AMA | SIG
Doctoral Student

The Academic Contribution Explained

Winter AMA DocSIG Special Session

February 15, 2020

Session Overview

From start to finish, conceptualizing, constructing, and submitting academic research is a challenging process that all academics experience. In this session, we took a deep dive into three phases of the manuscript creation and review process:

- Where do good research ideas from? How do I know it's a good idea when I see it?
- When constructing the manuscript, how to I articulate the contribution to knowledge?
- After submitting the manuscript for review, how do I properly address the editor and the reviewers?

We are thankful to the panelists who allowed us to transcribe this session for further dissemination to doctoral students who could not attend our session at the 2020 Winter AMA Conference.

Panelists

V. Kumar (VK) has been on the faculty at the J. Mack Robinson College of Business at Georgia State University, where he held many titles, including Regents' Professor, Richard and Susan Lenny Distinguished Chair, Professor of Marketing, and Executive Director, Center for Excellence in Brand & Customer Management. VK is also honored as a Chang Jiang Scholar, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, China; a Senior Fellow, Indian School of Business, India; and a Fellow of the Hagler Institute for Advanced Study at Texas A&M University. He has published over 200 articles in leading academic journals, including *Harvard Business Review*, *Sloan Management Review, Journal of Marketing, Marketing Science, Journal of Marketing Research*, *Management Science*, *Operations Research, Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science,* and the *Journal of Advertising Research.*

Daniel Ladik (known as Dr. Dan-o to his students) is an Associate Professor of Marketing in the Stillman School of Business at Seton Hall University. His main teaching and research interests include marketing strategy, personal selling and sales management, servant leadership and web 2.0/social media. Prior to Seton Hall University, Professor Ladik taught for seven years in the Sawyer Business School at Suffolk University in Boston. He earned his Ph.D. in marketing at the University of South Florida in Tampa and holds BS (economics), MA (international marketing) and MBA degrees from Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia. His research has been published in *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, Journal of Public Policy & Marketing, Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, Marketing Letters,* and *Industrial Marketing Management*.

William B. Locander is the Max P. Watson, Jr. Professor of Business and Chair of the Marketing & Analysis Department at Louisiana Tech University. He is Past President of the American Marketing Association and served as a Malcolm Baldrige Examiner for the National Quality Award. His research interests include strategic planning, buyer behavior, and organizational transformation. He has served on the *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, and *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* editorial boards and has published in the elite marketing and business journals, including *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science,* and the *Journal of the American Statistical Association*.

Christine Moorman is the T. Austin Finch, Sr. Professor of Business Administration at The Fuqua School of Business, Duke University where she is a member of the marketing area. Professor Moorman's expertise lies in examining the nature and effects of learning and knowledge utilization by consumers, managers, organizations, and financial markets in innovation, marketing alliances and networks, and public policy contexts. Professor Moorman's research has been published in a range of top journals, including the *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research, Marketing Science, Academy of Management Review, Administrative Science Quarterly*, and *Harvard Business Review*. Professor Moorman is the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Marketing* and previously an Associate Editor for the *Journal of Marketing Research* and the *Journal of Marketing* as well as an ERB member for *Marketing Science* and the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

David Stewart is a President's Professor of Marketing and Business Law at Loyola Marymount University. He earned his B.A. in psychology from Northeast Louisiana University and his M.A. and Ph.D. in psychology from Baylor University. Dave has held faculty and administrative roles at Vanderbilt University, the University of Southern California and the University of California, Riverside. He currently serves as the Vice President for Publications for the American Marketing Association and has previously served as editor of the *Journal of Marketing*, the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science,* and the *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*. Dave has authored or co-authored more than 250 publications and twelve books. His research has examined a wide range of issues, including marketing strategy, the analysis of markets, consumer information search and decision making, effectiveness of marketing communications, public policy issues related to marketing, and methodological approaches to the analysis of marketing data. In 2015, he was honored with the American Marketing Association's Award for Lifetime Contributions to Marketing and Society.

Session Moderators

Jennifer Locander is a fourth-year doctoral candidate at the University of Mississippi. Her research interests include motivation, organizational frontline dynamics, and sales and sales management. Her research is published in the *Journal of Business Research* and the *Journal of Marketing Behavior*. She has presented her research at several national conferences and co-authored the best paper at the 2017 National Conference of Sales Management. In 2018, Jennifer attended the SMA Doctoral Consortium and received a fellowship to attend the American Marketing Association's New Horizons in Selling and Sales Management Consortium. In 2019, she attended the AMA-Sheth Doctoral Consortium and received the Graduate Achievement Award from the University of Mississippi. Currently, Jennifer serves as the Chair of the American Marketing Association's Doctoral Special Interest Group (AMA DocSIG).

Breanne Mertz is a second-year doctoral student in Marketing at Louisiana Tech University. Her research interests include sales force effectiveness, ethical decision making, and corporate social responsibility. In 2019, Breanne presented her research at the Society for Marketing Advances (SMA) conference and attended the SMA Doctoral Consortium. Currently, Breanne serves as the Best Practices Officer of the American Marketing Association's Doctoral Special Interest Group (AMA DocSIG).

Session Transcription

Breanne Mertz ____

Good afternoon everyone, thank you so much for being here. As you know, this is the DocSIG special session – *"The Academic Contribution Explained."* My name is Breanne Mertz, I am a second-year student, and I am also the Best Practices officer for DocSIG. It's an honor for me to be here, and I am really excited to hear from the panelists!

We've got an incredible line-up as you can see. We have Dr. Christine Moorman, Dr. David Stewart, Dr. V. Kumar, Dr. Dan-o Ladik, and Dr. William Locander. So, let's give them a round of applause and thank them for being here.

Alright, now we'd like to tell you a little bit about the motivation behind today's session and why we chose to talk about three themes for this session.

Professor Ladik ____

Well to begin, thank you all for coming. It is 2020. It was 2000 when I was the DocSIG President, and DocSIG was really just starting to get involved at the conferences. And when I was the DocSIG president everyone here on this panel participated in DocSIG events. And somehow or another they were very gracious to give us their time to be helpful, and that's our goal today - to be helpful.

