

# Evaluating the Effects of Workshops and Consultations on the ETD Review Process

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## INTRODUCTION

- As a graduation requirement, North Dakota State University (NDSU) graduate students completing dissertations, theses, and master's papers are required to complete a format review with the Graduate School, to ensure their documents are consistent with NDSU's format guidelines.
- NDSU's dissertation, thesis and master's paper guidelines cover the proper formatting of each section of the document, including title page, abstract, table of contents, list of tables/figures, headings, body paragraphs, references sections, appendices, and so forth.
- Many students struggle with implementing the format guidelines and completing the review process in a timely manner, often requiring numerous reviews to have their document accepted by the Graduate School.
- In order to provide assistance to graduate students with their document formatting and to better prepare them for the format review process, in Fall 2014 North Dakota State University began holding ETD workshops and individual consultations.
- The ETD workshop explains the review process, including prerequisites, submission procedures, and format guidelines. Individual consultations focus on working directly with students to improve their ETD formatting during scheduled consultations (either online or at the Graduate School office).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Do workshops and consultations have a positive effect on how well dissertations, theses, and master's papers submitted to the Graduate School adhere to the Graduate School format guidelines?
- Do workshops or consultations reduce the number of reviews required before the document is accepted?

## PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 1110 students whose ETDs completed the NDSU Graduate School format review process from Fall 2015 through Spring 2019.
- Of the completed reviews, 412 were for dissertations, 557 were for master's theses, and 141 were for master's papers.

## MEASURES

**Student Activity:** 0=None; 1=workshop only, 2=consultation only, 3=Both workshop and consultation

**First Review Numeric Grade:** Range 1 (lowest) to 4 (highest)

**Number of Reviews:** Range 1 (lowest) to 8 (highest)

## PROCEDURE

- The data were compiled from the tracking spreadsheet used by the NDSU format reviewer for dissertation/thesis/master's paper reviews, along with workshop and consultation participation records.
- Each initial submission was evaluated based on its adherence to the format guidelines, and assigned a quality grade (4 being highest, 1 being lowest).
- The number of reviews required before a document was accepted was also recorded.
- Data represent the format reviews completed over the five academic years from Fall 2015 through Spring 2019.

## RESULTS

- One-way ANOVA showed a significant effect of student activity on the first review numeric grade ( $F = 71.70 (3, 1106), p = .000$ ). Post-hoc analysis using the Games-Howell test showed that each student activity group differed significantly from each other (see Table 1 and Figure 1). The quality of ETDs submitted to the Graduate School for the initial format review was lowest for students who did not attend a workshop or a consultation. The quality increased if the student attended only a workshop. The increase was even greater if the student attended only a consultation. The highest quality documents were submitted by students who attended both a workshop and a consultation.
- There was a significant negative correlation between the first review numeric grade and number of reviews ( $r = -.58, p = .000$ ). Students who had a higher initial submission quality completed the review process in less time, as measured by number of reviews.
- One-way ANOVA showed a significant effect of student activity on number of reviews ( $F = 20.92 (3, 1106), p = .000$ ). Post hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD showed that students who did not engage in any of the preparatory activities had more reviews than students who engaged in any of the activities (see Table 2 and Figure 2). In other words, students who attended a workshop, consultation, or both had fewer reviews to complete the review process as compared to students who did no preparatory activities. Students who attended both a workshop and a consultation required significantly fewer reviews than students who only attended a workshop. There was not a significant difference in number of reviews for students who attended only a workshop or only a consultation, nor was there a significant difference for students who attended a consultation compared to students who did both the consultation and workshop.

Table 1

Mean First Review Numeric Grade by Student Activity

Variable	N	Mean	SD
No workshop or consultation	667	2.49 <sup>a</sup>	.97
Workshop only	154	3.01 <sup>b</sup>	.99
Consultation only	162	3.30 <sup>c</sup>	.95
Both workshop and consultation	127	3.60 <sup>d</sup>	.75

Note: Groups with different superscripts are significantly different from each other at the  $p < .05$  level.

