PLANNING PRACTICE & RESEARCH
2020, VOL. 35, NO. 3, 349–362
https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2020.1748331

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

PLANNING EDUCATION

Demystifying Academic Writing in the Doctoral Program: Writing Workshops, Peer Reviews, and Scholarly Identities

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses a course at The University of Texas at Austinwhich sought to facilitate doctoral students' development of scholarly articles while simultaneously fostering their sense of scholarly identity. The article was co-authored by the instructor and two cohorts of doctoral students based on immediate as well as retrospective learning outcome assessments. The social constructivist approach to writing pedagogy fostered students' scholarly identities and demystified the publication process. However, efforts should be made to maintain the practice of writing, sharing, and reviewing and the course should more explicitly foster critical reflections on the relationship between writing, scholarly identity, and knowledge production.

KEYWORDS

Doctoral studies; scholarly identity; planning education; writing pedagogy; curriculum development

Introduction[1]

Doctoral students face increasing pressure to accumulate publications in peer-reviewed journals before graduation, in part because the academic job market has become increasingly competitive and tenure and promotion requirements have intensified (Barbacle and Dall Alba, 2014; Bartkowski *et al.*, 2015; Lassig *et al.*, 2013; Cuthbert, Spark, and Burke, 2009; Kamler & Thomson, 2004; Lee & Kamler, 2008). This pressure is exacerbated by the greater emphasis on faculty and student publication records for accreditation and state education board reviews (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014; Cotterall, 2011; Maghelal, 2008; Maher *et al.*, 2013; Maki & Norkowski, 2006; Stiftel *et al.*, 2009; Wilkinson, 2015). Still, despite the urgency to develop writing proficiency and publishing records, doctoral students report feeling anxious and inadequately prepared for the realities of academic employment (Austin, 2002; Baker & Lattuca, 2010; Golde & Dore, 2001; Maher *et al.*,

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2008), in particular the intense demands for scholarly publishing facing tenure-track faculty members (Hamin *et al.*, 2000).

Because of this mismatch between career preparation and career realities, it is increasingly important to incorporate pedagogical strategies that foster writing and publishing among doctoral students into the curriculum (Danby & Lee, 2012; Ferguson, 2009; Lee & Kamler, 2008). While traditional writing pedagogies emphasize technical skills training to develop mastery of composition, sentence and paragraph structure, and so on (see, e.g, Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Lee and Aicthison 2009; Parker, 2009), social constructivist approaches to writing pedagogies (Gergen, 1995) understand writing as central to the development of scholarly identities (Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Ivanic, 1998) and publication as essential to the development of one's scholarly community (Forsyth, 1999). From a constructivist perspective, the goal of constructivist writing pedagogies is to 'infuse' (Adamek, 2015) writing throughout the curriculum by incorporating students, their peers, and their mentors into a structured process of writing, peer-review and revision. This approach serves to demystify the publication process (Forsyth, 1999) while fostering the development of a supportive learning community (Foote, 2010).

In the following essay, we critically assess learning outcomes of Colloquium in Planning Issues, a core course for doctoral students in the PhD program in Community and Regional Planning at the University of Texas at Austin. Based on constructivist approaches to writing pedagogies, the annual course supports students' publication efforts through writing workshops and peer reviews, while also fostering students' critical understanding of the relationship between their own research, writing, and scholarly identities through course readings, lectures, and classroom discussions with invited speakers. In order to provide an assessment of the pedagogical strategies based on students' first-hand experience, the article is co-authored by the instructor and two cohorts of doctoral students who attended the class. Our approach responds to the call for more publication of doctoral students' own critical reflections of writing pedagogies (see, e.g. Guerin *et al.*, 2013; Frankel & Pearson, 2013), which has the potential of providing more grounded analyses of initiatives to improve writing skills (Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Carter, 2012; Maher *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, this 'collective autoethnographic' approach (Dowling *et al.*, 2012, p. 214) allows us to better assess how course objectives have been met by conducting a form of 'pre- and post-course measurements of the knowledge and/or skills that they impart' (Brooks and Wu 2012, p. 491).

