

Check Yes or No: Analyzing Student Satisfaction with the Texas A&M University Thesis Office

Christine Dromgoole

Thesis Office, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX

Introduction

Submitting and clearing the Thesis Office is often the last step in a graduate student’s academic career. Many students have already left the university by the time they submit to our office. Since students are not present much during and after submittal, the Thesis Office has historically had no accurate way to gauge their satisfaction. This made it difficult to improve processes, since any feedback or data that was obtained from students was anecdotal.

Beginning in the summer of 2009, the Thesis Office developed a survey for graduating students to measure their satisfaction with our services. A brief online survey is sent to every student at the point of clearing our office. The survey asks students their satisfaction levels on various components and services of the office. Students are also encouraged to provide suggestions on how we can improve our current services and/or what services we can add that they feel would be beneficial.

Collecting the Data

The survey was created using Google Docs. Google Docs is a free service available to all registered Google users. Questions can be configured to be mandatory or optional. Students can respond to our questions with drop-down menus with responses we designate or with free form text boxes (see Figure 1). All responses to the survey are automatically stored in a downloadable spreadsheet.

When a student clears the Thesis Office, they receive a congratulatory email to let them know all requirements have been completed. In this email, we inform them of the survey, emphasize its importance, and provide a link to it.

The survey first asks the respondent for some biographical information and then asks them to rate their satisfaction levels and provide comments on 11 key services that our office provides. Those services are:

- Pre-Submittal Conference
- Workshops/Presentations
- Website
- Thesis Manual
- Templates
- ETD Submittal System (Vireo)
- Review Process
- Customer Service
- Knowledgeability of Staff on Copyright Issues
- Academic Integrity (TurnItIn.com)
- Overall Service

Analyzing the Data

After the completion of a semester, the spreadsheet of results is downloaded and analyzed. The biographical data is analyzed to see what percentage of students responded, what degree they were seeking, and which college they attended. The average response rate is 52.41%. Doctoral students generally respond at a slightly higher level than Master’s students. (See Figure 2).

