

# Dissertation Genre Change as a Result of Electronic Theses and Dissertation Programs

Kate Pantelides, Middle Tennessee State University

**Abstract:** The increasing prevalence of mandatory Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) policies has ushered in rather dramatic dissertation genre change. The affordances of the medium offer expanded access and audience, availability of new compositional tools, and alternate formats, the implications of which are just beginning to appear in dissertations. Through genre analysis of 14 interdisciplinary, award-winning ETDs, I consider how the discursive opportunities offered by ETDs necessarily shift the *genre ecology* within which dissertations develop. Further, I catalogue emerging ETD convention and address tensions between emerging and "traditional" contexts. To provide context for this study, I examine the discourse that surrounds, constitutes, and creates dissertations, including vocal arguments against ETD policies, studies supporting ETD use, and dissertation awards discourse.

## Introduction

The dissertation-writing experience is arguably the one common identifiable expectation of doctoral education, regardless of discipline. Students enter programs knowing that the dissertation looms on the horizon, though "it" is rather ambiguous. As Elliot Shapiro (this volume) suggests, "the work of producing writing—the medium through which research is produced and presented—is often assumed to be something smart graduate students just learn" without explicit training. The increasing prevalence of mandatory Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) policies and the continual questioning of the dissertation's purpose and place in the academy (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Golde and Dore, 2004; Bowen and Rudentine, 1992) have imparted further change to this shadow process. The affordances of ETDs, and by this I mean the possibilities for the genre that this new medium allows, have ushered in rather dramatic dissertation genre change. Beyond simply providing a digital publishing space, the medium offers expanded access and audience, and availability of new compositional tools and alternate formats. Necessarily, these discursive opportunities shift the complex rhetorical environment, or *dissertation genre ecology*, within which dissertations develop, and they fundamentally change the opportunities for dissertation composition.

The notion of *genre ecology* (Spinuzzi 2002, 2011) is useful to examine the genres that surround and constitute the dissertation-writing process. Unlike other organizing measures of genre, which suggest an orderly progression of genre connections (genre set (Devitt, 2004); genre chain, (Swales, 2004); genre constellation (Bazerman, 1994)), the notion of ecology suggests that dissertations are constantly changing in relation to their environment and at the same time changing their environment. Further, ecology allows for the natural balance that genres must find between growth — a necessary characteristic of all living things, and stability — also a necessity so that actors within the ecology can recognize a given discursive

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product as a member of that genre. *Genre ecology* allows for bi-directionality of actors, texts, and utterances within a community tied to a specific communicative event (dissertation writing) and builds relational complexity into the model, providing a platform for understanding linkage within and between genres. Examining genres within this context, in relation to other connected genres, brings attention to the atmospheres in which genres are instantiated, grow, and develop.

## The Study

How do the affordances of ETDs drive genre change? What genre conventions are developing, and what "traditional" dissertation conventions are maintained? What are the rhetorical implications of ETDs? In this article, I address these questions through a discussion of some of the findings of my study of the first generation of dissertations produced under mandatory ETD policies.<sup>[1]</sup> In this study, I examine the linkages between two genres within the *dissertation genre ecology*, dissertation awards discourse and ETDs. I begin with discourse analysis of four distinct interdisciplinary awards criteria to better understand how award grantors constitute the dissertation genre. Next, I mine 14 interdisciplinary award-winning ETDs<sup>[2]</sup> to examine the discursive forces shifting within dissertations themselves, and I identify emerging genre conventions resulting from this change. I examine the interaction between these two genres to analyze how the rhetorical context in which dissertations are created impacts them as institutional artifacts.

To contextualize my findings, this article begins with a findings survey of past dissertation genre analyses. Since these studies were conducted, mandatory ETD policies have been enacted at a growing number of universities and have drastically changed the affordances of the genre. As such, I consider how ETD policies have changed the rhetorical context for dissertators, address the impact on dissertations themselves, and highlight areas for future research given these changes.

## Dissertation Genre Studies

My sample size and methodology is reflective of similar past genre analyses of theses and dissertations largely conducted in the late 1990s and early 2000s (for example, Paré 2014; Paré, Starke-Meyerring & McAlpine, 2009; Hasrati & Street, 2009; Swales, 2004; Bunton, 2005, 1998; Paltridge, 2002); such interdisciplinary, exhaustive surveys have rarely been undertaken since the impact of ETD policies began to take full effect. In discussing why so few dissertation genre analyses exist, Brian Paltridge (2002) posits three primary reasons: first, "the accessibility of the texts [...since] theses and dissertations are often difficult to obtain in university libraries," second, "the sheer size of theses and dissertations [...] limits [...] what researchers can observe," and, finally, scholars are only able to analyze a small number of dissertations, so their results are not largely generalizable (pgs. 125-126). Of course, this first problem of access has been obviated by ETD policies, and the impact of such access is the focus of my analysis; however, the latter two difficulties remain and limit the scope of dissertation genre analyses, giving way to folklore and unproven commonplaces regarding the genre. For instance, these broad, internationally conducted analyses largely disproved the widely-held assumption that dissertation form was simply extended research article and helped develop a catalogue of conventions associated with the dissertation genre.