We begin by presenting the theoretical framework that inspired the course design and our analysis of learning outcomes. After this, we review the course design and pedagogical strategies, present our outcome assessment methods, and discuss learning outcomes in terms of students' comfort with the publishing process, the role of writing for the formation of scholarly identities, and the role of writing for knowledge production within scholarly communities.

Doctoral Writing Pedagogy and the Development of Scholarly Identities

Doctoral programs are increasingly measured by the publishing proficiency of their students, in part, because evidence of publishing in graduate school is a positive indication of a candidate's potential for scholarly productivity during the tenure-track period (Broadhurst, 2014; Carter, 2012; Maghelal, 2008). Because of hardening scholarly market

realities, a series of initiatives have been launched in recent years to improve the quality of doctoral education in the United States, including the Preparing Future Faculty Program (supported by the Council of Graduate Schools and the Association of American Colleges and Universities), the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching), and the PhD Completion Project (sponsored by the Council of Graduate Schools). Universities have established writing centers and various peer mentoring programs and workshops available to doctoral students (e.g. Aitchison & Guerin, 2014; Carter & Laurs, 2014; Cumbie *et al.*, 2005; Ferguson, 2009; Murray & Newton, 2008; Solem & Foote, 2004), including the annual JPER Writing Workshop for New Scholars which seeks 'to improve the quality of written scholarship among new faculty of planning and related academic programs' (The Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP), N.d.). The increasing pressure to publish in a peer-reviewed journal prior to graduation has also prompted discussions in planning departments to adopt the 'Three Article Dissertations' (TAD) or 'Article Style Dissertations' (ASD) format in lieu of the traditional dissertation.

However, the development of doctoral candidates' publishing skills remains all too often left to chance (Reybold, 2003, p. 248) and instruction in writing for publication is still not common practice in doctoral programs (Boote, 2012; Ferguson, 2009). In cases when such instruction is provided, the pedagogical approach is typically premised on technical skills development and 'problems of writing are most often construed either in terms of individualized deficit and trauma (the problem) or of clinical-technical intervention (the solution)' (Aitchison & Lee, 2006, p. 266). Instead, from the social constructivist perspective (Gergen, 1995) on writing pedagogies, writing is understood as intrinsic to the development of scholarly identities (Dowling *et al.*, 2012; Guerin *et al.*, 2013; Kamler and Thompson 2004; Lassig *et al.*, 2013; Lee & Boud, 2003; Parker, 2009; Ward and West, 2008). This identity formation occurs via the 'intertextual connections' that are forged through the writing of scholarly articles (Thompson, 2009; see also McAlpine, 2012). That is, students' articles and hence their sense of self is developed through conversation with other academic texts, including peer-reviewed articles and books defined as canonical, as well as other 'texts' that circulate in their scholarly communities, such as favored theoretical frameworks and epistemological assumptions.

While constructivist writing pedagogies encourage students to develop the 'common knowledge' shared by members of their subdiscipline (Chandrasoma *et al.*, 2004), however, this process of identity formation may also contribute to the reproduction of disciplinary boundaries, which in turn may stifle creative approaches to knowledge production (Hirschman (1970)). One powerful pedagogical strategy to prevent the hardening of disciplinary silos while also providing technical writing skills is the writing workshop. Research in writing pedagogies suggests that a workshop format furthers students' understanding of the centrality of writing for knowledge production (Adamek, 2015; Dowling *et al.*, 2012; Aitchison & Lee, 2006) and fosters students' critical appreciation of writing as a principal means to enter 'explicitly into a network of peer relations as becoming-researchers' (Lee & Kamler, 2008, p. 516; see also Guerin *et al.*, 2013; Lassig *et al.*, 2013). By separating the intimidating process of publishing into smaller, sequential tasks and taking a collaborative approach to writing and revision, the workshop format also reduces anxieties about the peer review process (e.g. Adamek, 2015; Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Morss & Murray, 2001) and breaks down barriers to writing

and publishing (Bartkowski *et al.*, 2015; Ferguson, 2009; Manathunga *et al.*, 2010; Rinfrette *et al.*, 2015).