We want to help you take the next step with your research. And we organized this session around three specific topics. The first one is (1) formulating fruitful research ideas. The second one is (2) communicating a contribution to the marketing literature, and the last one is (3) successfully navigating the review process and responding to reviewer and editor comments. We have some major super experienced editors with us today.

Now we want to open the floor up because we want to be helpful. We want to answer your questions, and we want to start off our first theme *formulating fruitful research ideas*. So, how can we be helpful? Questions? We have things to say, but we want to hear from the audience first.

Audience Question ____

This is not a question, but can you give some background on this session and the paper that you gave way back when?

Professor Ladik ____

Well, I struggled as a doctoral student and after the doctoral process, I wanted to figure out what I did wrong. I interviewed a bunch of editors on what exactly a contribution is. Dave Stewart and I sponsored a DocSIG session on this topic in 2006. We wrote that paper up, appearing in *JAMS* in 2008, and it started this conversation of making a contribution to knowledge - *the contribution continuum.*

The book that I am holding here is the sequel to the contribution continuum article – a book titled "*How to get published in the best marketing journals"* – which is somewhat the basis for today's session and the chapters focus on today's themes - coming up with some ideas, trying to connect that to a literature stream, and then post hoc, how do you deal with reviewers. These are all sections which are covered in the book.

Professor Stewart ____

I'll provide some background. I was on sabbatical in the UK last year in the fall, and I ran into a publisher – Elgar and they have developed a whole series of these books. There is one in management, there is one in entrepreneurship, I think they are working on one in economics. But I was asked if I would edit this book. And because of the work I have done with Daniel over the years, I asked him to serve as co-editor.

So, we approached a lot of folks who had been editors and asked them for their advice. What you have in that book is the wisdom of sixteen editors and former editors of leading journals in marketing. Whether it actually lives up to the title remains to be seen, but that was the title the publisher had used for the whole series. Simply substituting the discipline in the title. But, that's the genesis of this. And Daniel then thought it would be useful to sponsor something with DocSIG. And before you leave, if you would like a copy of the book, though I didn't get the publisher to give it to you free. We do have a code that can get you 1/3 off.

Professor Ladik ____

And the first chapter is free!

Professor Stewart ____

Well, the first chapter is already online with the publisher.

Professor Ladik ____

Oh, it is?

Professor Stewart ____

So, you can read it there....

Professor Ladik ____

So, get your doctoral coordinator at your school to buy the book for you!

Audience Question ____

Rather than thinking of how to come up with good ideas or really what constitutes a contribution - are there key red flags that something is *not* contribution worthy?

Professor Ladik ____

Let's go to our editors. Do you want to start Christine?

Professor Moorman ____

So, the question is… How do you know if it is probably not going to work out when the paper comes in? One clear reason is that it's knowledge we already have—something already on the books. Maybe it's a pure replication. If it's a replication where someone tries to replicate a finding and things don't work out, and there's new knowledge produced, that's fine. But, if it's just showing me say, market orientation on firm performance again - that's probably not going to make it.

Also, if you try to publish a very specific thing like selling coffee in Kenya, that's probably not going to work. We are looking for something more generalizable. So, I would say those are two things would be red flags for us - those are concerning and would be clear desk rejects.

Professor Stewart ____

Somewhere in the first two-to-three pages, there should be a paragraph that says what your contribution is so that we can spot it, and if it's not there, we may look for it, but you are already behind the 8-ball at that point. Because part of what we are looking for is… this a new and novel contribution and if we can't find it easily in the paper, particularly at the beginning of the paper, then that is a problem. One last thing, and I will say one word – proofread!

Professor Kumar ____

I am going to the antecedent of your question which is… where do you even get your ideas from, then you can decide if they are good or bad ideas. So, when I work with my students, we have three sources of ideas. First, we talk to managers of companies, they either come to our school or we go to their sites. In the meeting, we ask them questions. I'll give you one example of that. This may be a three-minute thing - is that ok?

So, here is one company which told us, we have 30 million subscribers. Every quarter we are losing some of them. All we do is keep chasing these customers who left us and trying to win them back. So, the question is if they lost 3 million customers, and they are only getting 100,000 back - how do we find out which 100,000 of the 3 million is likely to come back? That question gave me and two doctoral students working on this effort the idea of winning back lost customers as a good research question. So, we gave them the model and they implemented, but again some of the reacquired customers left. Of the hundred thousand reacquired, I'd say like 50,000 left. So again, they used this model and 50,000 would come back. And then some left again. So, if you look at three lifetimes, there are some people which exhibit the pattern. The second study asked - how do you identify customers who exhibit a pattern like this? Once you know the pattern, right in the first round of reacquisition, you can eliminate them. So, that 100,000 becomes like 30,000 you would go after. So that is one idea.

The second way to find good ideas is watching TV. We see earnings per share and the analyst's forecast was 30 cents per share and this company realized 34 cents per share. So, everybody knows when that happens, generally the stock price goes up. But there was something else going on, the number of subscribers they had, you know they lost 2 million subscribers in that quarter. So, what is the effect of a marketing metric surprise on the normal return? That's never been studied until now. In finance - lots, but marketing metrics surprises - never. But when I say never… advertising effects are being studied, branding effects are being studied, but in terms of marketing metrics, they are not being studied. So, that question was determined by just looking at the TV.

The third one we do is look at other disciplines. My own experience was that I studied a lot on epidemiology, and I studied how diseases spread from one person to the other person. And then from there, I learned how to model co-diffusion and how a diffusion in one country would spread to a diffusion in another country with these durables that we have - a multinational diffusion model. So, when you look at these ideas, automatically you look at these ideas or the practical ideas that somebody wants you to solve as timely opportunities. And then you put the second layer, the research layer, like has anyone else studied this? Or where is there a discussion in the literature?

Professor Ladik ____

I think another way to think about it is, we all have ideas and it's hard for us to judge if our own idea is good or not. Now you need to be passionate about an idea in order to see it through, but ultimately you need feedback from your peers, from your doctoral team, and then maybe from other DocSIG friends you meet at this conference that are in other schools. That's how you'll find out if an idea is viable or not. You could pursue a project because of passion, but is it viable enough to be featured at one of the top journals? You're going to need other people to give you that feedback. Because it's hard for you as the author to really see. You're in it, and you don't have that outside perspective so to speak.

