIDE ON THE REVISIONS?

Young-A Lee: When teaching graduate courses, I revise the course contents each year although I may just do a minor revision for a certain year. I try to reflect (i) current disciplinary demands, (ii) whether this change will affect students' learning in other graduate courses, and (iii) whether this change aligns with the graduate program's assessment protocol. Thus, if I feel any change needed for my graduate courses, I share my rationales with respective colleagues and seek out their inputs. I also reach out to graduate students and ask about their current needs in the curriculum. Curriculum changes cannot be done alone. This is a collaborative team process.

Alice Spangler: My graduate courses were revised from one year to the next, sometimes with a slight tweak and sometimes with major changes. I asked the students to evaluate the course at the end of the semester and some of the changes were based on student evaluations. Other changes occurred due to experiences in other settings. For example, my six-month sabbatical was designed to help me gain an update on clinical practice working with older adults. This experience helped me maintain currency and relevancy in the graduate Geriatric Nutrition course that I taught. Also, my involvement with older adults in the local community and my research provided me with knowledge of the types of content and experiences I should include in the Geriatric Nutrition course. Another example was my exposure at a national conference to a poster presentation on using the evidence-based analysis process in a dietetics/nutrition course. I decided to use this concept in one of my graduate courses. In so doing, the graduate students engaged themselves in the actual evidence-based analysis process utilized by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

Mari Borr: Some classes are revised every few years; others are revised during the semester they are taught (to an extent)! I base my revisions partially on feedback gathered anonymously from students during the midpoint and at the end of the class. I also base it on their completed assignments (Do they seem to be getting what was intended out of the assignment?). Another basis for revision is new research and new books that are available and appropriate for the topic of the class.

DO YOU INCLUDE A STATEMENT ABOUT ETHICAL CONDUCT IN YOUR SYLLABUS? IF SO, BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE STATEMENT

Melissa Wilmarth: I do not include a statement that is explicitly listed as an ethical conduct statement; however, I have a few statements and intentional actions that are inclusive of ethical conduct in my courses. In my syllabi, I include the basic statements required by my university including a statement related to academic misconduct. In addition text, I also include an expanded statement about what constitutes academic misconduct at our institution, beyond the basic required statement. It highlights many of the ethical items that students experience while completing a course. Additionally, throughout the semester, I try to illustrate the importance of ethical behavior and work. This is explicitly describing what is appropriate and expected related to course assignments and activities. I find that just having something on the syllabus does not always stick for students.

Mari Borr: We are required to include a policy from our institution: This is that policy:

The academic community is operated on the basis of honesty, integrity, and fair play. NDSU Policy 335: Code of Academic Responsibility and Conduct applies to cases in which cheating, plagiarism, or other academic misconduct have occurred in an instructional context. Students found guilty of academic misconduct are subject to penalties, up to and possibly including suspension and/or expulsion. Student academic misconduct records are maintained by the Office of Registration and Records. Informational resources about academic honesty for students and instructional staff members can be found at www.ndsu.edu/academichonesty.

Mari Borr: I also include a reminder with some assignments: Please avoid unintentional (or intentional) plagiarism.

HOW IS TEACHING ON-LINE DIFFERENT FROM FACE-TO-FACE?

Mari Borr: In my opinion, you need to be more organized when teaching graduate students online. Instructions need to be provided in detail as students are less likely to ask questions (and they do not hear others ask questions as in a face-to-face setting) online. The structure of the course needs to be easy to navigate and procedures should remain the same (if possible) from one module to the next (such as how to submit an assignment). This helps the students to focus on the content rather than the technicality of how to do something. It is important to encourage and/or require student-to-student interaction as it does not happen as naturally as in a face-to-face class. However, students often have more "equal" participation in an online discussion board than in a face-to-face discussion.

Sophia Anong: There is a distance that is uncomfortable for both sides even if convenient. I once taught a hybrid research methods class with 17 students. We alternated meeting in class and through video chat for discussion sessions. They did not like the online feature and I agree. Not all content is conducive for online platforms. I suppose it depends on the personalities of the cohort and instructor to a certain extent as well how students are engaged online.

Sharon DeVaney: I think it is important to involve students in conducting some research and I did that even if it was a beginning online graduate course.

Students need to be exposed to research. Reading studies and discussing them on a discussion board is important but developing questions and obtaining and evaluating responses engages the students. They will begin to understand the challenge of designing a study.

HOW DO YOU ADVISE GRADUATE STUDENTS AT A DISTANCE?

