



# Impediments, Partners, and Proposals:

## Preparing Graduate Students to Start Their Thesis and Dissertation Proposals

Erin O'Toole, Science Librarian, University of North Texas

Transforming Libraries for Graduate Students Conference, March 23, 2018

# Impediments



- What is a proposal?
- Where do I find literature?
- How do I organize myself?
- Busy schedules

Take 1 minute to think about impediments at your institution. Please record your ideas on the worksheet.

# New program

University of North Texas

**Toulouse Graduate School**



- Format and content of proposals
- Search strategies for databases
- Organization with reference managers
- Saturday workshop

Take 1 minute to think about what services/programs you could offer to help students successfully complete and defend their proposals. Please record your ideas on the worksheet.

# Partners

Photo removed for  
privacy reasons

- Teaching faculty
- Subject librarians
- RefWorks administrator
- Graduate school

Take 1 minute to think about which partners could support your services/programs. Please record your ideas on the worksheet.

# 2015-2016 Workshops

Photo removed for  
privacy reasons

- Saturday 8:30 – 4:30
- 4 sessions and lunch
- All disciplines
- Promoted to graduate students and faculty by email

# Assessment

Photo removed for  
privacy reasons

- Waiting list is complicated
- Absenteeism is ~30%
- Workshop too long
- Objectives not clear
- Separate workshops for disciplines
- Better food

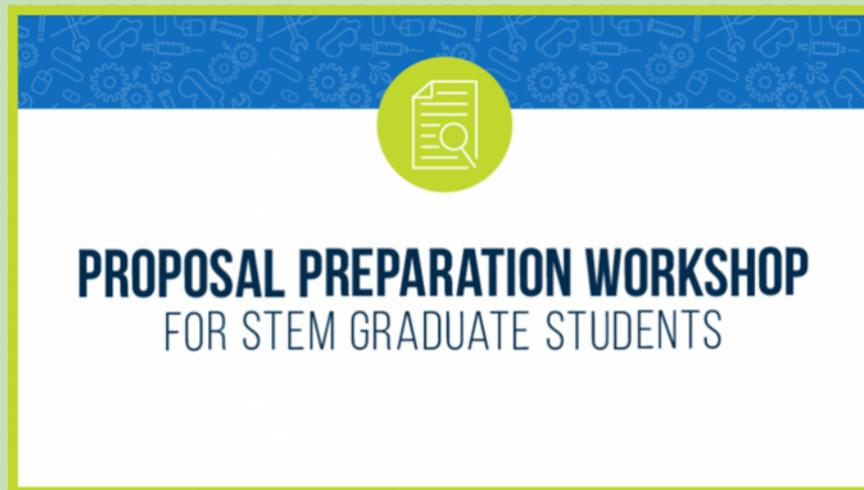
# 2016-2017 Workshops

Photo removed for  
privacy reasons

- 2 per long semester – STEM Humanities/Social Sciences
- Clearer registration form
- Saturday 9 – 3
- Multiple modes of promotion
- Healthier food

# Sharing and Questions

Please leave your worksheet if you're willing to have your ideas added to the slideshow posted in the Kennesaw State Digital Commons. Thank you!



Participants at the presentation were asked to brainstorm about:

- 1) impediments their students face when starting a dissertation or thesis proposal
- 2) potential programs or services that could remove or lessen the impediments, and
- 3) potential partners for the programs/services, inside or outside the library

The participants came up with the creative ideas listed in the table below.

Impediments to Starting Proposals	Potential Program/Service	Potential Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do I come up with a topic?</li> <li>• Is the topic I picked viable?</li> <li>• Where can I find “everything” on . . . ?</li> </ul>	<p>Video, Zoom or Skype workshop that could be recorded for further use</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contacts within departments</li> <li>• Graduate Student Association</li> <li>• Graduate Student Union</li> </ul>
<p>My focus is the medical student research proposal, which is a 3<sup>rd</sup> year research requirement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear of failure</li> <li>• Perfectionism</li> <li>• Isolation because of small cohort, field, or different focus.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Just write it” – program held to get something on paper</li> <li>• Social/group meetings</li> <li>• Friendly support groups</li> <li>• Specific mentor/oversight with a point person</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Departments</li> <li>• Writing center</li> <li>• Alumni</li> <li>• Older students</li> </ul>

Impediments to Starting Proposals	Potential Program/Service	Potential Partners
Not understanding the difference between a thesis and a project	Workshop: Deconstructing the Proposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graduate students nearing graduation</li> <li>• Faculty</li> <li>• Other librarians</li> <li>• Graduate Writing Center</li> </ul>
Not understanding theoretical frameworks	Utilize graduate student success stories and feature them in workshops on theoretical frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graduate students nearing graduation</li> <li>• Faculty</li> <li>• Other librarians</li> <li>• Graduate Writing Center</li> </ul>
Identifying a new approach/method or research that fills a gap in the field	One-day workshop as a precursor to our 3-day dissertation writing intensive, for students who have completed their proposals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty (presenting on the “standard proposal)</li> <li>• Subject librarians</li> <li>• Graduate School</li> </ul>
How do I pick or narrow down a topic?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brainstorm session with literature searching</li> <li>• Research consultations with liaisons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graduate writing center</li> <li>• Liaisons</li> </ul>
My institution requires doctoral students to take 3 of 4 courses following regular coursework and comprehensive exams: Review of Literature, Data Analysis or Qualitative/Quantitative, and Chapters 1-3 of dissertation.	A past cohort agreed to meet 4 times a year once they entered the phase with these required courses. Ten students started the courses, but only 4-5 eventually graduated. They need more help!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library</li> <li>• Writing center</li> <li>• Dissertation chair</li> <li>• Dissertation committee</li> <li>• Statistician assistance</li> <li>• Study spaces (single and group)</li> <li>• Peer editors</li> </ul>

Impediments to Starting Proposals	Potential Program/Service	Potential Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty deciding on or narrowing a topic</li> <li>• Lack of interaction with librarian as part of process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asynchronous online tutorials on beginning a proposal</li> <li>• Consultation with a librarian to discuss the proposed topic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nursing faculty</li> <li>• Nursing administration</li> <li>• Both needed to make the librarian part of the thesis/dissertation process</li> </ul>
Do not know the value/significance of research and its connection with professionalization and the job market	Network or clearinghouse of experts to verify feasibility of research topic, suggest resources, and sign off on projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subject librarians outside own university, especially those with focused expertise</li> <li>• Faculty, especially outside own university</li> </ul>
Lack of a support network	Same as above	Same as above
Lack of pre-research, not knowing where to find primary resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same as above</li> <li>• Information session on funding, help with grant applications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same as above</li> <li>• Graduate school</li> <li>• Departments</li> </ul>