Professor Locander ____

Looking to the future to tell us where things are going with technology, and I'll yield to my editors, but there is an issue of novelty that comes up when you present an idea. and I have lots of old ideas that I still like, but I think at this stage in your life… look to the future. Look at what's happening, what's cutting edge? I just wrote an article on mistakes in writing, and I think it echoes Dave's comment - I've read papers but by the fourth or fifth page, I was saying to myself, what is this about? It means that you are bouncing about. It's got theory and boy it feels good - makes sense in your mind, but if the reviewer is thinking… there's a lot of good ideas here but it doesn't seem to make a story. There's no hook - there is no definition to what we are doing. Good stuff, but it doesn't add up.

A lot of people say you need a passion about something. Instead, I might say… intellectual inquiry. I find a lot of my good ideas outside of the marketing literature. So, we could draw on cognitive sociology or sociological influences on cognition and contextual influence on behavior - that's interesting to me. So, I'll find things and say, this is a kind of interesting idea and it relates to something over here – and you'll think, I'll try that approach to that particular problem. So, they are going to look for novelty and richness in the idea. And the richness might not come from the marketing literature, because as they said, if no one has done it in marketing, you've got a great highway to sort of just ride down and bring that all together and be sort of the expert in that area. There are all kinds of things that are happening in society today that I think you can look at from a marketing perspective, a social marketing or a 4Ps type of marketing. I think intellectual inquiry is really important.

Professor Ladik ___

We just heard two stories that the genesis of the idea came from outside the literature but both stories threaded a conversation from somewhere else into an ongoing conversation in the literature. Remember we do have to publish the article in a particular journal for a particular audience. What did you say Bill… cognitive?

Professor Locander ___

Sociology.

Professor Ladik ___

…cognitive sociology. Your students saw something on television? Even though that's where the genesis of the idea came from, it still got threaded to the conversation in a particular journal for a particular audience.

Jennifer Locander ___

Do you think there is a shift in wanting more managerial implications as supposed to theoretical extensions or contributions in top journals?

Professor Ladik ___

A trend did you say?

Jennifer Locander ___

A focus on managerial implications seems to be where we are at right now, and a lot of journals are wanting more managerial and not so much theoretical development. I understand that both are important, but do you agree that one thing editors are looking for is something that can solve real-world problems and is of interest to managers?

Professor Moorman ___

You covered a lot of ground in that question. So, the real world is incredibly important, and the real world can be a very important stimulus for coming up with ideas. I would say my number one piece of advice is not to look to the literature for your ideas. Look to the real world, and like Daniel said, then link to the literature or literatures and across different fields to produce the greatest insight. I think for a top marketing journal, we are ultimately in the knowledge development process and that is how we have the potential to change the thinking or actions of managers or policymakers or other societal stakeholders is through that knowledge that we give them, including a new way of thinking about things, like new knowledge or a new metric or new tools.

At least for the *Journal of Marketing*, and I think that for most of the other major journals in the discipline, you really do need to have both. And I am starting to use… in my own letters… the phrase “marketing implications.” Because for me, that is very clear. When I say managerial implications, I'm not really sure… that can mean a lot of things to a lot of different people. But when I say marketing implications, that’s the business that we’re in. The *Journal of Marketing* is a marketing journal first. We care very deeply about marketing, so we want you to speak back to the field of marketing. And that could be to a manager, that could be to other stakeholders that are engaged with marketing. But that is something that we would like to see, in the statement of contribution that you write that we now require at the *Journal of Marketing.*

We require a statement of intent or contribution. And it's helpful - we talked about this at the workshop we ran - to actually write that way ahead of time before you write the paper. Don’t write that at the end, because you might find that you don’t have much of a contribution.

The last thing I will say about contribution because it connects back to the earlier conversation, and I heard this from Jeff Inman, is that you don’t want to write your paper like a mystery novel. The reader should not have to decode what your contribution is. You should be saying to them… this is what I'm trying to tell you in this paper very clearly and upfront. This is why my paper contributes to knowledge in the field. It's going to change managers’ thinking and also improve theory or whatever the mix of contributions happens be. Get that out clearly - communicate it clearly, and both must be done. You have to have a contribution and sell it in the paper.

Professor Stewart ____

If you’re not yet aware, you will become aware that the accreditation standards for business schools now has a section that focuses on impact. And impact is broadly defined. It's not just managers. It could be society as a whole, it could be consumers, it could be a stakeholder. But there will be pressure on deans who will then put pressure on you to write papers in a way that makes the impact clear. And this will be a little bit beyond just what is the contribution, but what’s the contribution to a particular stakeholder or set of stakeholders. So, you will probably be asked because we are going through reaccreditation at my institution right now, we have been asked to identify the stakeholders whose work you have recently published - is impacted, and how. And that will be a section of our self-report.

So, part of the reason you are seeing what you are seeing is because there is an external force related to accreditation that is beginning to ask for implications and tend to think about managerial or marketing implications. But it’s really any stakeholder… who are we making a contribution to? We might just be making a consumer a better shopper. That would be a fine contribution, but you want to think a bit broadly when you think about your contribution. You're going to be forced now to articulate not only how does it fit in the literature, and what theories does it use, but OK… who is it going to influence? How is it going to impact people?

Breanne Mertz ____

Okay, are there any other questions?

Professor Locander ____

I think we are hearing good things about the contribution to marketing and the contribution to consumers, whatever it is. At some journals, none that are represented here, you'll wind up with a reviewer who basically has a Ph.D. in social psychology or experimental psychology, and you'll do research that contributes to the marketing literature, but you'll get a review back stating "you've not extended what we know about motivation." And if you look at the *Annual Review of Psychology*, motivation is discussed in books that are piled high, and yet, the author's goal was to extend the issue of motivation in marketing – not necessarily to extend the psych literature on motivation.

We sometimes get confused. Now… I like what the panel has been saying. That is, make a contribution to marketing, to society, whatever it is, and if you get trapped with an awkward reviewer, you might have to go to a different journal. Probably, they won't like what you have to say. So that will happen to you but don't let it bother you. Stay with marketing, as it will pay off much better for you.

Audience Question ____

In our first few years in the doctoral program, we kind of call it *drinking out of a fire hose* with the seminar classes. You're probably jumping on different projects which really aren't your own and then around your comprehensive exams, it's time to start projects where you're the first author. So, how did you all go about carving your space in the marketing literature to kind of have something that is a passion to you, but also allows for fruitful ideas and contributions and is not just some side passion of yours?