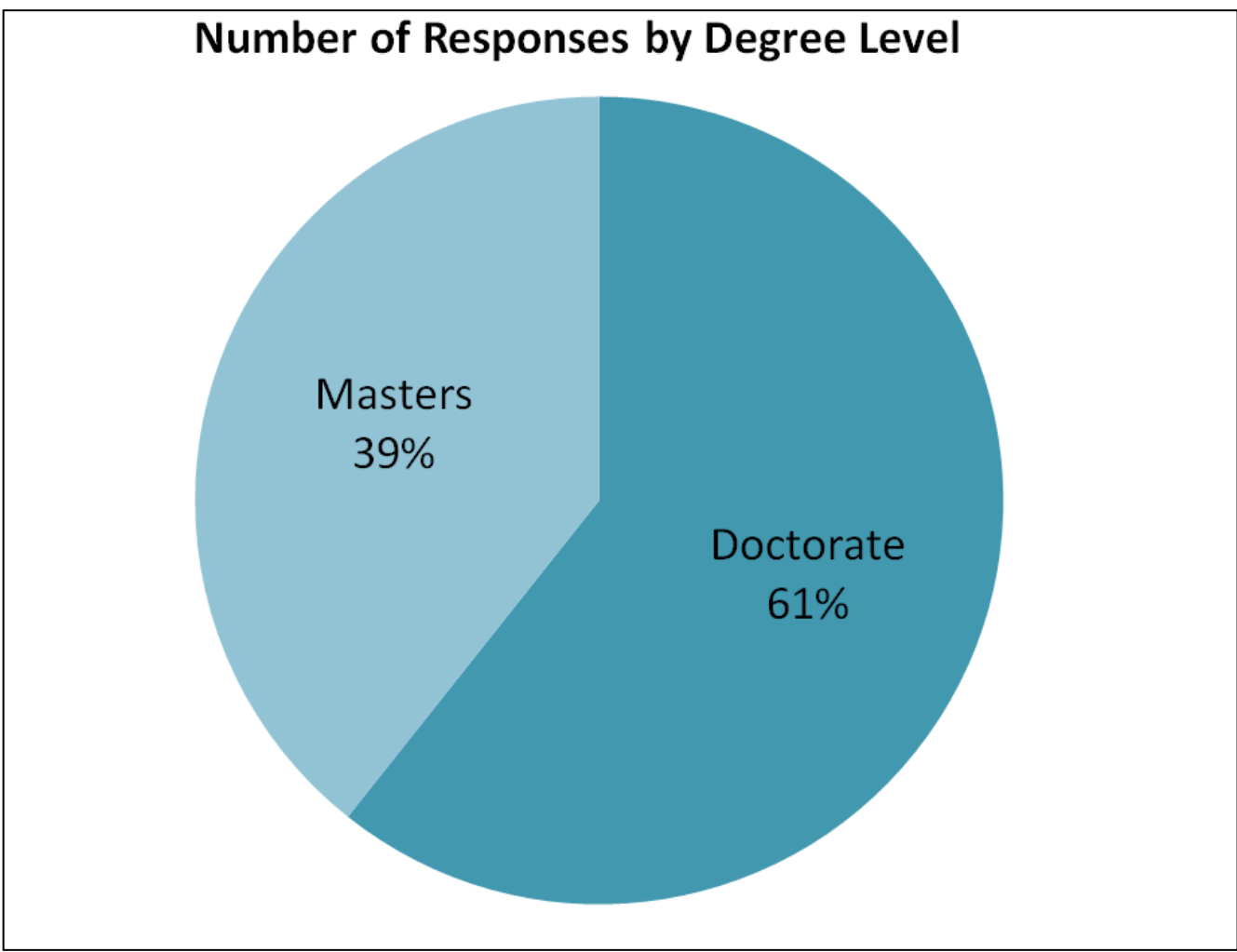


Figure 2. Average percentage of respondents by degree type from Summer 2009 to Summer 2011.

The satisfaction levels of each category are then analyzed. General satisfaction in each level is provided by students as a drop-down menu choice. They can choose:

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neutral
- Dissatisfied
- Very Dissatisfied
- No Response
- Not Applicable (depending on the category)

There is also a free form comment and suggestion box after each category. Graphs are generated from the satisfaction data and the comment data. Since the comment data can vary widely, I look for repeated key words (e.g. “Helpful” “Fast” “Unclear”) and at how often those keywords appear. See Figure 3 for an example of the graphs that are generated.

When all graphs are generated, I put together a report of the findings to present to the entire staff. This report includes all the graphs pictured, as well as the tables those graphs are based on. The idea is to present the information in as many ways as possible, so that all staff members can quickly absorb the information.

In addition to the hard data, I like to include some visually stimulating ways to absorb the free form comments. I do this in two ways, first I generally include one or two pages per category with selected quotations from students. These pull quotes are intended to highlight the feedback in the student’s own words and/or to illustrate any trends in their observations. I also create a word cloud using all the comment text to graphically illustrate what our students are saying. (See Figure 4)

