

Creating a Research Box:

Making Your Graduate Classes Work For You

You've enrolled in a graduate degree program and soon you'll be on your way to writing your thesis or dissertation. With a little foresight and clever planning you can learn to make your program of study work for you by incorporating your research agenda into your class schedule. Here's how to take full advantage of your time in the Graduate School and find yourself ahead of the curve when it comes to producing and completing a finished piece of research worthy of publication.

GETTING STARTED

- The first thing you should do is buy an actual, physical box which will serve as the central location where you will store all of your research.
- Read dissertations/theses recommended by faculty to help in developing a suitable topic. Make note of style, format, etc.
- Once you decide on a research topic, read other student manuscripts that are on similar topic areas. Often times, faculty can point you in the right direction.
- Gather materials from UMI's online database (http://www.proquest.com/products_umi/dissertations/) on how to write a dissertation/thesis.
- Buy a book such as "Dissertations and Theses from Start to Finish," from the American Psychological Association, or find another that will serve as your main resource.
- Keep in mind that you should not try to write out your paper and reformat at the end. Know your form from the onset.

FORMULATE A GENERAL TOPIC

- Utilize assignments in your classes to review the literature in your field.
- By identifying and generating a list of themes within your field you will begin to understand the history of the topic.
- Make sure to start off by applying consistent referencing for your initial readings.

RESEARCH

- Focus your research through the different classes, or other venues, available to you.
- As you continue to use the main library, online literature searches, and journals within your departmental and faculty libraries, your box will fill with articles and the names of sources that might later prove useful as references.
- At this point, your box will be growing with the myriad class topics, journals, theme words, etc., that can help you when you begin the formulation of a research question.
- Use research classes to come up with your own questions.
- Make use of your professors' office hours. Don't be afraid to ask questions!

CREATING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

- Through your graduate research class, begin to bring your ideas together from your research box into a question you might want to study.
- At this point, you have the history section gathered from your introduction course, other aspects of the topic have been gathered from research in classes, and you are ready to come up with a research question.
- Through a process of presenting your ideas to your classmates/professors both inside and outside of class, you will begin to tease out what you are interested in finding out and to better understand how you will set up your research study (i.e. quantitatively, qualitatively, or both).
- Take research classes outside of the required courses to better understand the process.
- Read books on research design (i.e. "Cresswell Book", "Grounded Qualitative Theory") to help you develop a model/theory of study. Continue to use your classes to experiment with the setup of your idea. Consult with a statistical analyst when necessary.
- Know what your professors want from you.

MAKE YOUR ADVISOR YOUR BEST FRIEND

- Continue to work with your advisor on developing your topic, method of analysis, and a timeline and format for your manuscript. Your advisor will become your best friend before the process is over, and your dissertation/thesis your first child!
- Allow each section of your box its own file to hold its own specific information. Gather information on theories for your study, statistical measures and demographic forms, and examples of instruments used.
- Understand the theories from your study, statistical measures, etc.

RESEARCH SPECIFIC COURSEWORK AND CONTACTS

- Allow yourself an avenue to explore your project in courses while gaining credit for it. Whether it's through an independent study with a faculty member or by taking advanced coursework on research development, you will have places to go and people to talk with about your study.
- Continue to talk about your study with faculty during office hours.
- Contact people within your field of study to talk about their work and its connection to your line of research. This could be via phone/e-mail as long as you talk about how their instruments or articles help to ground your project. Most are very willing to help students in their area of study.

CREATING A LIST OF REFERENCES

- After every article you collect, add it in full reference format to a general list, as well as a specific list for each file in your box. You will then know if you have articles on a particular topic. You will also know what you need to add over time as new articles come out within your domain.
- Having a comprehensive, generalized list will eventually help you when you go to type up the reference section of your material.
- This file will eventually become one of your favorites

as you realize you are becoming an expert within a field of study.

MERGE YOUR BOX INTO A DISSERTATION/THESIS

- At this point you have an introduction to your study from your history or first courses taken and can write your first chapter.
- You have reviewed the literature in the various aspects of your topic and have chapter two ready.
- In your research classes you have explored a theory to ground your work and have gathered the instruments you will need to conduct the study. This will lay the foundation for your third chapter.
- You have talked to people in the field to figure out how to conduct your study and are ready to collect your data.

CONDUCTING THE STUDY

- At this point all of your files in your box have helped you to develop and carry out a research study worthy of publication.
- All you need to do at this point is look back in your box at the variety of files developed and begin to see the other areas of research that can come out of your one study/research agenda. The list is endless.

CONCLUSION

- At this point the research box has helped you to unite all of the work from your individual classes into the development of a dissertation/thesis.
- You have developed your research agenda as you begin to apply to further graduate studies or begin interviewing for jobs in academia.
- **Keep your box:**
As a teaching tool and as a reminder of the process AND
As the foundation of your research agenda and the starting point for further endeavors. ■

Based on the Graduate School seminar "Creating a Research Box: Making Every Graduate Class Count" by Sharon Blackwell Jones, Department of Counseling and Human Development Services.

To view this seminar in full, visit <http://www.grad.uga.edu>.