Professor Locander ____

You want me to start with this one? You won't like my answer. I worked for Seymour Sudman, who was a national survey researcher at the University of Illinois, and he had an NSF grant. And he said Bill, would you like to ride along with me? I said, where's the train going? Sometimes you meet someone who has a grant, and you learn by doing the dissertation. And so, it was my first publication out of school and was in the *Journal of American Statistical Association*, which is one of the top statistics journals. And it was just because it was a survey methodology piece done via a grant. That can happen. So, you really kind of have to look at the situation you are in and what your interest pattern is. Don't think of the dissertation as some hurdle. It is the vehicle to learn and to launch your career. I think that's important too, and I will yield to my esteemed colleagues.

Professor Kumar ____

As I mentioned, in our program, we have three ways of developing ideas. So, the first year, we are unlike other schools where we have a mentorship model. From day one, they are assigned to a faculty and until they graduate, they stick with that faculty. And it's the responsibility of the faculty to challenge the students, to give them data sets, or ask them to come up with ideas for their first-year paper. It's all germinating from the students. If I am the mentor, I am just a gatekeeper - that's all. As long as I give a logical reason as to why an idea is strong or not, they will buy it. Sometimes they are very passionate about it, and they will be persistent, and I don't stop them. You go down this track and see what happens.

So, if we can look at thirty years of my career, maybe four or five times it has happened where the student persists with their ideas, and half of the time they have been successful and it's a good hit rate. But they are also scared. They have a finite timeline they want to finish everything, so that's why I say ok you have the data set we have provided and let us see what do we have here that can be a new idea. Here is the topic that this manager has set, let's see if they are willing to give us the data set too. But the effort must come from the students. They must be passionate about it otherwise they lose interest. It's a long journey, five or six years in a program is a long journey. You need to be highly motivated every day. As mentors, how do we motivate our students? The one trick I found to keep them motivated is right from the first year, or end of the first year, tell them any conference you want to go to - go. What's the problem? I mean they see scholars like the panelists and the audience here, and they get really motivated. So that's one thing I learned.

Audience Question ____

Something that was brought up during the award luncheon is the push to have a wider audience including practical marketers reading the ideas from the papers. Are you seeing what type of papers are accepted, or I guess rejected - is there an influence there?

Professor Stewart ____

The key issue is what are you contributing. One thing you can contribute is impact on some stakeholders. Implications for marketing practice for whatever. But ultimately, it's the totality of what's new and novel that is going to carry the day. And it might be that the paper has no practical implications. As an editor, I didn't force people to do practical implications, I would ask them, but there is some very influential literature that when it initially appeared in the literature did not appear to have a lot of practical applications.

Game theory is a case and point. Game theory was a highly quantitative esoteric area at the time, but now we have consulting practices built around game theory. So, it had major impact. But I do think you want to carefully think about… what is the nature of the contribution? And sometimes being able to take your empirical or theoretical contribution to the next level relates to what kind of problem it helps us solve that hasn't been solved before, is a way to build your contribution. So rather than thinking about… does it have practical implications, theoretical implications, or empirical implications, I would think more in terms of the totality of the package. And something may stand alone simply because it's a really good theory, there are no empirics in it - there is no real applications – it's just a really good conceptual review piece. Those are hard pieces to write because they are hard to make contributions. Other papers are just purely empirical pieces… we found something interesting. Some are a mixture of things, including implications. So, I would think in terms of the totality of the contribution.

Professor Moorman ____

I would like to add, as an editor, that's the way we're looking at the papers as well. We're not going to look for some immediate impact that the paper might have. That would be great but is it over time going to impact the way that the field thinks about topics or acts in a certain area? And we will take that long-term view, I mean we are willing to take that long-term view. Because sometimes it might be that an idea takes that long to really have an impact. But we are looking for big ideas with big implications. There are a lot of ways you can get there.

I just want to go back to, to the question… How do you get there? I think it's a bit of a myth to think we get these flashes of insight. Maybe in my life, I've had one good flash of insight, but it's usually because I've been grinding away with a process to get to the point where I start to see that there is an opportunity. But having something you're passionate about as others have said, is really important. Also, build on your strengths. You know, start with where you are strong already and then grow from that point. You don't have to completely reinvent yourself when you come into the Ph.D. program. I studied political science in my undergrad and when I came into marketing, I kind of understood these institutional issues, I also knew about philosophy of science, but I didn't really know that much about marketing practice. I've never practiced you know. So, I really had to learn about marketing, and I was able to connect the dots. So, I think, find out what you're really passionate about, build on your strengths, and just keep learning. Just keep trying to come up with what you think are good ideas. And reading how other people pitched those ideas, that's one of those things that I've been writing in a lot of my letters. When I see a paper come in and I see that the author doesn't really know what an academic paper looks like. Just go look at the last few issues of the *Journal of Marketing*. And what you'll see there, and I think you'll see this in other journals as well, is that there is a lot of diversity, there are a lot of different ways to make a contribution. So, you don't have to walk the straight and narrow. There is a lot of wiggle room in this field. I think someone said this in an earlier session or maybe said it at lunch, but we are an extremely broad field. When you look at all the different actors and the types of papers that get written, that is a wonderful thing for all of us. We can locate a place that we really find interesting and important.

Professor Kumar ____

I think we are all passionate about broadening the field, but one thing Christine did in the current issue of JM… I don't know how many of you have read it yet… but there is a fantastic article on theories-in-use approach similar to what Dave was saying about empirical phenomenon and then there is no theory for it. But if you read the article… it says that even managers think they can learn from that… how do you bring the managerial thinking and practice into explaining this empirical phenomenon? And then, as more things get replicated, it becomes a theory from empirical generalizations. So, I am citing this article like crazy. It is a genius idea that is hopefully helping me in my papers, because I like the empirical side of research. Not every time you have a theory ready and waiting, because this is not the way that managers behave and this has given a new life to the thinking of marketing practice, so please read it!