Although some "traditional," print dissertations mimic section format of research articles, these studies suggested that there are distinctive rhetorical parts of dissertations incongruous with genre expectations of research articles: specific, detailed methodology sections (Swales, 2004); meta-discourse and expansive conclusions (Bunton, 2005, 1998); appropriate hedging/preface, argument structure, citation purpose, and apprentice writers' signals of disciplinary knowledge (Parry, 1998; Swales, 2004). For example, particularly in dissertations, citations are a rich site of identity work, and they frequently serve to demonstrate, as Kathleen Fitzpatrick (2013), a member of MLA's dissertation working group<sup>[3]</sup>, has noted, "[that students] have learned everything that's happened in the field up to this point" (qtd. in Pantelides, 2013, p.114).

The process detailed in previous studies described the dissertation experience as primarily linear; for instance, Swales' 2004 study of dissertations suggests that since "the *final stages* of progress to a doctoral degree [are...] serially ordered, they can be considered as a chain" (p. 100). This chain metaphor is inconsistent with my recent findings regarding experiences of dissertating students and mentoring faculty members (Pantelides, 2013). As Eliot Shapiro details in "Towards an Integrated Graduate Student (Training Program)" (this volume), graduate students generally describe the dissertation writing process as particularly messy. Instead of a bucolic pathway, dissertation-writing processes seem to be much more reminiscent of overlapping, one-way streets and high-speed interstates. ETDs and increased online communication have dramatically impacted the dissertation "tradition" and, notably, provided a recoverable "paper" trail to provide evidence of the circuitous route dissertations take as they develop.

## ETDs and Dissertation Genre Change

In coordination with Virginia Tech, University Microfilms (now Proquest) and the Coalition for Networked Information (CNI) jumpstarted the ETD movement in the 1990s with the hope of introducing cultural change to the dissertation genre by incorporating "scholarly content that employed images, sound, datasets and databases, interactive software components, and other enrichments to traditional, primarily linear text" (Lippincott & Lynch, 2010, p.7). As the current "publisher" of most ETDs, many cite Proquest as one of the primary forces in heralding dissertation genre change, and it is the target of many complaints regarding ETD transitions.

According to the ProQuest website (2012), since 1938 they have published "over 2 million graduate works from graduate schools around the world." Of course, during most of this relationship, dissertations could only be accessed through microfilm or interlibrary loan, and it was not until 1998 that the first dissertations were published online as part of university guidelines (Princeton Graduate History Association). Though mandatory ETD policies are increasingly common, many policies provide embargoes to allow authors to opt out of full text publication and exempt themselves from the potential impact of expanded access and audience, though they are still able to take advantage of digitally available compositional tools and alternate formats.

## ETDs: Access, and Audience<sup>[4]</sup>

Whereas once dissertations were perhaps only read by students and their committees, with the transition to ETDs, they now have the potential to reach an audience of literally millions. Of course, just because something is available online does not mean that it will be read, but evidence suggests that ETDs are actively being read, and their audience grows daily. For instance, Virginia Tech's ETD website was accessed by 3,089,419 unique visitors in 2011 and received 9,217,796 hits (Virginia Tech University). On the other hand, archived, print dissertations, or those that often constitute the notion of "traditional" dissertations, are rarely accessed. As evidence, compare the ETD statistic above to the print circulation statistics in the four year period from 1990-4: only 3,967 of the 15,335 approved theses and dissertations that were authored during the time were checked out of the library (Moxley, 2001).

The drastic change in access for dissertations afforded through mandatory ETD policies has made a significant impact, one that has been heralded by many and, of course, deeply criticized. One particularly vocal, organized reaction against an ETD program was by the Princeton History Graduate Association in 2011. In response to Princeton's inauguration of Dataspace, their "own digital depository for the permanent electronic archiving of work produced by the Princeton University community" — a space that would make dissertations immediately searchable and accessible via all internet search engines — the History Graduate Association authored a white paper written to the Princeton University Community (Princeton Graduate History Association). Citing Proquest policies, other university ETD policies, and a *Chronicle of Higher Education* essay warning of university presses' refusal to publish books that have previously been published

as online dissertations, the authors requested a reconsideration of Dataspace's unlimited access to student work. They argued that since "*the change of medium has changed the system* [...]" we would like to minimize the potential damage associated with that change" (Princeton Graduate History Association, emphasis added).

The Princeton Graduate History Association's complaint emphasized the far-reaching implications of ETD policies, highlighting that the entire "system," or *dissertation genre ecology*, feels the ripples of ETD change. Their most persuasive complaint pertained to the impact of expanded dissertation access on available research methodology, citing a clash between open resource ideals and copyright restrictions. Since much of historical research is archival, the students explained that they had "encountered difficulties in obtaining copyright clearance from the archives they accessed because DataSpace and Proquest require far more extensive publication permissions than archives are normally willing to grant without charging substantial fees" (Princeton Graduate History Association). Further, they warned that participation in unrestricted ETD programs would frustrate their ability to publish their dissertations as monographs, an important pre-tenure feat across many disciplines, and particularly in history.

While stifling archival research is a very serious potential implication of ETD policies, the Princeton Graduate History Association only offers anecdotal evidence to support the frightening claims (Cassuto, 2011). In addition, their anxieties about ETD publication constituting prior publication and thus frustrating their consequent abilities to publish monographs has been countered by two extensive studies. In Ramirez et al.'s comprehensive 2013 study of publisher attitudes regarding ETDs, they received 128 responses from the 746 total journals and university presses surveyed. Overall, the study authors found that 45 % of editors declare "revisions of openly accessible ETDs [...] always welcome for submission," and 27% said such works would be "considered on a case by case basis[...]. Only 4.5% of all respondents indicated that they would never consider an ETD for publication" (8). Generally, journal editors were a bit more welcoming of ETDs than editors for university presses.