Mari Borr: I set up a meeting once a semester, just as I would with a graduate student who is attending the institution in person. We set up a phone call or video meeting. I find that it is even more helpful if you and the student can “meet” on FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, or other platform. Then you can see each other—it gives the meeting a personal touch and the students realize their advisor is a real person. Clarifications about classes or the program are much easier to make when you are in a conversation instead of using email—there seems to be much less misunderstanding.

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT THAT YOUR STUDENTS WILL GAIN FROM THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TERM PAPER OR PROJECT?

Melissa Wilmarth: I think this depends on the course and the role of that course within the graduate program curriculum. In general, I hope that term paper or project would act as a culminating experience within a course. I think this should be something that builds upon the work students have done through the semester in an individualized way. Ideally, students would be able to develop a paper or project that expands their skill set as it relates to the course content, but also builds on other academic components in their life. These other components could be a thesis or dissertation, conference presentation, or manuscript submission underdevelopment. If structured well, students will gain not only the mastery of course content, but also develop skills that push their academic socialization and their own research agendas forward in strategic ways.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU MEET WITH STUDENTS WHEN THEY ARE WORKING ON A THESIS OR DISSERTATION?

Melissa Wilmarth: I do not have a rule for how often I meet with students when they are working on their thesis. For me, there are many variables for determining this including, timeline of the student, student’s motivation, rate at which work is being produced, student’s ability to work independently, and the current stage in the writing process. I start with weekly meetings as things are developing, transition to every other week during heavy writing times, and then on an as needed/as progress is made meeting schedule. As graduate students near milestones in their thesis, I am increasingly available for them to have drop in questions, e-mails, and phone calls, in addition to scheduled meetings, to help assist them in moving through the process.

Young-A Lee: The frequency of meeting with graduate students working on a thesis will vary from one student to another. An important consideration is the

students' needs. Typically, I plan on three to four meetings with the student who is in the process of developing a thesis topic and proposal. Then, we would meet to discuss the written proposal and its revisions make plans for the next steps, including a committee meeting and submitting the Institutional Review Board application. During the data gathering, a meeting may or may not be necessary, but the student and adviser should stay in contact. More meetings will be needed during the analysis stage, the writing process, and preparation for the final committee meeting. The important point is that the advisor needs to be available, and the student should be comfortable seeking guidance, input, and other encouragement/support that is appropriate. If the student is working at a distance, communication can occur through email, conference calls, and so forth. Both advisor and student need to be responsive in a timely manner.

Young-A Lee: I hold a weekly meeting with my graduate students when they are working on a thesis or dissertation. I apply this same rule for my students before their thesis or dissertation stage, which allows them to brainstorm their topics. I use this time to mentor the importance of research integrity and train my students as an emerging scholar. This weekly meeting allows us to share ideas and alternative approaches. I like to emphasize the importance of intellectual engagement throughout the thesis and dissertation research journey so they are ready to be a collaborative researcher when they become a junior faculty member.

Sophia Anong: Once a week. This can be a lonely phase and I believe students at this stage need a consistent reliable soundboard and reassurance especially from their mentor. They do not necessarily have to have deliverables every week but the contact and structure are helpful for accountability and to nurture the mentoring relationship which helps the student finish strong.

Sharon DeVaney: Once a week. I believe that students need to know that their professor is as interested in their progress and results as they are. The sharing of ideas at all stages—brainstorming about the topic, reviewing the literature, deciding on the methodology, collecting and analyzing data—deserves discussion.

WHAT ETHICAL ISSUES SHOULD BE EMPHASIZED WHEN TEACHING AND MENTORING GRADUATE STUDENTS?

Young-A Lee: There are many ethical issues that graduate students should learn before obtaining their terminal degree. Students should be aware of Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) as early as possible, which “covers norms, principles, regulations, and rules governing the practice of research” (<https://about.citiprogram.org/en/series/responsible-conduct-of-research-rcr/>). The following topics should be emphasized when mentoring graduate students: authorship, collaborative research, conflicts of interest, data management, mentoring, peer review, plagiarism, reproducibility of research results, research using human subjects, research misconduct, and other others. Introducing these topics as early as possible helps graduate students to be ready as a young scholar for our current dynamic research environment.

Sophia Anong: Create your own intellectual property and respect that of others. Creativity and critical thinking are very important for every discipline. A field like Consumer Economics does not involve creating hard science so it is so

much easier to duplicate existing studies without any new creation or novel idea. My expectations for ethics are that they matter in everything they produce, what they say and how they represent themselves and others in all spheres of their work. Ethical and unethical issues always rise to the surface, so it is important to operate ethically. It is about respecting self, others, and preserving longevity and the generational integrity of the discipline both in instruction and scholarship.

**WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU DISCOVERED THAT A STUDENT HAD
PLAGIARIZED CONTENT IN A PAPER OR WAS UNETHICAL IN COLLECTING
DATA OR ANALYZING DATA?**

Melissa Wilmarth: If a student is suspected of plagiarism, I think the process of handling that depends on the university policy for academic misconduct. At my institution, as a faculty member, I am not allowed to speak with a student about suspected academic misconduct. Instead, it is submitted to our academic misconduct monitor for review and moving through the process. I appreciate the fact that my institution's academic misconduct process has the policy that the penalty is flexible to account for severity of the offense and that it offers a learning opportunity for students. I serve in the role of academic misconduct monitor in my unit and I feel that students deserve to have an appropriately tough penalty when academic misconduct occurs, but also need to learn from the experience about the severity of misconduct outside of the classroom and in the broader professional and societal context.

Sophia Anong: I would confront the student, be very open with the concern and follow institutional procedures to alert "authorities." I would not be comfortable continuing to work with the student but I am aware there are faculty and departments that would not take it that far due to pressures of numbers. I feel allowing students to get away with infractions is a disservice to the student, the program itself, our discipline, and the profession.

**WHEN SHOULD YOU ADD STUDENTS AS COAUTHORS? HOW DO YOU
ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO GET THEIR THESES OR DISSERTATIONS READY
FOR SUBMISSION TO A JOURNAL?**

Young-A Lee: I believe that a graduate faculty should play a strong mentoring role to guide graduate students to be an independent scholar. When I have on-going research projects and write research papers, I usually provide an opportunity for my graduate students to participate in my research and add them as coauthors. I often let my students be the first author although they have not initiated research ideas and framed the study. I start this mentoring process as early as possible. In this case, they can learn the entire process starting from a study design, data collection and analysis, data interpretation, preparing a research report, manuscript preparation, article submission to a journal, and manuscript revision process including how to respond to reviewers and editor's feedback. Providing an opportunity for graduate students to be coauthors helps them to be more competitive on the job market.

Young-A Lee. When I guide my students' thesis or dissertations, I challenge them to think about one manuscript for a masters' thesis research and possibly two or three manuscripts for a dissertation. I encourage my students to prepare journal manuscripts or conference proceeding abstracts (or papers) simultaneously.

Alice Spangler. In my department at Ball State University, policies were established several years ago to address coauthorship under a variety of situations, along with case studies to broaden the scope of ethics and process. The policies are still being used. In general, authorship is determined according to the extent of intellectual and scientific contribution. The first author is the individual who has made the most contribution, be it the student or faculty member. If the paper is based on the student's thesis or dissertation and the student has written the paper, most likely the first author is the student. On the other hand, if the student assisted the faculty member in the faculty member's research, then the faculty member would likely be the first author. There are many variations on what might happen in an academic research setting; for example, the student has made the major contribution in one part of the faculty member's overarching research project. An important point is that there is agreement before the student begins and having policies in writing can eliminate much of the controversy which might occur later. The department policy with which I worked also provided a statement addressing the situation in which the student does not wish to publish the research or waits beyond a year following completion of the research.

Alice Spangler. Part of the *mentoring* between student and advisor is the suggestion and encouragement that the research is published. My role as advisor was to discuss with the student possible journals and have the student examine the journals for the purpose of deciding which journal to consider for publication. The student would also be expected to examine the journal guidelines for submission. Further conversation would include guiding the student to organize the thesis or dissertation content to fit the article and submission guidelines. Students need to understand this is not just a copy/paste effort. After the effort, the student has exerted to complete the dissertation or thesis, the student may not have much energy and initiative left to publish. Hopefully, the advisor can encourage and provide solid reasons for publishing, perhaps coupled with the idea of taking a month or two away from the project before starting the writing process.

CONCLUSIONS

Sharon DeVaney. Many of the professors described an experience during their graduate studies that helped them write in more depth, think more comprehensively, or be more open to ideas. The professors pointed out that graduate students need to do more in their courses than simply earn a grade. In regard to term papers and projects, the professors explained that they think of these assignments as the building blocks of the students' theses and dissertations. Most professors expressed the need to hold weekly meetings with their graduate students when they were developing their research questions, designing their studies, collecting data, and writing their theses or dissertations. Online teaching was described as being more demanding for both professors

and students and online teaching requires the professor to be very organized. The need for ethical behavior in research and publishing should be included and modeled in graduate courses.