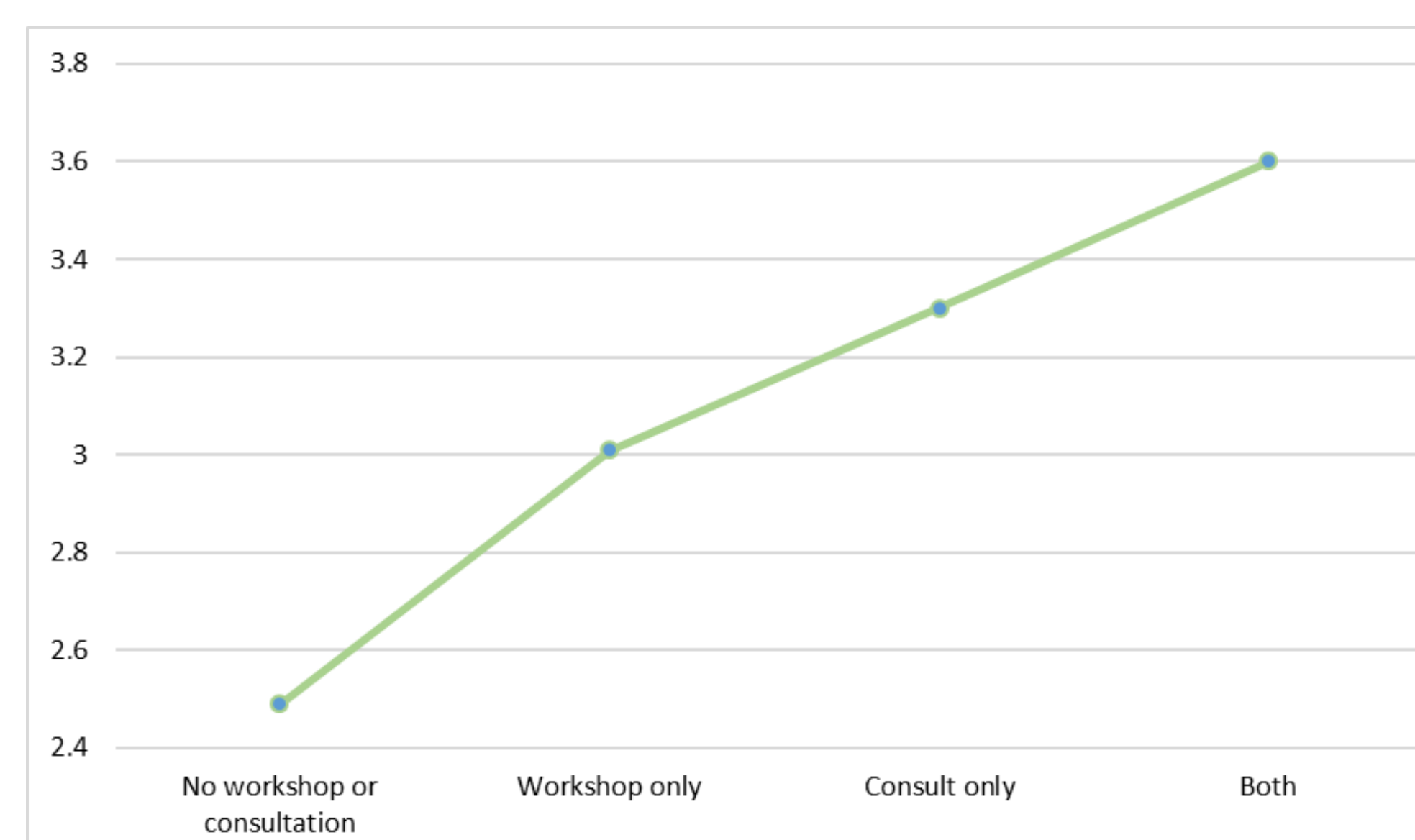


Figure 1. First review numeric grade by Student Activity.

Table 2

Mean Number of Reviews by Student Activity

Variable	N	Mean	SD
No workshop or consultation	667	3.92 <sup>a</sup>	1.11
Workshop only	154	3.60 <sup>b</sup>	1.09
Consultation only	162	3.40 <sup>b,c</sup>	1.03
Both workshop and consultation	127	3.24 <sup>c</sup>	1.04

Note: Groups with different superscripts are significantly different from each other at the  $p < .05$  level.

