

Communication Center Dissertation Boot Camp

The Communication Center designed the Dissertation Boot Camp program to provide PhD students completing their dissertations an environment and a schedule to facilitate their writing. The main goal is to remove distractions and provide students a space that is conducive to generating quality writing and increasing productivity. The space, in this case the Communication Center, situates students in a community setting. Students reported informally that sitting and working with other PhD students also working on their dissertations helped them feel less isolated and helped motivate them. Some students attributed their motivation to the peer experience of having to write every day because everyone else in the program was also visibly working.

The Boot Camp, which runs 8 hours a day for five continuous days at the end of the standard semester, includes three workshops to orient and guide participating students towards goal setting. The Communication Center faculty works with the participants on setting long-term and short-term goals, eliminating distractions, and instructing them on tracking their own progress throughout the program. In addition to the three one-hour workshops (which occurred on the first third and last day of the Boot Camp), we tutored students individually, as well as requiring each student to keep daily logs of their regular goals and reflections on their work and process. Our pilot Boot Camp, developed in conjunction with Dr. Brandy Blake from the Stewart School of Industrial and Systems Engineering, ran in the summer of 2014. Nine participants completed the pilot program. We conducted the first campus-wide Boot Camp during finals week of fall 2014, with 14 participants successfully completing the program. Eight of these participants from the fall program have assembled informally to continue the practices they learned in order to perpetuate their productivity and success. This last outcome is the best possible result of the Dissertation Boot Camp, as the Communication Center's mission statement focuses on enabling students to continue successfully on their own initiative using the tools and strategies they have developed while working with us.

Graduate student testimonies about the Dissertation Boot Camp:

"My experience at the Boot Camp was multifaceted. First, as a multi-disciplinary and diverse group of advanced Ph.D. Candidates at GaTech we all were facing THE ONE THING we all desperately wanted to get going and done – DISSERTATING – and seeing that in everyone's eyes was comforting and motivating at the same time. When writing got slow and tedious, the view of another fellow student powering through would get me INSPIRED all over again. And that was the only distraction we were allowed – no social media, no emails, no phones, all of which made for a very effective environment to keep the focus on the WRITING. The few short and structured breaks for snacks, lunch, little physical exercise, and brief discussions on effective writing skills helped keep things light and playful. I have really enjoyed our daily PROGRESS CHECKS on the writing GOALS – we discussed what we were able to accomplish, whether our goals were realistic, what we learned to improve our performance the next day. At the end, I have ACCOMPLISHED a lot MORE than I

planned when I was going in. The second big thing at the Camp was working together with and getting to know people from different schools and programs – I'd like to hope that I have developed a few solid collegiate friendships and that is a big A+++ to the Boot Camp! And right now, eight of us are working to get Boot Camp 2.0 going into the Spring semester to keep dissertating and getting closer to the graduation! “

Aselia Urmanbetova
School of Public Policy, GaTech

"I am a PhD Candidate in the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs. I took the tremendous opportunity offered by CommLab's Dissertation Writing Bootcamp to stay on schedule and maintain momentum as I write my dissertation. Since my plan is to graduate in the spring of 2015, I realized that a structured, highly supportive environment in a location conducive to writing would help me to complete draft chapters. This is just what transpired during the Bootcamp. The faculty at CommLab were highly committed to the process. They not only responded to our needs, but anticipated them. For example, the layout of the space included large-screen computers, separate as well as community tables which were helpful to be productive and to spread out our materials. Guidance at the beginning, midway and at the end as well as during breaks throughout the day helped to address writing issues. The enforcement of breaks enabled me to refresh, engage with other students and share lessons learned. The experience really helped to propel me towards the finish line and most importantly gave me renewed confidence that I could actually finish the dissertation. At INTA some of us PhD Candidates were trying to figure out how to effectively create a dissertation writing club that would help us reach our goals. The DWB far exceeded my expectation. I cannot thank the CommLab faculty enough for their genuine concern for and support of PhD student success."

Many thanks,
Diane Alleva Caceres
PhD Candidate
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