Course Design and Learning Goals

Following a review of the doctoral program conducted jointly by faculty and PhD students in 2012–13, Colloquium in Planning Issues was converted to a workshop format to accommodate requests by students for increased participation by faculty members, more systematic and frequent review of students' writing, and more discussion of academic career issues. Furthermore, the program review highlighted questions of student and program identity, suggesting that a restructured Colloquium should integrate a focus on academic publishing with professional identity development in order to promote a supportive 'culture of research publication' within the department (Bartkowski *et al.*, 2015, p. 102).

In order to meet these pedagogical goals, the course was divided into two tracks: 'publishing' and 'professional development.' The publishing track starts with a series of four assignments where students follow explicit instructions provided by the instructor (Table 1). The first is a 'Workshop Proposal' (assignment 1) where students present the tentative goal of their article, the intended audience, a short list of potential target journals, and a brief abstract complete with a preliminary argument. After receiving feedback from instructor and their advisor, the student conducts a thorough 'Journal Analysis' of their chosen target journal (assignment 2). The goal is to instill in students the good habit of carefully assessing the theoretical and topical orientations of their chosen journals prior to submitting an article.

The students then prepare a 'Workshop Plan' (assignment 3) where they provide a revised abstract of the article, justify their selection of journal, specify their audience, and present an outline of the article. The Workshop Plan also lists the students' intended deliverables, the due dates, and their workshop schedule, which is developed in coordination with instructor and members of their committee. Finally, students conduct a 'Peer Review' (assignment 4) of the first draft of a scholarly article provided by a colleague of

Table 1. Course assignments in order of delivery and learning goals.

	Assignment	Learning goals
Publishing Track	1.Workshop proposal 2. Journal analysis 3. Workshop plan 4. Peer review 5. Writing and revisions 6. Workshop critique 7. Final presentation	• To develop a concise argument and situate an article within a scholarly field. • To develop a critical understanding of audience by reviewing journals and selecting an outlet for an article. • To produce an outline, schedule, and writing strategy in order to develop a systematic approach to publishing. • To critically assess a manuscript in order to prepare for the rigor of manuscript review. • To complete and revise discrete elements of an article as a means of developing productive scholarly habits. • To develop skills necessary to critically assess scholarly texts and productively respond to critique of one's own texts. • To develop synthesis and presentation skills while fostering their sense of membership in a scholarly community.
Professional Development Track	1. Session summaries (two) 2. Research statements (two)	• To develop a practice of critical analysis through routine-taking and reflection. • To concisely and critically elaborate a research trajectory grounded in student's personal and scholarly interests.

[First Author]. By practicing the role of a reviewer for a specific journal, students develop a better understanding of how their own articles will be assessed in terms of structure, theoretical development, and empirical rigor. Once the students have completed their review, the author of the article joins the class as a guest speaker and provides students with the original reviews and the revised and published versions of the article, further demystifying the publishing process (Forsyth, 1999).

Once these assignments are completed, students schedule and lead two writing workshops each and also participate as peer reviewers in workshops organized by their fellow students (assignments 5 and 6). Prior to the workshops they are scheduled to lead, students circulate texts for review and also articulate the goals of their workshops. In the workshops, which are attended by the instructor, their academic advisors, committee members and other doctoral students, the students introduce challenges they have faced while writing and solicit advice from workshop participants. Since the workshops are customized by each student and their advisor, the structure and thematic content of the workshops vary widely based on students' research interests: topics have varied from regional development issues in Argentina via housing policy in Mexico City to the relationship between the built environment and travel behavior in the United States.

Finally, at the end of the semester all Colloquium students present their work in the annual, departmental Doctoral Research Symposium (assignment 7). Structured in a session format akin to the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) annual conference, the Symposium encourages students to succinctly synthesize their text in verbal form. Students in the early phases of their doctoral studies typically develop and revise detailed outlines and sections of an article based on their masters' thesis research, which they then complete over the following academic year. For these students, Colloquium provides a means and incentive to get started in their publishing careers. More advanced students, on the other hand, prepare and revise complete drafts of articles based on their dissertation research or on investigations conducted in collaboration with faculty members.