Ramirez et al.'s findings, coupled with the similarly comprehensive 2000-2001 study (Dalton & Seamans) on which it was based, combat the false assumption that dissertations can magically turn into books without considerable revision. In particular, one university press director elaborated on the importance of quality, saying "whether in hard or electronic copy, we expect that the dissertation be completely revised before we will consider a manuscript. We do not consider the dissertation to be the equivalent of a book. It is student work; a book is professional work" (qtd. in Ramirez et al., 2013, 11). Essentially, these editors posit that worries about prior publication are a bit naive, considering the extent to which a dissertation must change before it can be considered for peer-reviewed publication. Such conversation reinforces a long-standing truth that, like dissertations themselves, is brought out into the open through ETD policies.

ETDs dramatically alter dissertation audiences and accessibility, but such comments from publishers suggest that this development does not significantly constitute genre change such that it renders an ETD any more complete or professional than a print dissertation, simply because it is widely available. Though print dissertations have long been considered among students and faculty to simply be monographs-in-the-making or "proto-books" (Smith, 2010, p.17), publishers identify clear distinctions between monographs and dissertations. When we define dissertations by their most simple social function — to complete doctoral work, genre limitations are more evident. Perhaps ironically, online publication reinforces one of the defining characteristics of dissertation projects — the lack of peer review — the primary aspect publishers cite as making the dissertation and monograph distinct genres. Thus, publishers help define the dissertation not by the audience, but through process.

## ETDs: Available Compositional Tools and Alternate Forms

In stark contrast to the Princeton history graduate students, many students are tussling with their universities over policies *restricting* ETDs. Increasingly, digital-born dissertations, or those that can only

exist in electronic form, are being authored and subjected to university policies that are not quite ready for them. Case in point: in 2006, a doctoral candidate at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, Virginia A. Kuhn, remained in graduation "limbo" after successfully defending her dissertation but unsuccessfully attempting to submit her digital dissertation.

After waiting a semester to find out whether or not she would be granted her degree, the dean said "that the institution would award Ms. Kuhn's doctoral degree on the basis of having formulated a 'first pass' solution to the issues raised by it. She had 'clearly earned' the degree [...] so the university would 'not wait until all issues are finally resolved'" (Monaghan, 2006). Both the Princeton history students, Kuhn, and students like her, are struggling with the evolving capabilities of ETDs and the consequent changes in form and process, and university policies are struggling to catch up with these new opportunities and set appropriate limits.

The utilization of newly available compositional tools and alternate formats for the dissertation have been advocated by bodies such as the Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD) and the Modern Language Association (MLA) as a potential answer to some of problems associated with the dissertation genre. Though multimodal, innovative dissertations sometimes encounter stumbling blocks, such innovation often pays off for dissertators in the form of multiple job prospects and positive professional notoriety (Fitzpatrick, qtd. in Pantelides, 2013). Carol Berkenkotter (2013) further suggests that it is "not unusual to see citations to a dissertation [...] when a field's changing very very quickly," and in situations like these, citation to a risk-taking dissertation proves uptake of the form and content (qtd. in Pantelides, p.103).

## Interdisciplinary Award-Winning Dissertations

The affordances of ETDs productively trouble dissertation genre convention and introduce new possibilities for composition. To understand changing convention, I analyzed 14 recent, award-winning dissertations, which are members of the first generation of dissertations created under mandatory ETD policies. The selected dissertations have won one of four different Outstanding Dissertation and Theses (OTD) interdisciplinary awards: those distributed by the NDLTD, the Council on Anthropology and Education (CAE), the Society for Medical Anthropology (SMA), and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) (The James Berlin Award). As award grantors, these actors impact the dissertation genre ecology by rewarding particular conventions and providing models by which other dissertations will be written. As Carol Berkenkotter and other faculty mentors advise, the best way to begin the dissertation-writing process is to examine the conventions observed in successful dissertations (qtd. in Pantelides, p. 99), and award-winning dissertations are frequently used in this capacity. Further, since these awards all promote new knowledge within their respective fields, they are significant drivers of innovation.

I selected these awards because they are interdisciplinary (each award recognizes outstanding research from more than one discipline) and contrast each other in terms of the types of research and writing they reward. Although most disciplines in the social sciences and humanities have a primary professional organization, many only recognize outstanding research completed by current scholars in the field; few, like the awards I have selected, are tailored specifically for dissertation work. I limited my search to the last four years in order to draw from a large enough pool but ensure that these dissertations were impacted by recent changes in university policies regarding ETDs. In addition, I selected only award-winning dissertations that were electronically available and not under embargo, which would render them exempt from the discursive forces I have identified as facilitating genre change.

## Award Specifications

Of the four awards I examined, the NDLTD Innovative ETD Award is the most interdisciplinary, but also the most focused on purposely promoting dissertation genre change. The mission of the NDLTD as an international organization is

through leadership and innovation, [to promote] the adoption, creation, use, dissemination and preservation of electronic theses and dissertations. The NDLTD encourages and supports the efforts of institutes of higher education and their communities to develop electronic publishing and digital libraries (including repositories), thus enabling them to share knowledge more effectively in order to unlock the potential benefits worldwide. (NDLTD.org, 2012)

The NDLTD's primary purpose is to house ETDs and educate the academic community about their potential.