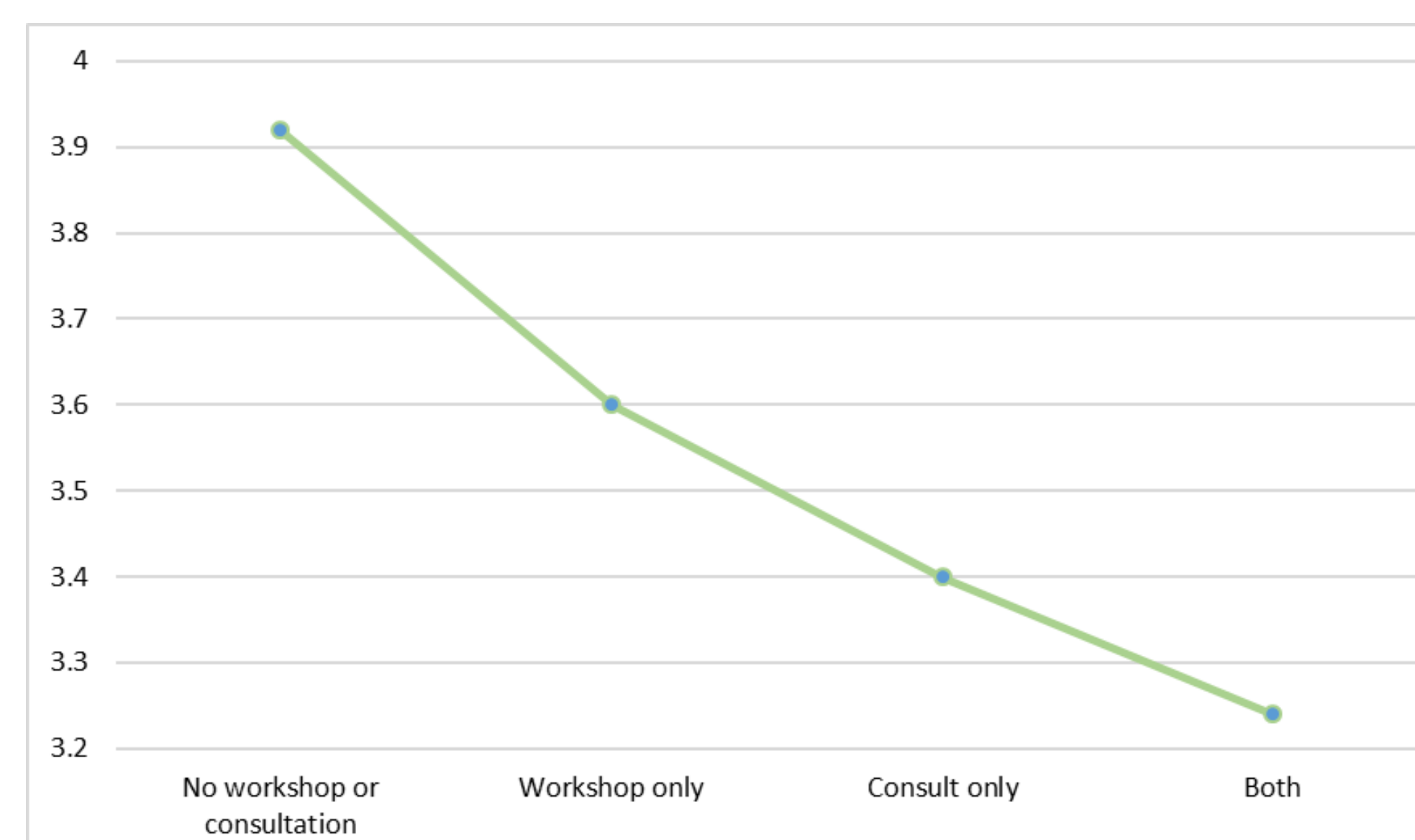


Figure 2. Number of Reviews by Student Activity

## DISCUSSION

- Students who engaged in any form of preparatory activity showed higher quality initial submissions, demonstrating the impact that the format reviewer can have on student success. While attending both a workshop and a consultation provided the most benefit with respect to the quality of the initial submission, if a student could not attend both, the most beneficial was an individual consultation.
- While the number of reviews needed for a student to successfully submit their final document was impacted by workshop/consultation attendance, the pattern was less straightforward than for initial submission quality. What was clear was that engaging in any form of preparatory activity was associated with fewer reviews, and that an individual consultation (either alone or combined with a workshop) had the biggest impact.
- The number of reviews needed for a student to complete is in many ways a proxy measure for how much time the student and the format reviewer are spending. However, this is limited as number of reviews does not reflect the extent of the changes that the student needs to make from review to review (in other words, one review may contain more extensive changes than another).
- More effective measures, such as the amount of time the format reviewer spends per document review, the cumulative time the reviewer spends per student, and the total time the student spends on revisions may better measure the value of workshops and consultations.
- The first review numeric grade measure, while guided by a rubric defining each value, would benefit from further validation (for example, independent review of a sample of initial submissions by another reviewer).
- The amount of time needed to implement a program of workshops and/or consultations is a key consideration. The workshops at NDSU take 1.5 hours and are given to multiple students at once, while consultations are given to one student at a time for approximately 1 hour. Consultations may be more effective, but they are more challenging to implement for large numbers of students.

## CONCLUSION

- This study demonstrates that while some students can effectively navigate the format review process without attending a workshop or consultation, some form of outreach can be very beneficial for both the student and the format reviewer. Initial reviews of high-quality submissions take less effort for the format reviewer to complete, and high-quality initial submissions are easier for the student to revise. The final submission process can be stressful for students who are trying to meet completion deadlines for graduation. Future research could track the amount of time the format reviewer spends per student, and student reports of their anxiety level and the amount of time they spend on revisions.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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