

## **Writing Development and Support for Postgraduate Research Students During Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning**

### **Presenters**

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### **Scholarly Area(s)**

- 2. Professional development
- 4. Academic development

### **Format**

Open space methodology

### **Session Proposal**

The COVID-19 pandemic and rapid shift to Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL) in 2020 have had profound and far-reaching effects on the South African higher education sector. With remote working and studying came an acute disruption of the social dimensions of learning and teaching. This new reality posed unique challenges for the Postgraduate Writing Unit in the Faculty of Commerce, Law, and Management (CLM) at a large, research-intensive public university in South Africa. The unit's focus is on writing development and support for postgraduate students enrolled for research degrees (i.e., Master's by full research and PhD) in the faculty. By adopting an academic literacies approach (Lea and Street 2006; Lillis 2006) to research-writing development, the unit aims to provide transformative and contextualised (Lea and Street 2006; Lillis 2006) support to these research students.

In principle, the research-degree journey can be isolating (Ali & Kohun 2007), especially in contexts where the notion of the 'detached' scholar prevails (Badenhorst & Geurin 2016: 14), and this was exacerbated by ERTL. Consequently, research-writing interventions provided by the CLM Postgraduate Writing Unit were shifted online to create spaces for research students to connect and be supported. However, although opportunities to engage with students were made available, the move online was not without challenges in terms of buy-in by students and schools within the faculty. As a result, the reach of writing support interventions has not been realised to the desired extent.

The affordances offered by technology and lessons learned over the last 18 months may have positive effects on the work of the unit. Nevertheless, there are still matters to grapple with, such as: i) How do we increase participation from students, work in partnership with supervisors and garner support from the schools in the faculty? ii) How do we counter postgraduate student isolation through virtual and contact-based writing support initiatives (e.g. writing groups)? iii) Should these interventions be compulsory or voluntary? iv) What are the best ways to track, monitor and measure impact of postgraduate writing interventions, such as those presented by the PG Writing Unit?

In this session the presenters invite postgraduate supervisors and students, academic development professionals, and any other stakeholders with an interest in writing development and support for postgraduate students, to participate. Collectively, we hope to explore the new horizons presented

by ERTL and converse about the future of writing development and support for postgraduate students in the context of CLM and elsewhere. [Words: 404].

### **Key words**

PhD Students | Postgraduate Research Students | Postgraduate Student Isolation | Postgraduate Writing | Postgraduate Writing Development | Postgraduate Writing Support

### **Key questions for further engagement**

1. How have other institutions and academic development practitioners approached writing development and support of postgraduate research students during ERTL?
2. Can a system of interventions, such as writing groups, counter the notion of the 'detached scholar'?
3. How can we move from a culture of once-off writing development interventions, such as workshops, to a more systematic and comprehensive approach?

### **References**

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