

Nurse Author & Editor

Leslie H. Nicoll, PhD, MBA, RN, FAAN Editor-in-Chief

☰ Menu

1 MIN AGO EDIT

From Doc to Post-Doc to Career

From Doc to Post-Doc to Career: The Transition from Nursing Student to Nursing Scholar

Thomas Lawrence Long

NURSE AUTHOR & EDITOR, 2018, 28(1), 5

The new assistant professor came to me with several questions: How do I extract material from my dissertation to write journal articles? How do I select the journals to which I submit my manuscripts? She had earned her PhD at one Ivy League institution and had secured a tenure-track position at another. She was my consulting client at an annual clinic hosted by the Council of Editors of Learned Journals.

This conversation prompted the first of what would become several of Long's Axioms of Higher Education:

GRADUATE SCHOOL PREPARES YOU . . . FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL.

I was surprised that her doctoral mentors had not explained this basic feature of the scholar's profession although I understood how she might feel reluctant to ask her senior colleagues for advice. The transition from doctoral student to research scholar is not easy, and graduate school and the profession often do not make it easier. The premise sometimes seems: If you have to ask, you don't belong here.

For nurses in academia the challenge may even be more complicated. Most doctoral students in arts and sciences fields have followed a seamless and unbroken trajectory from baccalaureate degree to master's degree to doctoral program (and perhaps to a post-doctoral fellowship). By the time they have been appointed to their first full-time faculty position they are only 35 to 39 years old.

Nurse researchers, in contrast, have had interrupted studies: perhaps entering nursing with an associate degree, later moving into a bachelor's degree before returning to practice, eventually pursuing a master's degree and then back into practice, and finally undertaking a doctoral program.

By the time nurse researchers have graduated with a doctorate, they are about 49 (Fang, Bednash, & Arietti, 2016), and the average age of an entry-level assistant professor is 51 years (Notre Dame College, 2015).

In the nine years that I have provided writing support services in the University of Connecticut School of Nursing's Center for Nursing Scholarship, I have had the opportunity to coach and encourage doctoral students and junior faculty across this threshold. These observations represent some of the common challenges.

BEING A PROFESSOR IS NOT THE SAME AS BEING A DOCTORAL STUDENT.

Doctoral students' writing projects are clearly circumscribed by a course syllabus and the semester with their specifications and deadlines, but professors' research projects and manuscripts rely on the skill and self-discipline of the new professor. While the tenure clock imposes an ultimate deadline and a tenure mentor may nudge and cajole, there are no short-term deadlines for submitting grant applications and research manuscripts. Cultivating a regular, even daily, writing habit (Silvia, 2007) is essential to this endeavor. Based on research by Robert Boice (1987), Paul Silvia's *How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing* provides a way to achieve this goal.

WRITING FOR COURSES IS NOT THE SAME AS WRITING PROFESSIONALLY AS AN ACADEMIC.

One of your doctoral program faculty may have complimented a paper that you wrote for a course by encouraging you to revise and seek publication, but a course paper is not a journal article manuscript. Journals have conventionally defined genres (e.g., the systematic literature review, the integrative literature review, the case study, the research article), and your job as an academic writer is to learn those genres. The best way to do so is by reading current issues of journals in your specialization and paying attention to the kinds of writing published there. The same goes for PhD or SciD dissertations and DNP capstone projects. They require significant revision in order to be ready for editors' and reviewers' eyes. Carter-Templeton (2015) has carefully laid out what is required here and Nicoll (2017) also provides useful advice.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY MAY BE LESS IMPORTANT THAN SHOWING HOW YOU HAVE LISTENED TO WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN SAID.

Almost every scholarly article represents the state of knowledge in its review of the literature (often labeled as a manuscript section, Review of the Literature).

This representation should not be perfunctory or superficial. You may think that what you have to say is the most important part of the manuscript, but in some ways it is not so. You need to show that you have been paying attention to a scholarly conversation that has been going on long before you entered the scene. Demonstrating your knowledge of that conversation and respectfully but clearly pointing out its gaps is the foundation for what you have to say.

DOZENS OF PUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS DO NOT MAKE A PROGRAM OF RESEARCH.

A program of research consists in identifying unmapped territory and then systematically filling in the details of this *terra incognita*. I have seen how this works through years of conversations with my colleague and co-author Cheryl Tatano Beck when she has described how she moved from researching post-partum depression to researching traumatic labor and delivery's post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to researching secondary PTSD among nurses in labor and delivery. She has also literally written the book on it: *Developing a Program of Research in Nursing* (2015).

Corollary to the above:

DOZENS OF INTERESTS AND INTERESTING IDEAS DO NOT MAKE A PROGRAM OF RESEARCH.

As a friend of mine says, "Until you publish your data, you're just a lab rat." Remain focused, write manuscripts, submit manuscripts (which only need to be very good, not perfect), revise manuscripts according to editors' and reviewers' suggestions, resubmit manuscripts, and start all over again.

FIND A MENTOR WHO WILL HOLD YOUR HAND . . . AND HOLD YOUR FEET TO THE FIRE.

You do not have to know everything (as humane senior colleagues will allow), so knowing *whom* to ask for help and knowing *when* to ask for help are essential during the transition from doctoral student to scholar.

CONCLUSION

Making the transition from student to scholar can be challenging but remember—many have gone before you. Look to colleagues for advice and support, read widely, and be focused on the pillars of an academic career: teaching, scholarship, and service. Scholarship can be a stumbling block for many but remember that your doctoral program provided beginning skills in research and writing. Building on these and remaining focused on the new phase of your professional career can help you to be successful.

REFERENCES

1. Beck, C. T. (2015). *Developing a program of research in nursing*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing.
2. Boice, R. (1987). A program for facilitating scholarly writing. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 6, 9-20.
3. Carter-Templeton, H. (2015). DNP project to manuscript: Converting a DNP scholarly project into a manuscript. *Nurse Author & Editor*, 25(1), 2.
<http://naepub.com/student-authorship/2015-25-1-2/>
4. Fang, D., Bednash, G. D., & Arietti, R. (2016). Identifying barriers and facilitators to nurse faculty careers for PhD nursing students. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 32, 193-201.
5. Long, T. L. (2015, May). Long's axioms of higher education. *The Long View*.
<http://thelongview.tv/2015/05/10/longs-axioms-of-higher-education/>

6. Notre Dame College. (2015). Today's nurses tomorrow's educators.
<http://online.notredamecollege.edu/nursing/todays-nurses-tomorrows-educators/>

7. Silvia, P. (2007). *How to write a lot: A practical guide to productive academic writing*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas Lawrence Long is associate professor in residence in the University of Connecticut's School of Nursing, where he provides writing support services in the Center for Nursing Scholarship. He is the co-author, with Cheryl Tatano Beck, of *Writing in Nursing: A Brief Guide* (Oxford University Press, 2017). He is also an Author-in-Residence for *Nurse Author & Editor*.

NAE 2018 28 1 5 Long

Copyright 2018: The Authors. May not be reproduced without permission.
Journal Complication Copyright 2018: John Wiley and Son Ltd.

Related

[Introducing the NEHP](#)
September 20, 2015
In "Announcements"

[Revise and Resubmit](#)
November 20, 2015
In "Authorship"

[The Manuscript Option
Dissertation](#)
January 5, 2018
In "Reporting Research"

📁 EDUCATIONAL PROCESS