Professor Locander ____

We all are enamored with and were taught the scientific process. Joel Cohen was a consumer researcher who taught me in Illinois. So, he asked me, you know what's the first step in the scientific process, and I gave him… the kind of standard definition – hypothesis etc., and he said "No, I'm going to argue that it's observation." He said, how did we start studying groups? Anybody know? We sat down and watched monkey colonies - how they interacted with one another, how families interacted with one another, how groups worked. He said observation is the most important thing which kind of ties into what we have heard here today. Observe the real world. That future that I talked about, observe what's going on in the real world right now and then how do I bring it back into marketing. And it might be observing consumption for example. So, I think you can find things if you just be yourself and open up a little bit and use that good brain you have.

So many people are afraid of making a mistake. I had an executive friend of mine in Dallas, and I was looking for a new rolling suitcase. We were in this large industrial area where you just drive around and around. And I said Gary, we are lost. And he said, "I've never found anything until I was lost." It's OK to be lost… there is an answer at the end of it. So, use yourself, use your own interest or curiosity and something will come. And of course, the journals, you'll have to see how to tie it back in but, start with an observation I would say - your own personal observation.

Breanne Mertz ____

I think we have time for one more question on this theme.

Audience Question ____

So, I was recently approached by a Ph.D. student, and I wanted to pitch this to all of you. How do you determine if something is too narrow a topic, or if it's too broad a topic? I did not have a good answer for that.

Professor Ladik ____

I think that you need to sell it. I think you need to have a conversation. You're in a bubble. You're in your own head. You may think you have a great idea, or you may not know if it's a good idea, you may not know if it's too narrow. Collect data. It's what we do, isn't it? Talk to people you admire. Talk to some of your direct peers. Come to conferences and talk to some editors of the journals. There have been… what, two days in a row of meet the editor sessions? Where you actually get to sit down with an editor, and you can get some direct feedback. Please investigate - you don't have to do it on your own. It's always good to get a little wisdom of crowd action I would say.

Professor Moorman ____

I'll just add one thing that might help… you might just be thinking of an idea, maybe you've done some observations. Just make four PowerPoint slides. We did this at the workshop, show it to three people and see what kind of reaction you get. If you get that… hmm, that's kind of cool, or if you get, I already knew that or well you missed this paper over here, or, well you have this specific instance of something, but I can see the same thing here and here.

So, the idea is to do a little bit of trial and error learning. Prototype the idea and show it to some people. And tell them… this is just the beginning of the idea. But get a little bit of feedback and keep getting feedback as you work. You know the mistake that people make is that they show their paper to people right before they are ready to send it in - that's too late. You want to be doing it literally in month 1 or 2, in the beginning when as you are starting down the path. And you will know very quickly if it's too narrow or too broad, and where the opportunity is. And I use this rule when I'm traveling. I always ask three people for directions because I look for convergence. Did I get the same direction from three different people? So, one person may hate the idea, but they may be wrong. But if three people think the idea is too narrow then you're probably getting some good feedback then.

Professor Stewart ____

Editors can spot the papers that have never been read by anyone other than the author. Sometimes I wonder if the author has read it. But there is a breadth that occurs when you share ideas and get feedback. And that needs to happen very early, all the way through to the point where you are ready to submit the paper.

And there are plenty of ideas in the world, don't get concerned that someone is going to steal your idea. Yeah, it can happen, but it's unlikely.

Professor Locander ____

When working on a manuscript, all of my doctoral students and all of my colleagues - we'll sit down together, and we read the paper out loud to each other. We read it. And I can tell you, we had a draft that was almost ready to go, and we sat down, read it again and I said what the hell does that mean? And he said, "I don't know Bill you wrote it!"

And so, you read it out loud, and you're hearing it, and you could hear something that you then know the editor is just going to kill me on it. So, when you read it out loud you go… oh yeah, that's what we want to say. If you read it out loud and it sounds bad to you, it's going to sound bad or confusing to everybody else. And I've done this for thirty years, and we read it out loud to each other, and if it sounds good, we can pass it along.

Professor Ladik ____

One last thing before we move onto the next topic. We keep coming back to this theme, good idea, bad idea, narrow idea… but maybe we will take the conversation out of the literature for thirty seconds and talk about movies.

I mean, do you want your paper to be a romantic comedy where you know in the first five minutes of the movie that these two are going to hook up by the end of the movie? You know already, and you just spend the rest of the movie trying to figure out how it's going to happen, but you know how the movie is going to end. There is not that much of a surprise, or something unexpected. Back to what Professor Moorman said, if you can do those four slides and you get a, "I wasn't expecting that," comment or a "that's counterintuitive," comment then, you're probably onto something. Then, you wouldn't have a rom-com, you'll have a movie like *Inception* that everyone keeps talking about even though it came out ten years ago.

We are going to switch to another theme now to see if we have some more questions here.

Breanne Mertz ____

So, this next theme is communicating a contribution to the marketing literature. So, I will read off the first question that was submitted, and then we will open it up to the audience to ask their own questions.

Our first question to panelists, when constructing the manuscript, how do I articulate the contribution to knowledge? What are your thoughts on this?

Professor Stewart ____

The first thing you should write on the paper is a paragraph that specifies the contribution, three or four sentences, then you write the rest of the paper around it. Too often what happens is that people describe the methodology, describe the data, develop some implications and then, just before the paper is about to go to the editor for review they say, 'oh, we better put a contribution in here.' That's the wrong way to think about it. You should start with your contribution. Yeah, you may already have your data and your thoughts on what the paper is going to be about but write the contribution and write the rest of the paper around it.

Professor Moorman ____

I would just say, for me, and some people who were at the workshop know what I'm going to say because I think about two circles. One is the important circle – that things are just important because people are going to die, or managers are going to waste a lot of money for their company. Other things are just interesting because they are just super surprising that these two factors interact in this way, and you know it changes the way that we think about things. So, you can nest your contribution into the importance, or you can nest it into something that is interesting, or you can look for something in that sweet spot in between. If you can hit both of those—that's special.

I would say, you never want to put your contribution against the background that no one has ever done it before, that's never a contribution. That's a gap, but you still have to say why it's important or interesting. So, I think that is one thing to really be aware of. And you see a lot of papers like that, where people say… no one has ever done this before, and then they don't go on and sell it for why it's important for me to go on and read this paper.

Professor Stewart ____

Yeah, there may be a reason why the topic has not been dealt with.