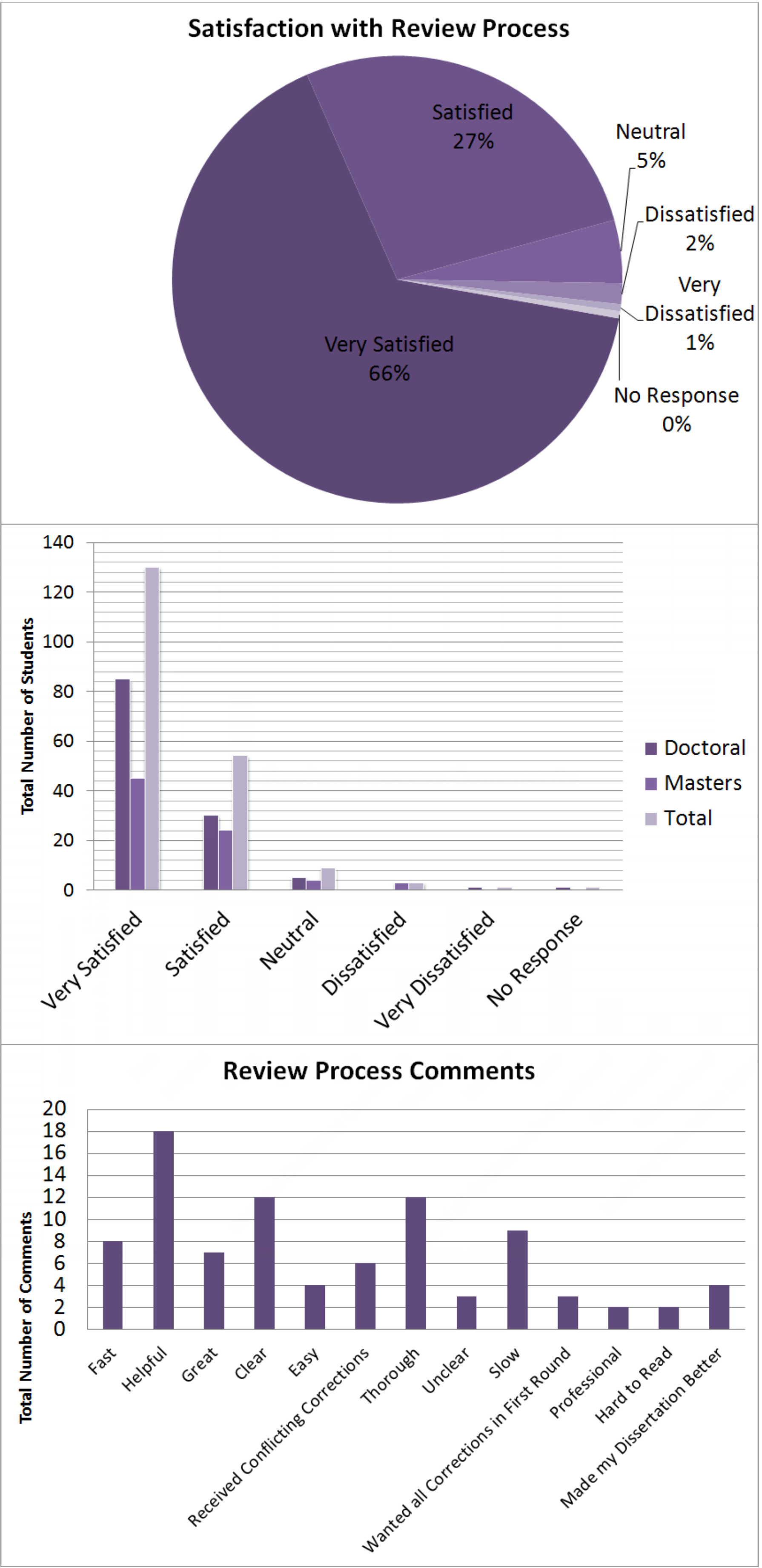


Figure 3. Examples of the different graphs generated. The pie chart and first bar graph are generated using the satisfaction data, and the second bar graph is based on keywords.