The organization distributes multiple awards each year, but the requirements for the outstanding dissertation award are as follows:

ETDs submitted for this award must represent student efforts to transform the genre of the print dissertation through the use of ETDs. This award recognizes innovative use of software to create "cutting edge" ETDs. The application and integration of renderings, photos, data sets, software code and other multimedia objects that are included in the document will be considered as part of the innovation of the work. (NDLTD.org, 2012)

The primary measure of quality for this award is the level of innovation and "cutting edge" nature of the dissertation. Unlike some other interdisciplinary awards, which frequently list a "significant contribution to the field" as the primary marker of excellence, the larger purpose of this award is to spur genre evolution and "transform" print dissertation norms. The NDLTD is also distinct in its self-awareness about its role as a mechanism for genre change and purposeful promotion of certain conventions. The award discourse provides a useful catalogue of compositional affordances of ETDs: integrated renderings, photos, data sets, software code and other multimedia. Such emphasis allows for interdisciplinarity, but it also makes this award unique in its focus on product and form.

For instance, the CAE (2012) award drastically contrasts the NDLTD guidelines, defining "innovation" in terms of methodology or findings, rather than compositional tools or format:

1. The issue addressed in the study bridges the theories and practices of anthropology and education.
2. The author-researcher applies anthropological methods and concepts in handling and reporting data thoroughly and insightfully.
3. The study is of high quality and makes an important contribution to the field. (website, *sic*)

This award promotes interdisciplinary applied work, grounded in theory (standard 1). The encouragement to bridge two disciplines is especially noteworthy since dissertations are frequently bounded works, intent on proving their place within a narrow discourse community. This characteristic of openness is counter-balanced by Standard 2, which posts that an outstanding CAE dissertation must demonstrate in-group awareness (Parry, 1998) of "anthropological methods and concepts" — shorthand for expert understanding of this discourse community. Dissertation candidates for this award are "study" based and must develop out of recognized anthropological research methods. The NDLTD award, on the other hand, privileges end results and does not address process.

Like standard 4 for the CAE award, the MASA award (2013) description begins with the requisite nod to a dissertation that makes an "influential contribution" to the field, but, unlike many descriptions, further details what this contribution must include. The MASA Dissertation Award recognizes research

that is judged to be a significant and potentially influential contribution to medical anthropology. Dissertations are judged on the basis of: (1) scope and excellence of scholarship, including ethnographic research; (2) originality of subject matter; (3) effectiveness and persuasiveness of arguments; and (4) writing quality. Dissertation research of exceptional courage and difficulty is given special consideration.

The SMA explains that a significant contribution within medical anthropology is generally ethnographic in nature and, to be "significant," must offer something new to the field. The third and fourth standards emphasize the importance of effective writing — writing that will ensure that this important contribution is successfully communicated to its audience.

The final award that I examined, the CCCC James Berlin Memorial Outstanding Dissertation Award, is perhaps the most general of all in its description. In addition to listing the necessary documents included in an application packet, they provide the following description of what the award honors: "a graduate whose dissertation improves the educational process in composition studies, or adds to the field's body of knowledge, through research or scholarly inquiry" (CCCC website, 2013). The conciseness of the statement and the fuzzy requirements for winning — "[improving]" or "[adding]" to the field — reinforce the kind of genre knowledge required of dissertators. The implication is that dissertators will have acquired sufficient knowledge during the dissertation writing process to understand what improving and adding to the field means explicitly — they should not have to be told. Dissertation meta-discourse, that which defines what a dissertation is meant to entail, is often marked by its lack of explicit discussion. Perhaps understatement is necessary for the awards discourse genre, but, as Boquet et al. discuss in this volume, absence of "how students are to acquire [...] complex discursive competencies, particularly in writing" is rarely addressed in the context of graduate writing.

## Comparing Awards Discourse

Even though the MASA and CAE interdisciplinary awards originate in Anthropology, they reward very different kinds of research from significantly different fields. The CAE mostly awards dissertations in Education, with some recipients heralding from Anthropology and Linguistics. Because of the nature of research rewarded by the SMA, many of the award winners' dissertations are embargoed. However, the one recent MASA award winner who made her work widely available was in Anthropology. Her dissertation, *Composite masculinities: Aging, illness, erectile dysfunction and Mexican manhood* especially meets the latter criteria of the MASA award, which notes, "Dissertation research of exceptional courage and difficulty is given special consideration." In this way, the MASA award reflects the NDLTD's commitment to rewarding dissertators who take a chance, a rhetorical move which disrupts the normalizing tendency of genre.

The familiar standard across three of these awards is that the dissertation must "[make] an important contribution to the field," which echoes the empty directive most dissertators receive upon embarking on the writing process. According to the awards' discourse, the dissertation may take the form of software experimentation, a study, an ethnography, or research/scholarly inquiry, but the author must understand "the field" well enough to know what a "significant contribution" will entail. This dictate is perhaps the most often repeated interdisciplinary descriptor of what a dissertation should do and be — the pat rhetorical exigency for dissertation writing — but it is rarely explicated. Its frequency in both written and spoken discourse suggests its importance, but the lack of explanation of what a "significant contribution" actually entails renders it somewhat hollow. Such awards discourse relies on familiar shells to describe what

dissertations should accomplish functionally and symbolically as opposed to explicitly and rhetorically addressing dissertation purpose, certainly a difficult feat.