Professor Kumar ____

I'll follow up with what Christine said. First, establish the importance and interesting aspect of it. Once you have done that, you have to show that nobody has done that essentially. There could be somebody in chemistry who has done it or in physics. What we do is… we got the problem to solve from some business or someplace interesting, then we create a table to show how the study is different from other studies. How is this one thing important and interesting? And what are the dimensions of it? So that table clearly delineates the contribution as a unique contribution compared to all other studies done or created. The title of Table 1 in the manuscript is related to the literature. If it's exactly the same as something else already done, then there is no study to do. If you do that as the first task then you don't fall into the trap that the panel of reviewers is saying, which is… there is a gap and nobody has done it, but you don't know if it's interesting. First, establish that this is the phenomenon I want to study and then say… has anybody done this, and in what context. Somebody could have done just the conceptual work, yours is empirical or analytical, or they have done it in services, and you are doing it in a product category. So, you need to really understand where the intended contribution is and then see how it works out.

Professor Ladik ____

Please allow me to make up a hypothetical example. Let's talk about a phenomenon Z, and four other authors, author A, B, C, and D all made contributions to the literature with phenomenon Z. And here you are in the introduction of your paper and you need to make your contribution statement. You'll know you have a contribution when the conversation in the literature, i.e., the literature review from authors A, B, C, and D on phenomenon Z will change from here on out. Because of the research you are presenting, everyone is going to have to cite you afterward because the conversation has changed in the literature.

Then it's not a gap. Sure, there might have been a gap and you can say… there is a gap. But a gap itself is not a contribution. The gap is something you have to argue for the contribution. And if you can say, Professor A, and Professor B, Professor C, Professor D said this, but the research presented here says something completely different, and it adds something beyond what is already known, then you have a contribution statement in the beginning of your paper.

Audience Question ____

When studying real-world marketing questions, would you consider a contribution to managers a contribution in itself? Or would you recommend starting with a theoretical contribution?

Professor Ladik ____

I think that it depends on the journal. Some journals have a particular constituency, that we can satisfy a contribution to that journal depending on the constituency. Some journals care more about methodology and some journals care more about the theory. But it could be more of a journal conversation.

Professor Stewart ____

If you are working in consumer behavior, you might publish your research in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. They're going to insist you have a substantial theoretical discussion. On the other hand, you might seek to publish in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*. They quite explicitly are not interested in a lot of theory - their niche, if you will, is to publish relatively short interesting empirical papers without necessarily a whole lot of theoretical framework. So, you can publish a paper in either, but they are going to have to be written in somewhat different ways because the journals define what they are looking for in a somewhat different way.

Audience Question ____

When you have a discussion on the contribution, you determine what your contribution is and then you need to sell it. Usually, I see in papers that authors make three contribution statements. Is this a kind of magical number… does it matter? I may have one big contribution, and for some reason, you have four or five comparable contributions. How would you approach selling these contributions?

Professor Moorman ____

I don't think that matters. There is no magical number, but you want the reviewer or the reader to walk away saying, "wow" this is important enough to give up space in the journal. In general, I would not worry about those kinds of things. That's not the way we would think about the problem. If I saw one big contribution in a paper, I would be satisfied. So, it's not something I would worry about.

Professor Stewart ____

Ten insignificant, trivial contributions don't make up for one big one.

Professor Ladik ____

One big "wow" is better.

Breanne Mertz ____

We have one more theme and we'll move onto the next one.

The third theme of our session pertains to successfully navigating the review process and responding to the reviewer or editor comments. So, the first question that we will start off with, that was submitted is:

After receiving the manuscript for review, how do I properly address the editors and reviewers?

Professor Ladik ____

Even though we are talking about this from a journal perspective, depending on where you are at in your doctoral career you are probably also going to be going through a very similar process when you are pitching your dissertation idea. And you have a faculty that are acting like reviewers. You'll have to convince them as well that this is viable.

Professor Moorman ____

So, this is after you get the reviews back?

Breanne Mertz ____

Yes, and then properly addressing the response.

Professor Moorman ____

In the book that's going around, I wrote a chapter with a group of former editors at Duke on responding to reviewers. There are five of us, and we each have kind of our own perspective on this topic so there isn't a science. What you want to do is read the comments you have been given. I wouldn't summarize the editor's comments to the reviewers. If I, as the editor, write you a letter, I would want you to repeat my comments back to me. That's just my preference at the *Journal of Marketing* and then share with me your response. But really writing your reviewer comments is just communicating all the work that you have done back to the editor and to the reviewers. So, first you have to have a revision plan.

Start by noting the five or six main things you need to do in the paper… get some new data, fix this analysis, prove our theory, whatever those happen to be. Then you do that work and you communicate that to the review team. We really like authors to put a summary of their major revisions, and as an author, now as an editor, I'm asking my authors to do it because I think that it focuses the review team on a set of issues. Here are the five major revisions. It also allows you to shorten the review comments that maybe one of those major revisions three people asked you to do it, so when you get to their comments you can just say see major revision one, thank you very much. Where you have gone in great detail, and you point them back to the place in the paper, see pages 3-6 where you made that change. So those are some broad guidelines that I would recommend that might be helpful.

Professor Stewart ____

I'll suggest a couple of others before you even start writing. Read the reviews and go for a walk. They are probably not as bad as you think they are. Secondly, you should have a mentor or two who you can talk to about your reviews. So, you get the reviews back, you read them, you take the walk, calm down. A few days later, go to your mentor and say this is the response that I've gotten, what is your take on them? You may think they are terrible; your mentor may say these are some of the best reviews I've ever seen because your mentor has some perspective after seeing a lot of reviews. And it's really helpful if you get another perspective and this doesn't need to be a coauthor, it can be someone you simply respect and is willing to help you, but they can provide some perspective and they can say some things like, this reviewer is absolutely right – I have no idea what you are trying to say in that paragraph. But that external perspective can be very helpful. And then you can begin to think about how you are going to craft the particular revision and responses.

Professor Kumar ____

What I do is try to do more than what the reviewers are suggesting. At least one or two things. Not only do you have to satisfy them, but you also have to show that you care about this research and while doing this you also thought about doing more of this and that. That's the way I like to look at it because doing research and getting an opportunity to revise is like winning a million dollars. So, once you get that chance, you can never let it go. So, you need to see what else you can do. Hold onto that dearly - to your heart and do it!

