

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
February 10, 2016

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Thought-Leaders Convene to Consider the Future of the Doctoral Dissertation Workshop Proceedings, Social Media Offer New Picture of Issues on the Horizon

Washington, D.C. — On January 27-28, the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) [convened](#) approximately 40 scholars and leaders in graduate education, scholarly publishing, academic libraries, and disciplinary associations to deliberate the future of the doctoral dissertation. Over a two-day workshop supported by ProQuest, the group considered trends shaping the format and dissemination of dissertation research, including new modes of scholarly communication and publication, open access, emerging technologies, diversifying PhD career paths, and changes in disciplinary cultures.

Brief [papers](#) prepared and circulated ahead of the workshop enabled attendees to focus on big-picture questions affecting the enterprises of scholarly communication and graduate education, including:

- What is a dissertation? What is its purpose? Who are its audiences?
- What skills are or should be gained as a result of writing a dissertation?
- What new dissertation formats should be considered?
- How should dissertation research be archived, accessed, and disseminated?
- What is the role of the dissertation in the employment marketplace?

These questions contributed to a wide-ranging conversation about why the dissertation exists and whom it serves. For some participants, the dissertation is of primary importance to the student-author and an opportunity to build skills, demonstrate expertise, and earn a credential. For others, the main audience of the dissertation is the student's committee or the disciplinary community. Still others wondered whether the dissertation should contribute something of value to society at large.

By the workshop's conclusion, it was clear that the many futures of the dissertation depend on the purpose of doctoral education as a whole. In her closing remarks, CGS President Suzanne Ortega shared her view that the goal of graduate education is to educate "individuals who can ask and answer questions of importance." For Dr. Ortega, the dissertation represents both students' "demonstration of the capacity to utilize the tools (theoretical, methodological) of their discipline to identify and address a relevant question" and an "opportunity to develop a set of intellectual skills and habits of mind that have broad utility."

Austin McLean, Director, Scholarly Communication and Dissertations Publishing at ProQuest said, "We are delighted to support this workshop related to the future of dissertations, an area of great significance to ProQuest. Dissertations make an important contribution to the scholarly record, raise the profile of an institution and their authors, and are vital tools for researchers of all fields in all countries. By convening this important conversation about the future of the

dissertation, the Council of Graduate Schools is ensuring that graduate education will continue to produce graduates with valuable skills needed as part of a 21st century workforce.”

Proceedings may be accessed at <http://cgsnet.org/cgs-future-dissertation-workshop> and the parallel conversation that emerged during the workshop on Twitter may be found at [#DissFwd](#). The event was the capstone of a CGS Best Practice project on the [Future of the Doctoral Dissertation](#).

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The [Council of Graduate Schools](#) (CGS) is an organization of approximately 500 institutions of higher education in the United States and Canada engaged in graduate education, research, and the preparation of candidates for advanced degrees. The organization’s mission is to improve and advance graduate education, which it accomplishes through advocacy in the federal policy arena, research, and the development and dissemination of best practices.

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