Further, as dissertations are increasingly rewarded (both in terms of online readership and literal awards) for being accessible to broad audiences, the lines of what "field" a dissertation must contribute to are irreversibly blurred, as in the case of the CAE award, which specifically encourages interdisciplinarity, and the ND LTD award, which privileges form rather than disciplinary content. As Richard Miller, a member of the MLA dissertation working group, posits, "the internet makes it clear that any area that you would like to demarcate as a field is actually a host of [discontinuous] fields... they're all overlapping ... it's a wonderful ven diagram" (qtd. in Pantelides, 2013, p. 105). The common pedagogy of dissertation writing suggests that by the time a dissertator has completed her work, she has hopefully gained awareness of the meaning of the placeholder "significant contribution" within her discipline through assumed natural transfer imparted through the writing process. However, dissertation genre change means that these measures of "quality" and "contribution" listed in awards discourse must be recalibrated and examined rhetorically since the notion of what these measures entail evolves in a digital environment. Awards discourse is perhaps one of the best spaces to consider generic definition within the *dissertation genre ecology* because the award mechanism requires grantors to specifically address the conventions that make a dissertation successful or not.

## Features of Award-Winning Dissertations

After a preliminary reading of the award-winning dissertations, I developed inductive categories to compare these dissertations based on my readings and attention to rich features. The table of award-winning dissertations (Appendix) lists the author, title, award granted, and degree completed; this table provides a point of reference for the subsequent tables that examine more specific genre features of these works. It also provides an overview of the diverse fields of research awarded for outstanding dissertation scholarship.

Table 1 categorizes the award-winning dissertations based on the number of pages, basic organizing structure<sup>[5]</sup>, and number of references. I selected these categories because they stand out as universal features of the dissertations that I examined. Though these markers are not all objective measures of a dissertation, they lend themselves to quantitative analysis.

**Table 1. Award-Winning Dissertations' Numbers of Pages, Organization, and References**

Author	Pages	Structure	References
T. Dimov	156	traditional—simple	89
M. C. Giraldo	138	compilation of research articles	156
W. M. Stack	187	traditional—simple	152
R. D. Kennedy	375	traditional—simple	214
A. N. Booker	268	traditional—complex	74
A. Lashaw	317	traditional—simple	118
Z. Zakharia	228	traditional—complex	145



I. M. Garcia Sanchez	375	traditional—complex	427
R. Kulkarni	210	traditional—simple	100
E. A. Wentzell	341	topic-based	31
C. J. Fulford	187	traditional—complex	89
D. Fels	212	traditional—simple	100
A. M. Wetzl	320	traditional—simple	108
J. C. Menck	287	traditional—complex	234

As Table 1 demonstrates, the 14 dissertations range in length from 138-375 pages, and the structure of the dissertation does not seem to be connected to length in this small sample. The page mean is 257, and the median is 248, far beyond the quantitative measure of 150 + pages frequently laid out in departmental dissertation discourse (USF Department of English, 2011). With regard to references, there is greater disparity; the number of references range in number between 31- 427, where the lowest and highest numbers seem to be outliers, and the other reference lists cluster more towards the median of 113. The mean for this data set is 146 references. These quantitative markers suggests a certain amount of regularity within the genre, regardless of discipline. They also indicate that ETDs include some discursive characteristics that we often take for granted; for instance, dissertations are significantly lengthy works, which include numerous citations and, at least within my small sample, divide fairly easily into four general structural categories.

Even the dissertations that incorporate innovative technologies and structures are fairly easily categorized within frequently recognized dissertation structures and fall towards the median in regard to page length and number of references. Of the five outstanding dissertations awarded by the NDLTD, three of these were traditional-simple, one was traditional-complex, and one was topic-based. Interestingly, all developed coherent, unified texts throughout their extended document, and three in particular seemed to closely adhere to "traditional" structure, perhaps as a counterbalance to their more innovative content.

Table 2 lists the sections<sup>[6]</sup> by which each dissertation is divided, any extra-textual material incorporated in the project, the methodology of the project, and the authorial stance. Like the measures examined in Table 2, these categories also seem to be universal across the 14 dissertations, but these more qualitative comparisons provide a window into how genre change is taking place in some interdisciplinary dissertations.

Though these dissertations range in discipline, length, methodology, and award granted, there are many overlaps in regard to structure and particularly the sections by which these projects are divided. All of the texts have multiple chapters; an acknowledgments section that adopts a dramatically different tone and style than the rest of the text; a table of contents; an abstract; appendixes; a list of references; lists of various figures and tables, and for the multimodal dissertations, lists of audio, video, and additional images. Even in the more innovative projects, by which I mean the dissertations that take advantage of the digital format by embedding extra-textual elements in their work, there is an introduction, description of methodology, literature review, and a clear reliance on peer-reviewed literature. Many of these components are university requirements, and their existence across such an innovative, diverse sample emphasizes the institutional nature of the genre.

**Table 2. Award-Winning Dissertations' Measures of Structure and Method**

Author	Sections	Extra-textual Material	Method	Stance
T. Dimov	Ack., Abst., Table of C., 4 chs., Bib., Discography, Appendix	Audacity screen captures of music files, Embedded photos of musical scores; Accompanying audio files in an "online cd"; Use of both informational and reference footnotes; All components included in zipped folder online	digital quantitative analysis	third person
M. C. Giraldo	Abst., List of fig., List of tbl., List of videos, Ack., Ded., 4 chs., Refs.	Hyperlinks, Supplemental videos, Embedded slide images and figures	biological experiment	third person; however, appears in videos and performs voice-overs
W. M. Stack	Ack., Abst., Table of C., List of tbl., figures, videos, 6 chs., Epilogue, Refs.	12 videos, fully embedded within the text, thanks her committee for encouraging her to use multimedia	ethnography	first person
R. D. Kennedy	Author's declaration, Abst. , Ack., Ded., Table of C., List of fig., List of tbl., 5 chs., Appendix, Bibliography	Complementary video	qualitative analysis	first person, appears in the video
A. N. Booker	Copyright, Com. Sig., Abst. , Ack., List of tbl., List of illustrations, 6 chs., Refs., Appendices, List of Refs.	Illustrations	qualitative methods: interview and analysis	first person limited
A. Lashaw	Abst., Table of C., Ack., intro., 6 chs., Conclusions, Bibliography	N/A	ethnography	first person
Z. Zakharia	Copyright, Abst., Ack., Table of C., List of tbl., List of fig., 6 chs., Refs., Appendices	Maps	mixed method qualitative	first person