The professional development track complements the writing workshops with assigned readings, lectures, and discussions with guest speakers who share experiences with publishing, mentoring, teaching, job searches, conference presentations, and collaboration in grant writing, research, and publication. The goal of the weekly, two-hour professional development sessions is to illustrate the realities of the tenure track while fostering a critical understanding of the relationship between writing, scholarly identity, and knowledge production. In addition, these sessions provide necessary training for the workshop process through assigned readings and classroom instruction. For example, students are prepared for the peer review process via instructor's individual evaluation of their Peer Review (assignment 4), classroom instruction provided by the instructor, and the classroom interaction with the guest speaker whose article students reviewed. In addition to the required textbook by Silvia (2007), students are assigned 4–10 different readings each week. During the four professional development sessions devoted to scholarly publishing they read seven texts on the peer review process published by scholarly organizations, presses and universities.[2]

Table 2. Outcome assessment questions.

Phase 1: At the End of the Course
1. How and to what extent do you feel the class furthered your understanding of the academic publishing process?
2. How and to what extent do you feel the class furthered the actual development of an article for publication?
3. How and to what extent do you feel the class furthered your professional development as a researcher and/or a scholar in higher education?
4. On a personal level, how do feel you have developed as a researcher and/or a scholar in higher education as a result of this course during this semester?
Phase 2: One-Two Years Following the Course
1. Please summarize your skill level and confidence level before the class in terms of writing capability, knowledge about the publishing process, and knowledge about other aspects of academic 'professional' development that were taught in the class.
2. Please summarize your skill level and confidence level one (two) years after the class in terms of writing capability, knowledge about the publishing process, and knowledge about other aspects of academic 'professional' development that were taught in the class.
Phase 3 (Anonymous): Two-Three Years Following the Course
1. Please provide any additional critical comments regarding the *course structure* which you did not include in your assessments immediately following the course or while writing this article.
2. Please provide any additional critical comments regarding the *pedagogical strategies* used in the course which you did not include in your assessments immediately following the course or while writing this article.
3. Please provide any additional critical comments regarding the *long-term learning outcomes* of the course which you did not include in your assessments immediately following the course or while writing this article.

Learning Assessment Methods

Our discussion of learning outcomes is based on students' narrative assessments immediately upon conclusion of the course (Phase 1), while writing this article (Phase 2), and 1 year following the development of the article (Phase 3). Specifically, in Phase 1 immediately following the course, each student author/course participant provided [First author] with an assessment of the course structure and responded to a series of questions (Table 2). In Phase 2, completed while writing this article, each author assessed learning outcomes in the longer term by responding to two additional questions (Table 2). Finally, in Phase 3 following the development of the article, students (many of whom had now graduated) were invited to respond to a series of follow-up questions in an anonymous survey shared via Qualtrics and to also respond to the comments provided by three manuscript reviewers. Six of the 11 student authors chose to complete the survey while all students responded to the manuscript reviews.

It bears noting that such a collective learning outcomes assessment runs the risk of bias. Recall bias may lead students to paint an excessively positive picture of course outcomes, and students may also feel pressured to only write about positive outcomes when co-authoring with their course instructor. However, even though students took the course for a grade, Phase 1 of the outcome assessment did not commence until after course grades were assigned, and student authors were encouraged to provide critical reflections via the anonymous survey in Phase 3. By evaluating learning outcomes immediately upon conclusion of the course and also one or two years later, we were able to obtain a critical, 'retrospective evaluation' of the course (Bleske *et al.*, 2014) from a greater critical distance and in light of students' experience in the intervening years. Also, the dialogue involved in collectively developing the article served to reveal deeper insights about learning outcomes. When analyzing the individual assessments of learning outcomes, we found that students had learned significant lessons that went beyond the

specific learning goals of the course (Table 1): they had grown more familiar and comfortable with the academic writing and publishing *process*, they had developed a stronger sense of their *scholarly identity*, and they had gained a deeper comprehension of *academic writing as central to knowledge production*. We have therefore structured the following outcome assessment to reflect these three themes, but we have also included excerpts of students' original narratives in order to illustrate our 'autoethnographic' approach (Dowling *et al.*, 2012, p. 214).

