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Leading a Horse to Water: Writing Workshops for Engineering Graduate Students

A workshop series sponsored by the Howard R. Hughes College of Engineering of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) seeks to dispel the myth that engineers cannot be good writers.

Susan Wainscott, MLIS, and Julie A. Longo, MSE

OUTCOMES

Each year the number of workshops offered has increased, as has overall attendance. New topics have been added each year. One topic, Grants, has been moved to a workshop series provided by the Office of Sponsored Projects, and is no longer part of the College’s workshop series. Past and present workshop topics are described briefly below, roughly in the sequence they would be offered across an academic year.

Introduction: An overview of resources and services available to graduate students including the workshops, libraries, tutoring and writing center.

Lit. Review: How to search, evaluate, store, and incorporate information sources into the literature review section of a manuscript.

Use of Sources: Comparison of reference management tools, discussion of citation ethics, and practice in paraphrasing.

Reference Tools: Instruction on use of a particular reference management software tool.

Papers: Organization, writing, and editing of manuscripts. Focus has evolved from general writing tips to address journal articles and conference papers.

Grants: Locating, selecting, and preparing applications for funding. Included project management tips to ensure timely submission.

Reports: Audience identification, organization, writing, and editing of technical reports for grant agencies. Includes tips for creating a style guide.

Intensive: Invitation-only opportunity to receive one-on-one consultations from a variety of campus experts on a student’s writing project.

Currently, students from all four engineering departments in the College – Mechanical, Electrical and Computer Engineering, Computer Science, and Civil / Environmental / Construction – as well as other academic units on campus regularly participate in these workshops. Some workshops (Lit. Review, Reports, and Papers) now have registration wait lists. The Lit. Review workshop is now offered twice per year. Some students repeat workshops when the material is more timely for their projects or when they wish to achieve greater levels of expertise.

FUTURE PLANS

An additional partnership with UNLV’s Writing Center is being pursued, and additional workshop topics and enhancements are being considered. Additional formal assessment is being considered for future publications.

Based upon this experience, In 2015-2016 the authors worked with the Associate Dean for Research, Graduate Studies & Computing in the College of Engineering to design a standalone Ethics Workshop for graduate students that focuses on research and publishing ethics. Preliminary assessment results from the Ethics Workshop will be presented at the 2016 American Society for Engineering Education on June 28, 11:30 – 1:00 PM, in Exhibit Hall F.

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