Professor Ladik ____

So, from a practical standpoint, you also, in short order, need to communicate back to the editor what your intentions are going to be. You know, you might need to take a walk, but in 24 or 36 hours you need to get back to the editor… thank you for the review, we are going to submit a brand-new paper. Thank you for your review, thank you for your time, we are going to pull the paper from the review process now because of… you need to have some kind of communication back to the editor on what your intentions are going to be. You don't want to leave the editor hanging, or have them need to track you down again, and you get a note back… 'we haven't heard from you for 36 days,' meanwhile, you started your revision, but they don't know you started your revision.

Audience Question ____

So, I've heard people talking about… sending a paper to a copy editor. Before you press send on a manuscript… I am curious to hear what your process is like. You've been working on something for so long, each sentence probably feels like your own child. How do you personally go through that process?

Professor Ladik ____

I give it up. I personally give it up. Ok, this was my child… here copy editor this is no longer my child, please fix it! I think my child should look like this, but you tell me where the period should be.

When I'm really involved in a research project, I get so into it, that I use perspective. I can't see it anymore. I'm too close to it. I need some distance; I need someone else to look at it. Preferably someone that isn't a marketing professor.

Professor Kumar ____

I don't know how many of you have tried outsourcing for copyediting, it's quite an expensive process. Four cents a word, so it's quite expensive, so I chose the easy option, I married one!

Professor Ladik ____

When I was a doctoral student, our office manager at USF, she was amazing. We would buy her dinner and she would read our papers.

Professor Locander ____

She now has a consulting practice. Reading dissertations all over the United States, and she does better now than when she was the administrative assistant.

Professor Moorman ____

You need someone who cannot just copy edit, but someone who really tests your logic. Are you being logical in the way that you have written this paper? Have you defined all your constructs? Some copy editors will do that if they are really good, but most copy editors will just give you a grammar check. If you can find somebody like that, maybe your faculty advisor, and you can do that for one another… do these paragraphs work well together? Do they lead from one to the other? Have I defined everything? Am I using these terms consistently throughout the manuscript?

The other thing I do - reading it out loud - like what Bill said… I know that Amos Tversky used to do that, read his papers out loud. The other thing I do is read my paper backward. Not word for word, but section by section. When I think I'm finished with it, I start with the conclusion, then I read the discussion, then I read the results, etc., What happens is you get tired. If you're always reading from front to back, maybe the front is pretty good but the back is a mess. Because by the time you get there, you are fatigued. So, when you read it in reverse order, you start to see things.

Professor Ladik ____

Now that's a nugget!

Breanne Mertz ____

Now that is really good. Alright, any other questions?

Jennifer Locander ____

When is it appropriate for ask for clarification? For example, I got a review back and one of the comments was, 'no theory here.' And that was the comment for the theory section, and obviously, there were theories in there, so how do I address this? Is it something I can ask or inquire about? Or should I take my best shot and really try to emphasize the theoretical framework to the reviewer? Or is it appropriate to contact the editor for clarification?

Professor Moorman ____

I say very rarely and that varies by journal. If I were to get a comment like that, I would probably ask other people to look at it with me and following Dave's advice. I would say, and following my experience as an author, when reviewers give me comments its usually because of something I've done - I haven't written it clearly, I haven't called it out as a theory, I haven't explained things well, or I've contradicted myself. I can't sometimes see that, but other people can tell me… you don't really have any theory in here. You have a collection of definitions, but you haven't developed any propositions or x-y relationships. So, getting that outside advice can be helpful.

Now, I had an author write to me the other day and said, the AE told us there is a confound and we don't think there is a confound, and this is why, we don't think there is a confound. Now I am going to go back and look at that and see if they are right. So, if that's the case and they were deep into the review process, they wanted to make sure they didn't come back with a mistake, but they do think they are right. But I would say very rarely.

One reason an author might want to come back and ask a question is when they are getting contradictory advice. You know, when reviewer one tells them to do something and reviewer two tells them to do the opposite. Our job as an editor is to sort that thing out for you. We should be giving you very explicit direction when that happens… we want you to talk to reviewer one. And we might want to talk to the AE and engage with them about that because we want to be very constructive and clear with you, or we might say either of these are viable directions, think about what's best for your paper. And then when you write back you can say, the editor said this was up to us, or the editor said to go with reviewer one. Now reviewer two gets quiet because they realize that there is clear direction in the review process. And hopefully, that is what you would get, I think that is the editor's job - to help with stuff like that.

Professor Stewart ____

It really does depend on the journal because for some journals, the role of the AE is to try to sort through those contradictions, and then you should pay attention to what the AE is telling you. And then a really good AE is going to see the contradictions that emerge among reviewers, then they are going to try to give you some advice. So, pay attention to what the AE is telling you. Other journals actually ask for a revision plan. You know, send us back two pages on how you plan to address the issues that have been raised, and that actually provides a means by which you can have the dialogue about, this is what we plan to do. And you can get feedback on that.

Professor Locander ____

One thing that **…** if you're responding to an R&R, don't take that casually. In some of the best papers I've published, the response to the reviewers and editors was longer than the paper because they talked about some theoretical things, and they were… not wrong, but they perceived it differently. So, you know, for a 30-page, double spaced paper, we sent back 25 pages single-spaced to make our case. They can be wrong and misread it, and we will get a dialogue going on it. So, sometimes you want to put a lot of effort into a responding, because otherwise, 'oh we found no theory,' 'oh there was theory on page 12.' That doesn't help the editors, that doesn't help the AEs, they are just sort of lost then. But if you can build your case inside your R&R, that kind of helps everyone out. And that's the best shot you have, right? It could still be rejected. But at least you've made your case.

Professor Stewart ____

One caveat here… as an editor, I don't like the long responses back or as a reviewer for that matter. What I often find is… things that what should have been in the manuscript, what should have been in the revision, actually ends up in the comments to the reviewers. As the reviewers or editor, I have frequently had to say… 'the two paragraphs at the top of page three of your response, really ought to go in the manuscript.' I think that if you do your revision and then point to what you have done, see page 31 paragraph 2 where we have addressed that, and maybe a sentence on what you've done… your revision will be better. Remember, we are not going to publish the comments to the reviewer; we are going to publish the paper. So, be sure it's in the paper, and I think that provides in many cases a way to deal with the information overload of long responses to the reviewers and the editors. Now, I'm not editing a journal anymore, so you don't have to worry about me, but I really hated to get back 30 or 40 pages back worth of comments to the reviewers. Particularly when I found that a lot of that belonged in the paper itself.