Learning Assessment Results

Demystifying the Publishing Process

Our outcome assessment suggests that students indeed emerged from the course with greater confidence in terms of tackling the publishing process. This was partly a result of deconstructing the process into discrete elements: identifying and analyzing a publishing outlet, developing an outline, and identifying and pursuing specific writing tasks on a regular schedule. This incremental approach served to meet Learning Goals 1–3 (see Table 1): to develop a concise argument and situate an article within a scholarly field, develop a critical understanding of the audience, and develop a systematic approach to writing and publishing. Reviewing an early draft of an article that was eventually published in a prominent journal served to address Learning Goal 4; i.e. to prepare for the rigor of manuscript review. In the words of two students, this approach served to reduce the level of anxiety about writing and publishing often reported among PhD students:

K.C

Thanks to the class, the publishing process is no longer intimating. The class helped improve my writing skills and made it easier to write my dissertation, and the course was instrumental in developing my confidence to submit and revise several articles for publication, Learning how to position myself in the field through my publications was perhaps the most valuable lesson from the class.

J.W

Immediately following the class, my understanding of the academic publishing process had definitely improved. One of our required reading assignments consisted of editorial correspondence, anonymous reviews, and two drafts and final versions of articles authored by the instructor and a colleague. Discussions with the authors illustrated the iterative and protracted nature of publishing and gave me a more thorough understanding of what to expect and how to choose appropriate outlets for my articles.

However, although the course met learning goals in terms of preparing students for the publishing *process*, the course did less to improve students' *technical skills* in terms of mastery of English composition. Although instructor and guest speakers underscored the importance and in some cases the urgency of honing writing skills, the structure and intent of the course did not permit intensive training in English composition. This limitation was compounded by the fact that doctoral students in different stages of

their careers attended the course. Although the course is required for all doctoral students, the department does not stipulate which semester the course needs to be taken. Also, some students later in their career chose to retake the class to benefit from the writing workshops. As a result, entry-level students reported feeling intimidated by the course assignments at the beginning of the semester, while more advanced students would have liked to have seen more participation by students in their last year of the program.

Writing and Scholarly Identity

A second significant learning outcome was students' newfound, critical appreciation of writing as integral to the development of their scholarly identities. While the workshop format served to meet Learning Goal 5 (to complete and revise discrete elements of an article as a means of developing productive scholarly habits), the peer review process demonstrated the iterative nature of academic writing and illustrated how the publishing process is intimately connected with the reproduction of a scholarly community. The peer-review approach also served to meet Learning Goal 6 (to develop skills necessary to critically assess scholarly texts and productively respond to critique of one's own texts), and requiring the students to lead the workshops and present their article in the Doctoral Research Symposium addressed Learning Goal 7; i.e. to develop synthesis and presentation skills while fostering their sense of membership in a scholarly community. As the following comments by students suggest, by framing academic writing as integral to students' scholarly identity, the course strengthened their confidence and willingness to embrace the publishing process:

M.T

The course reduced the loneliness of the writing process. Not only did we have to share our own thinking and writing with our peers, but they also did the same with their own articles. This deepened my sense of scholarly collaboration and gave me a feeling of belonging to an academic community. Now, 2 years later, I realize that the workshops helped me find my place in the planning field by allowing me to critically reflect on my own interests.

C.W

Before I attended this course, I had no experience with publishing and I had only a vague sense of my scholarly identity. I didn't realize that my personal background is integral to who I am as a scholar, and I didn't realize that the writing process would be key to helping me define my path in academia. By integrating the writing process with critical considerations of my own scholarly identity, the course became central to my growth as a scholar.

J.Y

The writing workshops helped me situate my research in the planning discipline and define who I am as a scholar. Without being compelled to define my scholarly identity through the class and also, importantly, to present this in writing, I would still be

vacillating between different research subjects and research methods without a clear sense of myself as a scholar.

However, while the course strengthened students' sense of their scholarly identities, students should have been provided with more opportunities to collectively reflect on their backgrounds and interests. This would have facilitated their understanding of writing as integral to their development as scholars. As in the case of many planning programs, doctoral students at the University of Texas at Austinhave diverse life and professional experiences, which makes adjusting to a form of knowledge production premised on particular forms of writing a fraught challenge.