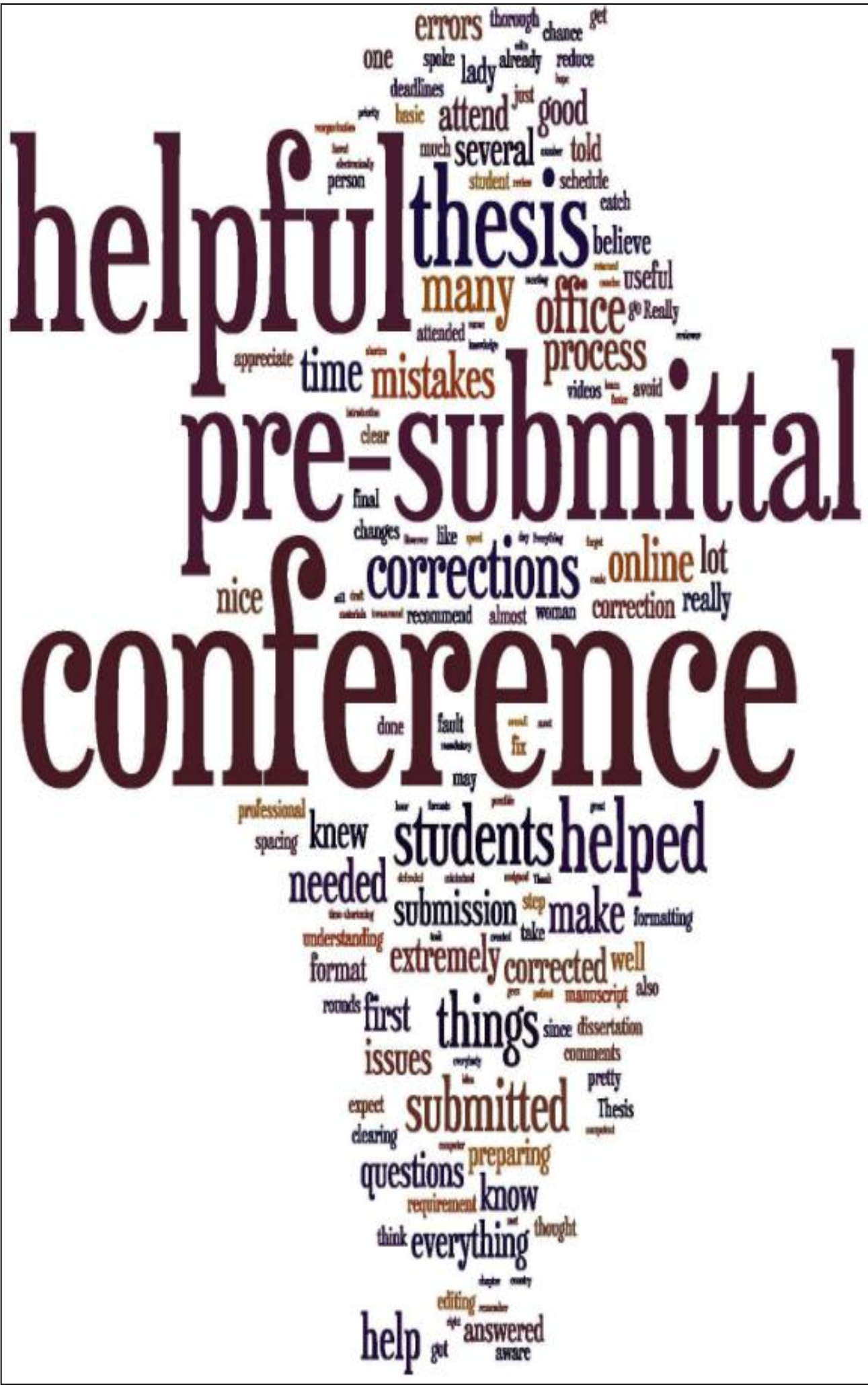


Figure 4. Word cloud generated by student comments.

Results

Once the report has been completed, our staff come together in a meeting to go over the results and discuss the findings. Often, in addition to comments, the students include suggestions for improvement. We keep track of the kinds of suggestions made and when there are trends, we try to improve or offer more services based on these suggestions or complaints.

Based on feedback from the survey we have made the following improvements:

- Rearranged parts of the website to make it easier to navigate.
- Developed a Microsoft Word template that uses the Styles feature to generate an automatic table of contents, list of figures, and list of tables.
- Developed a series of handouts specifically for Macintosh users.
- Developed a users group for our LaTeX users. We created a website, offer a semi-annual meetings, and facilitate discussion among students.
- Updated and simplified some of our technical handouts to make them more user friendly.

For Further Information

Please contact Christine Dromgoole at cdromgoole@tamu.edu. You can visit the Texas A&M University Thesis Office website at <http://thesis.tamu.edu>.

Visit docs.google.com to create your own survey.

Thesis Office Post-Clearance Satisfaction Survey

Please take the time to fill out the following survey. Your opinions are very important to the staff in the Thesis Office. By providing us with your perspectives, you will be enhancing our ability to provide quality services for future students at Texas A&M University.

* Required

Last Name, First Name (optional)

Please list your semester of graduation. *

No response

Please list your year of graduation *

No response

Please list your degree level *

No response

Please list your academic college *

No response

Please list academic college if 'other'

Figure 1. Screenshot of the survey.