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In 1982, the University of Chicago pioneered a new dimension in graduate education—interdisciplinary workshops that bring together students and faculty in the Divinity School, Humanities Division, and the Social Sciences Division for ongoing and collaborative exchange of ideas around particular areas of interest. By providing graduate students with a forum for presenting their research and writing, the workshops, which have been widely replicated at other universities, have become an important part of the UChicago graduate education experience. Workshops facilitate the dissertation-writing process and create opportunities for professionalization as they encourage students to engage rigorously with their own and their fellow students’ work through discussion, debate, evaluation, and critical feedback.

In addition to the academic importance of workshops, participation in a workshop series, which can include scheduled meetings as well as dinners and other social gatherings, serves well to combat intellectual isolation. The workshop setting provides an informal forum for students to develop close and supportive ties with their fellow students as well as faculty mentors and even guest faculty. More advanced graduate students often become mentors and role models to other students as they experience together the different stages of their transition from consumers to creators of knowledge. The workshops represent dozens of vibrant micro-communities of scholars where the participants engage in lively conversation and receive valuable insight and encouragement.