EGR 393, Section 601: Writing an Engineering Thesis or Dissertation

Course Dates: January 6, 2020 – April 28, 2020  
Course Time: Thursdays, 9:00am – 12:00pm  
Course Location: To be determined

Instructor: Dr. Katy Luchini Colbry (colbryka@msu.edu)  
Office Hours: immediately following class or by appointment

Course Overview

This seminar course supports graduate students in completing their thesis or dissertation and includes structured time for writing and peer-review. Weekly discussions of topics such as publication timelines; creating outlines; research support resources; receiving/providing feedback about academic writing; and MSU Graduate School formatting requirements. Designed primarily for on-campus graduate students in their final 1-2 semesters who will devote substantial time to writing the thesis/dissertation during the term. PhD students ideally will have already passed the comprehensive exam, but may also enroll if they intend to spend substantial time writing in preparation for their comprehensive.

Please note: this course is designed as a supportive “writing lab” environment for students who are spending substantial time on their own thesis/dissertation during the semester. The weekly seminars are primarily time for individual writing and peer review/feedback. This is not an English-language or grammar course, and does not provide instruction in technical writing. Students will receive general feedback from their peers, but not detailed document editing.

EGR 393 is a special course in that (1) students enrolled in 1 credit of EGR 393 are considered “full time” enrolled students, regardless of whether they take other credits in the same semester; and (2) there is an automatic tuition scholarship available to cover the 1 credit of EGR 393; students are still responsible for paying applicable fees (typically $25 or less per semester).

Learning Objectives

By participating in this course, students will:

- Gain an understanding of the structure of an engineering thesis/dissertation and develop skills for developing and implementing writing timelines
- Be able to articulate the value of citation management systems for supporting research writing and apply appropriate citation techniques to their thesis/dissertation
- Learn about ethical practices for research writing, and be able to articulate key principles for disseminating research responsibly within their own domain
- Gain an understanding of the process of peer review in engineering and be able to provide and receive constructive feedback about academic writing
- Learn about various strategies for structuring writing time effectively, overcoming common challenges to writing, and developing a sustainable writing practice
- Gain experience in working in teams and communicating with individuals from different backgrounds, cultures, and research disciplines
Grading

This course is graded Pass/Fail based on an accumulation of points as follows:

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<th>Point Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>100 or higher</td>
<td>Pass</td>
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<tr>
<td>99 or below</td>
<td>Fail</td>
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Points are accumulated based on the following activities:

**Attend Weekly Seminar:** up to 5 points per seminar (partial points awarded for attending only part of the seminar). Seminars are held weekly (Thursdays, 9:00am-12:00pm, location will be announced) from 1/6/2020 through 4/28/2020. **Maximum of 80 points** for attending all 16 seminars. Note that the seminars are designed primarily as “writing labs” when students will work on their own thesis/dissertation for a substantial portion of time.

**Writing Assignments:** 5 points per assignment, which are due at the beginning of the seminar. The first assignment will be to develop individual writing goals and a timeline for the semester, based on your individual thesis/dissertation. **Subsequent writing assignments will be to fulfill your own writing goals, as identified in the first assignment.** In other words, you will determine in consultation with the instructor, which assignments, goals and timelines are most helpful and appropriate to your own thesis/dissertation. You will have opportunities to review and revise your individual goals/timelines throughout the semester, if needed. **Maximum of 70 points** for submitting up to 14 weekly writing assignments.

**Written Peer Reviews:** 10 points per assignment for submitting written peer reviews of portions of other students’ thesis/dissertation. The goal of these assignments is to provide direct, peer-to-peer feedback and support to improve students’ writing and to allow the reviewer to gain skills in providing effective written feedback. **Maximum of 50 points** for this activity.

**Final Thesis/Dissertation:** 100 points for having your final thesis/dissertation accepted by the MSU Graduate School prior to the end of the semester. Please note that submission is not sufficient; the final document must be accepted by the Graduate School, indicating that it has met all requirements (including formatting) and that the student has submitted the other forms/tasks required as part of the thesis/dissertation process.

Course Policies

1. Attendance and participation are expected. Absences must be excused in advance by emailing colbryka@msu.edu.
2. If you have an unexcused absence due to a medical or personal emergency, please inform the instructor by email (colbryka@msu.edu) as soon as possible.
3. Students are not required to purchase textbooks or other materials for this course.
Additional MSU Policies Applicable to this Course

The following language is drawn from the MSU Ombudsperson website (https://www.msu.edu/~ombud/classroom-policies/syllabus-faq.html#question2) and from notes distributed by the University Council on grief absences.

1. **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities** (from the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD): Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at rcpd.msu.edu. Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a Verified Individual Services Accommodation ("VISA") form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (test, project, etc.). Requests received after this date may not be honored.

2. **Academic Honesty**: Article 2.III.B.2 of the Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR) states that "The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards." In addition, the College of Engineering adheres to the policies on academic honesty as specified in General Student Regulations 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades; the all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades; and Ordinance 17.00, Examinations. (See Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide and/or the MSU Web site: www.msu.edu.) Therefore, unless authorized by your instructor, you are expected to complete all course assignments, including homework, lab work, quizzes, tests and exams, without assistance from any source. You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, you may not submit course work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course. Also, you are not authorized to use the www.allmsu.com Web site to complete any course work in this course. Students who violate MSU academic integrity rules may receive a penalty grade, including a failing grade on the assignment or in the course. Contact your instructor if you are unsure about the appropriateness of your course work. (See also the Academic Integrity webpage.)

3. **Limits to confidentiality.** Essays, journals, and other materials submitted for this class are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University's student record policies. However, students should be aware that University employees, including instructors, may not be able to maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues to protect the health and safety of MSU community members and others. As the instructor, I must report the following information to other University offices (including the Department of Police and Public Safety) if you share it with me: suspected child abuse/neglect, even if this maltreatment happened when you were a child, allegations of sexual assault or sexual harassment when they involve MSU students, faculty, or staff, and credible threats of harm to oneself or to others. These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In almost all cases, it will be your decision whether you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting you are encouraged to make an appointment with the MSU Counseling Center.

4. **Drops and Adds**: Please check the MSU Schedule of Courses (schedule.msu.edu) to
determine the last day to add this course; the last day to drop this course with a 100% refund and no grade reported; and the last day to drop this course with no refund and no
grade reported. You should immediately make a copy of your amended schedule to verify you have added or dropped this course.

5. **Commercialized Lecture Notes**: Commercialization of lecture notes and university-provided course materials is not permitted in this course.

6. **Disruptive Behavior**: Article 2.III.B.4 of the *Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR)* for students at Michigan State University states: "The student's behavior in the classroom shall be conducive to the teaching and learning process for all concerned." Article 2.III.B.10 of the SRR states that "The student and the faculty share the responsibility for maintaining professional relationships based on mutual trust and civility." *General Student Regulation 5.02* states: "No student shall . . . interfere with the functions and services of the University (for example, but not limited to, classes . . .) such that the function or service is obstructed or disrupted. Students whose conduct adversely affects the learning environment in this classroom may be subject to disciplinary action through the Student Judicial Affairs office.

7. **Grief Absence Policy**: Michigan State University is committed to ensuring that the bereavement process of a student who loses a family member during a semester does not put the student at an academic disadvantage in their classes. If you require a grief absence, you should complete the “Grief Absence Request” web form no later than one week after knowledge of the circumstance. I will work with you to make appropriate accommodations so that you are not penalized due to a verified grief absence.