Writing, Scholarly Identity, and Knowledge Production

The course also furthered students' understanding of the intimate links between writing, scholarly identities, and knowledge production. By producing and receiving peer reviews, students learned through practice that academic articles are developed through intertextual connections with other scholarly articles but also shaped by debates, epistemological assumptions, and other 'texts' circulating within scholarly communities. As a result, students began to see writing as a productive strategy to foster their own scholarly knowledge production, which in turn increased their enthusiasm for the writing process:

A.I.R.S

Similar to J.Y., I also entered Colloquium with professional experience from outside planning. However, because of the emphasis on writing as a form of knowledge production within a scholarly community, the class helped me define my research problem and develop arguments and research questions that were scientifically rigorous and relevant.

A.R

Academic writing, particularly the knowledge production concept, was foreign to me when I began this course. I was accustomed to detached, isolated technical writing, which mostly consisted of assembling data for plans, grant reports, or policy papers. The course it helped me appreciate the importance of publishing as a means of reaching other scholars with similar interests.

K. S

Like peers who came to planning by way of design and engineering disciplines, I had professional writing experience but limited contact with scholarly production. The focus on intertextuality in Colloquium helped me develop my scholarship by opening up my writing process to the critique and support of those with different epistemological perspectives.

Although the course prompted students to view writing as integral to knowledge production rather than a disagreeable task to be completed following the research process, the connections between writing, scholarly identity, and knowledge production should have been articulated more explicitly. This could have been achieved through the further discussion of students' research interests, ideally incorporating their academic advisors into classroom sessions.

Conclusions

As our experience suggests, writing is a fundamental means by which scholarly identities are developed and tested. By demonstrating the connection between writing, the development of scholarly identities, and knowledge production, the writing and publishing process emerged as a positive – even inspiring – instrument for both personal and professional growth. The course served to demystify the publishing process, significantly strengthening students' sense of scholarly identity and fostering their awareness of the role of academic writing in scholarly knowledge production. By including faculty advisors, committee members, and other students in peer review-based writing workshops, writing was 'infused' into the curriculum (Adamek, 2015).

However, in order to sustain the momentum provided by Colloquium, regular opportunities should be provided for critical discussions of writing, publishing, and academic identities once the semester is over. Students who need to improve their writing skills should be provided further immersion through writing seminars and workshops offered by writing centers and institutes. Faculty mentors should remain engaged with their students' publishing efforts through mentoring, critique, and facilitation of informal writing groups to ensure that the momentum of the course is not lost. Such ongoing mentoring should include discussions of the peculiarities of academic publishing, including tailoring papers to certain audiences and mastering a variety of writing styles, and journal formats, which appeared as a particular challenge for students who attended Colloquium. Finally, since this is a small doctoral program (± 15 students at any one time), the diversity in backgrounds and scholarly preparation will remain a pedagogical challenge. Further experimentation is required to ensure that the course is flexible enough to meet the needs of the beginning as well as advanced students.

Despite these limitations, however, the workshop-based approach to writing pedagogies served to develop a learning community of students, advisors and committee members, creating 'an environment in which graduate student publications are the norm rather than the exception' (Bartkowski *et al.*, 2015) and framing writing as integral to the production of both scientific knowledge and scholarly identities. As social constructivist research in writing pedagogies suggests, such a collective approach to writing prevents it from becoming a 'silent struggle' (Adamek, 2015, p. 214; see also Boud & Lee, 2005; Ferguson, 2009). The peer-review model thus served to demystify the publishing process, enhancing students' self-confidence (Caffarella & Barnett, 2000) and increasing their motivation to write (Morss & Murray, 2001). Ultimately, by centering scholarly writing as a regular routine, a workshop-based, social constructivist approach to writing pedagogies addresses the growing need for doctoral students to publish while in graduate school.

Note

1. Acknowledgments to be added.
2. Non-peer reviewed reading assignments include texts from Sage Connection (http://connection.sagepub.com/tips-for-you/); PhD2Published, including 'How to Write a Peer Review for an Academic Journal: Six Steps from Start to Finish' (http://www.phd2published.com/2012/05/09/how-to-write-a-peer-review-for-an-academic-journal-six-steps-from-start-to-finish-by-tanya-golash-boza/); and The Writing Center, The University of Wisconsin – Madison, including 'Conducting Peer Reviews' (http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/

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Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank their faculty colleagues in the Program in Community and Regional Planning and other departments at The University of Texas for their generous contributions as guest speakers and participants in our writing workshops.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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