I. M. Garcia Sanchez	Copyright, Com. sig., Ded., Table of C., List of fig., List of tbl., Transcription Conventions, Arabic-Roman Characters Transliteration Symbols, Ack., Vita, Abst., 8 chs., Refs.	Maps, Transliteration symbols, Children's drawings are figures	ethnography	first person
R. Kulkarni	Copyright, Abst., Ded., Ack., Table of C., List of table, List of fig., 7 chs., Refs., Appendix	N/A	ethnography	first person limited
E. A. Wentzell	Copyright, Ded., Ack., Table of C., List of fig., 9 chs., Refs.	Advertisements	qualitative case study	first person
C. J. Fulford	Signature page, Ack., Abst., Ack., Abst., List of fig., 6 chs., Appendices, Bibliography	Self-created figures	mixed qualitative methods; critical discourse analysis	first person
D. Fels	Copyright, Signature page, Abst., Ack., Table of C., 5 chs., Refs., Appendix,	N/A	qualitative mixed methods	first person
A. M. Wetzl	Signature page, Abst., Ack., 7 chs., Refs., Appendices	Student composition excerpts	qualitative mixed methods	first person
J. C. Menck	Com. Sig., Ded., Ack. Abst., List of fig., List of Tbl., List of Audio files, Table of Contents, 8 chs., Appendix, Refs.	26 audio files of oral histories, analyzed and incorporated in the text; Primary text is a pdf embedded with photos and audiofiles; Material is also provided on a website; Begins chapters with photographs from her study and quotes from respondents	ethnography	first person

## Genre Change: Implications of Expanded Access and Audience

Ryan David Kennedy's (2011) dissertation, *Evaluation of the City of Woodstock's Outdoor Smoking By-law: A Longitudinal Study of Smokers and Non-Smokers* is fairly traditional in regard to structure; he uses a traditional-simple form, 214 references, and at 375 pages, his dissertation is the longest of the samples that I studied. What is different about his project in respect to the other awarded projects is the exigency to which his project responds. The purpose of his dissertation is to create a video informing his local community about a smoking ban in the City of Woodstock. His qualitative research, including interviews, observations, and analyses, were all conducted in order to gather research for his subsequent video and film appearances of various scientists addressing the impact of a smoking ban. Since his study develops a framework for expanding smoking bans, success for his project requires audience uptake that depends on wide reader/viewership. His dissertation document offers access to a fascinating chronicle of the otherwise intangible work that goes into producing such a project.

Dissertations are one of the few academic genres that encourages the capture of this bread-crumbs pathway of research. For instance, in *Writing across the curriculum program development as ideological and rhetorical practice*, Carolyn Fulford's (2009) ambivalence about her research method is notable in discussions of her methodology; she admits that "[closure] on the data gathering was a somewhat arbitrary decision" and that ethnography "seemed suitable." She painstakingly talks through her process of selecting methods, suggesting that her agentive study "needed" a particular methodology, generally attributing responsibility outside herself. Such a narrative and tentative musing suggests that she is trying and testing out methods and is aware that such trial and error is part of learning the rhetorical ropes of study design. In this way, the dissertation serves as a tangible record of Fulford's process of genre knowledge acquisition. The dissertation genre is functionally a space for convention testing and experimentation rather than simply book drafting. ETDs open up a space within study development, featuring meta-musings of researchers, language that is often edited out of peer-reviewed published works. Though rendered inappropriate in other venues, such metadiscourse still seems to be a reliable characteristic of dissertation writing. Thus, the move to the digital environment has preserved one of the most obvious and engaging markers of the genre.

In his examination of dissertation genre conventions, John Swales (2004) identified extended methodology sections as a significant feature, essentially proving to the author's respective discourse community that she fully understands the processes used in her project. However, Anna Maria Wetzl's (2010) description of her audience offers a new way of thinking about extended methodology sections in dissertations: "my research has as its main audience other composition instructors who, just like my colleagues, do not always have the necessary training on linguistic diversity to understand what L2 Englishes are about" (22). Wetzl purposely provides an extended discussion of her methodology and methodological context because she is aware that her audience belongs to disparate discourse communities and does not necessarily have previous knowledge of L2 Englishes. In addition to the very immediate audience of the dissertation — the committee, for Wetzl there is also the imagined audience for the dissertation: an increasingly interdisciplinary and accessible audience available courtesy of ETD policies. Interdisciplinary works such as those examined in my study require extensive discussion of methodology in order to be intelligible to those for which it is accessible. Thus, this dissertation marker earlier chalked up to apprentice status is now made necessary by a change in audience accessibility.