Professor Locander ____

So, do a good job!

Breanne Mertz ____

A question from the back of the room?

Audience Question ____

Question, or more like curiosity, but to the editors, full disclosure I'm not a doctoral student, I've had the pleasure of attending several sessions like this, just wondering… are we getting better? Are we getting it? Have you seen a trend in terms of authors being able to respond in the manner that's required for publication in journals? Are you seeing fewer or less rejects? Of the ones that you're seeing from fit or contribution? I'm just curious!

Professor Moorman ____

I think *JM* is like a lot of the major journals where we have about a 35% - 40% desk reject rate, and about a 10% acceptance rate. So, I think a lot of desk rejects come from people in countries where they haven't had strong training. So, they just don't really know how to do academic research. Those are the people I say, go and read *JM*. Or people who haven't taken the time to think about what editorial mission is of *JM* or whatever journal they are targeting. So, you want to write your paper for a journal - that means everything from the focus, to the formatting - look at what people are doing and if there are papers written on your topic in that journal. One of those reviewers will likely get it so you want to be pointing back to those papers, and really positioning your paper for that journal.

I'm an optimist by nature, and I have a very strong positive feeling about the field, I think we keep improving, and so I'm not feeling pessimistic about the progress that we have made. In doctoral education, these sessions, all the stuff we do, has helped lift the field. It's working.

Breanne Mertz ____

Alright… We have a chance for one more, maybe two more questions.

Audience Question ____

So, I've gotten some advice in terms of simplicity… keeping your research simple. Don't make a model too complex so people can't follow. Don't make it so daunting they don't even want to follow. But at the same time, I sometimes feel that in reading, especially the top journals, some of the publications or the manuscripts that have gotten published tend to have some advanced methodology, advanced theoretical development, etc. So, not necessarily wondering if that advice I have gotten is incorrect, but is that advice going to tailor you down towards certain journals as opposed to opening up opportunities to the top journals?

Professor Stewart ____

I would differentiate between using simple and advanced methodologies. You can use advanced methodologies that are appropriate and still be simple, in the sense of explaining what the question is and talking about the results. I mean it's not necessary to be as complex as a lot of papers have become.

I do think that it is often the case that the methodology ends up driving the complexity of the paper because the author wants to convince us how good they are a methodologist. And that's not the point. You know, I think some of the best papers are, at their heart, very simple. They answer a simple question. Now, they involve sophisticated methodology, but you don't need to know the methodology to see… that was a really interesting question, we didn't have that answer before, and that is a really outstanding contribution.

Professor Moorman ____

I agree with what Dave has said. I think you see papers published at the end – after they have gone through a process and that process has changed them. So, I would say come up with the best idea that you can and don't worry about methods, because you will get suggestions about that in the review process. And I think it would be very uncommon, I haven't seen it in my whole career, a paper rejected on the basis of method. If it does, it's usually confounded with the fact that it's a weak idea, right? That's the biggest problem.

So really focus in on that. I would say, 70% of the time spent on a paper should be coming up with the strongest idea you can. That's what's going to save the day. That's what's going to carry the day for your paper. So, focus on that, really invest your time and energy.

And I did have one other note that I did want to come back to. Which is, don't feel like you need to immediately rush out and read all the literature on a topic, because that is the instinct. Starting out with an observation or, it could be popular press observation. That observation could come from anywhere. From there… think – think – think – think - think. Then read. Then go do some more observation. And then keep thinking and reading, but if you go and you read right away, a couple of problems arise. First, you go down the rabbit hole, and it will take you a long time to come out. Second, you're going to get contaminated. Then you're going to be thinking about what everyone has already written. You know, there is this white elephant stuff in psychology, you can't get the white elephant out of your head. You can't see through to the next idea. So that's why that observation… that thinking time. Think your own thoughts, talk to people, you know, work it over for a while and then maybe take some time to look at the literature, but set a limit on that and go do some more observation. And keep iterating through those steps.

Professor Stewart ____

But make your observation broad. There is a tendency in doctoral education for us to get very narrow by confining ourselves to the people in the same hallway we are. And they are probably interesting bright people, but they're probably not typical of most consumers or managers. And so, some of the observation you do needs to be off the university campus. It may be having a conversation with some managers. And those may not even always be directed at a particular research topic. What keeps you up at night? You know there are some really good ideas that might come out of a discussion. Just what kind of problems are you confronting? But you wouldn't actually know that unless you went and talked to a line manager or consumers. Consumers often do things - I genuinely consider consumers rational. They may not share my rationality, but I genuinely believe they're rational. But going there… asking people why they do what they do, and why they behave the way that they do. You know, why are they behaving that way in the store? Watch them in the store.

That's as important as reading the literature. That you need to do, but you need breadth.

Professor Locander ____

How many people in here, during this whole session thought about topics, topics like ethics, social justice? The future I talked about earlier is changing. Ethical behavior, the treatment of human beings, the nature of work, the role of consumers, etc., is going to be important in your lifetime because, if you will, there will be a contextual turn of the screw. We want to be observant of *those* things.

There is always a chapter at the end of the business textbooks on business ethics. I think over time in the next 20 to 30 years that chapter is going to move up. It should move up. Because responsible marketing is about ethical behavior in the marketplace from whatever dimension you want. And there is some study of cognitive style, which relates to things we have talked about, and that is divergent thinking and convergent thinking. When you jump to see a gap in the literature, you've already converged on that one point. So, there is that white elephant there, you're stuck with that white elephant.

So, just give it time, let it expand and then turn and start coming into the problem as you want to address it. And I think that's a helpful way to think about it.

Professor Ladik ____

Alright, everybody… take a deep breath. Our goal today was to be helpful! We sure hope we were helpful. First, we would like to say thanks to the Academic Council and DocSIG for giving us this opportunity to chat with you today. Thanks to the panel. We thank you the participants for your time. We thank you for your energy. Best of luck with your research!