Sharon DeVaney: The question of when a graduate student should be included as a coauthor on the professor's research was addressed. Also, ideas about helping students prepare their final project for submission to a journal are discussed. With this last topic in mind, I have included several articles and book reviews in the appendices about teaching and advising graduate students. Many of the articles were developed for a presentation by the Associate Editors at the annual conferences of the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (Adams, 2014; Borr, 2016; Delgadillo, 2016; Delgadillo, 2019; DeVaney, 2013; DeVaney, 2014; DeVaney, Delgadillo, Lee, & Spangler, 2017; DeVaney, Spangler, Lee, & Delgadillo, 2018; DeVaney, Wilmarth, Lee, Delgadillo, & Spangler, 2019; Hodges, 2011; Lee, 2014; Lee, 2015; Lee, 2016; Myers, 2014; Myers, 2015; Nielsen, 2011; Nielsen, 2015; Wilmarth, 2019; Wilmarth & Ingram, 2019). The book reviews have been published in FCSRJ to bring awareness of new ideas to our readers all over the world who are busy teaching, mentoring, and conducting research (Efron & Ravid, 2019; Leavy, 2017; Rothstein, 2019; Singh & Lukkarila, 2017; Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2018; Terrell, 2015; Yin, 2016).

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The FCSRJ Editorial Board members decided on the topic at their annual meeting. Each person submitted questions and then Dr. DeVaney compiled the questions. Drs. Borr, Lee, Spangler, Wilmarth, and Anong selected the questions they wanted to answer.

APPENDIX A

Journal Articles

- Adams, R. A. (2014). Preparing a manuscript for publication. *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 43(1), September, 98–101.
- Borr, M. L. (2016). Embedding an article in a master's paper. *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 45(1), September, 9–11.
- Delgadillo, L. M. (2016). Best practices for collaboration in research. *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 45(1), September, 5–8.
- Delgadillo, L. M. (2019). Demonstrating teaching excellence for tenure and non-tenure track positions in family and consumer sciences. *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 47(4), 375–383. Best Paper in FCSRJ Family and Consumer Sciences Education for 2019.
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- DeVaney, S. A., Delgadillo, L. M., Lee, Y., & Spangler, A. (2017). From submission to acceptance: Publishing in a research journal. *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 46(1) September, 24–30. Best Paper in FCSRJ Professional Issues for 2019.

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- Myers, L. A. (2015). Two new resources available through the family and consumer. *Sciences Research Center, Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 44(1), September, 105–106.
- Nielsen, R. B. (2011). Cues to quality in quantitative research papers. *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 40(1), September, 85–89.
- Nielsen, R. B. (2015). Launching a research career: T-15 years and counting. *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 44(1), September, 12–20.
- Wilmarth, M. J. (2019). Family and consumer sciences graduate research productivity in 2018. *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 48(2) December, 119–130. Best Paper in FCSRJ Professional Issues for 2019.
- Wilmarth, M. J., & Ingram, S. (2019). Theses and dissertations completed in family and consumer sciences: 2018. *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 48(2) December, 181–205.

APPENDIX B

Book Reviews

- Efron, S. E., & Ravid, R. (2019). Writing the literature review: A practical guide. Reviewed by Laura J. Taylor. (2019). *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 48(4), June, 414–417.
- Leavy, P. (2017). Research design: Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, arts-based, and community-based research approaches. Reviewed by Tiffany Machado Blanchflower, (2018). *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 47(1) September, 101–102.
- Rothstein, A. L. (2019). Creating winning grant proposals: A step-by-step guide. Reviewed by Robert J. Griffore. *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 48(2), 209–211.
- Singh, A. A., & Lukkarila, L. (2017). Successful academic writing: A complete guide for social and behavioral scientists. Reviewed by Sharon A. DeVaney, (2018). *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 46(3) March, 317–319.
- Swaminathan, R., & Mulvihill, T. M. (2018). Teaching qualitative research: Strategies for emerging scholars. Reviewed by Sharon A. DeVaney. (2019). *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 48(1), September, 105–107.
- Terrell, S. R. (2015). Writing a proposal for your dissertation: Guidelines and examples. Reviewed by Hongjoo Woo, (2016). *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 45(1) September, 119–121.
- Yin, R. K. (2016). Qualitative research from start to finish, Second Edition. (2016). Reviewed by Sharon A. DeVaney. *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 44(3) March, 324–325.