Nearly all of these award-winning dissertations begin with a copyright page, though Kennedy's dissertation breaks from this practice. Instead of a copyright page, his work begins with an "Author's Acknowledgement," declaring: "I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. *I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public*" (emphasis added). Such an inclusion gestures towards author awareness of the implications of online publication — an aspect of ETD policies that seems to not be widely acknowledged. This addition to the traditional copyright statement underscores the fact

that ETDs are not simply print dissertations that happen to be online. Kennedy's author acknowledgement shows understanding of the rhetorical implications of ETD access that are somewhat distinct from the rhetorical implications of ETD expanded audience. This author acknowledgement begs the question, how aware are dissertators of the implications of online publication? Do the medium's affordances impact the composition process for most dissertators? Or does the consideration of online publication merely come in at the end, when authors have to make decisions about access?

## **Genre Change, Availability of New Compositional Tools, and Alternative Forms**

Even for dissertators purposely taking chances, who were awarded for trying to "transform" the genre, using "innovative" techniques, and embarking on research that demonstrates "exceptional courage," there are a number of indicators that mark them as a member of the class of events designated dissertation. However, multimodal aspects of ETDs can disrupt some of these formal features of traditional, print dissertations, such as perspective. In fact, one of the most "traditional" dissertations, in regard to format, research design, and stance, introduces perhaps the most interesting contradiction in form.

Martha C. Giraldo (2009) uses third person throughout her entire dissertation and observes strict research article format in each chapter; however, the innovative aspect of her dissertation, which contributed to her winning an OTD award from the NDLTD, is integrated video clips of her performing the experiments she addresses in her research. In these clips she narrates her process, putting in direct conflict the assumption of scientific distance suggested by her consistent use of third person throughout the text of her dissertation. These video clips reinforce the personal, subjective nature of scientific work without acknowledgement or reflection in the text.

NDLTD award-winner Tomislav Dimov (2011) also employs some of these "traditional" conventions in his text, such as third person and research article structure; however, his innovative methodology, which uses computer-mediated technologies to quantify inaudible (to the human ear) differences in vibrato of classical scores, provides an alternate manuscript form. Dimov collected all of his musical samples in one online accessible CD, which acts as a companion to his text. Though the samples are not integrated directly within his project, the discography is meant to compliment the text and provide an audible version of the visual maps and textual analyses he offers throughout his dissertation. Unfortunately, though the idea is innovative and productive, in its actual production and performance, Dimov's work exposes some of the difficulties ETD and multimodal detractors raise. Because of copyright restrictions, Dimov is only able to provide less than 5 second samples of music. Since his CD is so large, it must be slowly downloaded in a zipped folder, and the user must have the correct version of a particular software for the CD to play correctly. Although Dimov's dissertation is generally available online, access is restricted by the nature of the technological artifact. In this case, both legal and technological constraints impinge on his project's creativity and shape limits on its form.

## **Comparison of Features of Award-winning Dissertations**

Of this small sample of award-winning dissertations, the one that is most successfully innovative — in that the author takes full advantage of the affordances of ETDs, using both multimodal elements and progressive methodologies — is Jessica Claire Menck's (2011), *Recipes of Resolve: Food and Meaning in Post-Diluvian New Orleans*. Using mixed qualitative methods, Menck examines post-Katrina New Orleans through the lens of its food. Throughout her text, Menck incorporates recipes, audio clips from residents' narratives, and photographs of herself with study participants. Menck's work is based on rigorous ethnographic methods and seamlessly includes multimodal elements within her research. At the end of her dissertation text she links to a video of her defense and an accompanying website developed in concert with her dissertation project. The website includes all of the same findings as those catalogued in her dissertation in

a different genre format, usefully highlighting existing genre convention in both venues. Instead of organizing by chapters, the website version of her findings is organized by recipes, photos and narratives, and does not directly cite the 234 references listed at the end of her text. Looking at the two projects alongside each other provides a useful study in existing genre conventions, underscoring the limits of the dissertation genre and the impact of an academic audience.

## Conclusion

Award-winning dissertations and awards discourse are only two genres within the larger *dissertation genre ecology*, but as explicit models of, on the one hand, exemplary dissertations, and on the other, prescriptive definitions of what dissertation innovation entails, they powerfully shape what comes next for ETD genre convention. The move to digital spaces offers a notoriously closed, rather private genre significantly expanded access and audience and the potential to adopt new compositional modes. Rhetorically, this alters the genre in important ways, and we are just beginning to see these differences come to light. ETDs change the way dissertations are created, disseminated, read, responded to, and used. These changes suggest that dissertations convention, such as opaque, discipline-specific language may be frustrated by expanded, interdisciplinary readership, especially if audience uptake is dependent on clear, jargon-free prose. Further, formal aspects, such as employing third-person, may be contradicted through multimodal elements, revealing the researcher behind and within a text. But just as interesting as what may change is what may be preserved (and why it is preserved), such as meta-language and lengthy methodology discussions, as in the dissertations examined in this study.

As research sites and composition tools become increasingly multimodal, intertextual, and hypertextual, dissertations will follow suit — and are already doing so. Thus, hopes to stabilize or purposely manipulate the genre seem futile, since genres, like language, are alive: rhetorical, evolving, and flexible. Dissertations develop out of an "atmosphere of influences" (Bazerman) — an ecology which is reflexive, overlapping, and "intermediational" (Spinuzzi). In this way, they are a useful barometer for the relative health of graduate writing at the university and an early indicator of the discursive forces and actors affecting graduate writing. Regardless of efforts at innovation, there is always genre's counter-balance, the "relative stability" (Spinuzzi) necessary to maintain a genre's use and recognizability to its users, and it is important to consider both ends of this spectrum to understand how dissertations are at once shaped by and continue to shape the genre ecology. ETD policies seem to create a prism effect for dissertators— either focusing light so that they loyally follow established genre conventions, or taking risks — shooting out in different directions to create greater differentiation, innovation, boundary breaking and bending.

## Appendix: Award-Winning Dissertations

Author	Dissertation Title	Award	Discipline
T. Dimov	<i>Short Historical Overview and Comparison of the Pitch Width and Speed Rates of the Vibrato Used in Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin by Johann Sebastian Bach as Found in Recordings of Famous Violinists of the Twentieth and the Twenty-First Centuries</i>	NDLTLD 2012 Winner	D.M.A. Musical Arts
M. C. Giraldo	<i>In Planta Characterization of Magnaporthe Oryzae Biotrophy-associated Secreted (BAS) Proteins and Key Secretion Component</i>	NDLTLD 2012 Winner	Ph.D. Plant Pathology

W. M. Stack	<i>The Relationship of Parent Involvement and Student Success in GEAR UP Communities in Chicago</i>	NDLTLD 2012 Winner	Ph.D. Leadership
R. D. Kennedy	<i>Evaluation of the City of Woodstock's Outdoor Smoking By-law: A Longitudinal Study of Smokers and Non-Smokers</i>	Innovative ETD Award	Ph.D. Psychology
A. N. Booker	<i>Learning to get Participation Right(s): An Analysis of Youth Participation in Authentic Civic Practice</i>	Anthro. ODA 2009	Ph.D. Education
A. Lashaw	<i>The ethics of optimism: Progressivism Sensibilities in the Era of 'The Racial Achievement Gap'</i>	Anthro. ODA Finalist 2009	Ph.D. Education
Z. Zakharia	<i>Languages, Schooling, and the (Re)-Construction of Identity in Contemporary Lebanon</i>	Anthro. ODA HM 2009	Ph.D. Education
I. M. Garcia Sanchez	<i>Moroccan Immigrant Children in a Time of Surveillance: Navigating Sameness and Difference in Contemporary Spain</i>	Anthro. ODA 2009	Ph.D. Applied Linguistics
R. Kulkarni	<i>Motivated to overcome: An ethnographic study of a college preparatory charter school for low-income youth</i>	Anthro. ODA 2010	Ph.D. Anthropology
E. A. Wentzell	<i>Composite Masculinities: Aging, Illness, Erectile Dysfunction and Mexican Manhood</i>	Med. Anthro. ODA 2011	Ph.D. Anthropology
C. J. Fulford	<i>Writing Across the Curriculum Program Development as Ideological and Rhetorical Practice</i>	James Berlin Award 2011	Ph.D. English
D. Fels	<i>The Vernacular Architecture of Composition Instruction: What the Voices of Writing Center Tutors Reveal About the Influence of Standardized Instruction and Assessment</i>	James Berlin Award 2011 HM	Ph.D. English
A. M. Wetzel	<i>L2 Writing in the L1 Composition Course: A Model for Promoting Linguistic Tolerance</i>	James Berlin Award 2012	Ph.D. English
J. C. Menck	<i>Recipes of Resolve: Food and Meaning in Post-Diluvian New Orleans</i>	NDLTLD 2012 Winner	Ph.D. Leadership

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## Notes

- [1] I do not mean to suggest that ETD programs are entirely new — they have existed for more than a decade; however, it is just in the last five years that many universities have implemented mandatory policies.
- [2] For this study I examine dissertations from the humanities and the social sciences, which, though there is great variation within these disciplines, orient around a notion of the "traditional dissertation" that allows for discussion of the genre. I have not included dissertations from the sciences since they have a drastically different approach to dissertation writing — an approach that many of those encouraging genre change in the humanities and social sciences herald.
- [3] The Modern Language Association (MLA) created a working group in 2010 to examine the dissertation's role in the humanities and suggest disciplinary revisions to combat problems such as high attrition and lack of job placement associated with "traditional," print dissertation form.
- [4] Though addressed within the same section, I have chosen to discuss access and audience as separate concepts. Audience and access are clearly related and reciprocal, but they have different rhetorical implications for dissertations. Unregulated access to dissertations means that authors must consider how their texts are searched and represented online. Increased readership prompts different concerns, more directly connected to writing style, structure, and tone.
- [5] I adopt the descriptions of structure from the categories identified in Brian Paltridge's (2002) study of dissertation advice book discourse, though they are certainly not exhaustive. Both empirical studies and popular advice seem to agree on these basic forms as the most frequently employed methods of organizing dissertations: traditional-simple, which features a primarily Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion (IMRD) structure (Swales) with few sub-headings or deviations; traditional-complex, which utilizes numerous branches off of a traditional IMRD framework; topic-based, which organizes chapters around distinct ideas, though the document still functions as a whole; and compilation of research articles, which links independent articles in one document, though they do not depend on each other for overall coherence (Paltridge).
- [6] List of Abbreviations for Table 5: Ack. = Acknowledgements; Abst. = Abstract; Table of C. = Table of Contents; Chs. = Chapters; Bib. = Bibliography; List of fig. = List of figures; List of tbl. = List of tables; Ded. = Dedication; Refs. = References; Intro. = Introduction

## Contact Information

Kate Pantelides  
 Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Composition  
 Department of English  
 Middle Tennessee State University  
 Murfreesboro, TN 37130  
 Email: [kate.pantelides@mstu.edu](mailto:kate.pantelides@mstu.edu)

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