

# All Graduate Students Can Be WACKy: Supporting Graduate Student Writers Across the Curriculum

## An In-Depth Look at One Research Institution's Program

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<http://www.phdcomics.com/comics/archive.php?comicid=1531>

# Today's Presentation

- Trace WAC's history with graduate students
- Outline our WAC program and the ways in which we work to support graduate students
  - In particular, we'll highlight changes made over the last two academic years
- One of our Graduate Writing Fellows will share his experiences and how his role as a fellow intersects with his research interests

# Today's Presentation, continued

- Discuss how to implement effective strategies for supporting graduate student writers across the curriculum at your institution
- Questions, Discussion, and Chaos!

## Let's Start with a Question (WAC & YAK!)

*What kind(s) of support do graduate students need?*

- Take a few moments, meet your neighbor, and chat!

# Let's Start with a Question (WAC & YAK!)

*What kind(s) of support do graduate students need?*

- Need everything - writing, statements, evidence, conclusions, citations
- Need support - writing center as one type
- Hearing from graduate students and “asking about their greatest barriers”
- Time
- Also expected to teach → will need to comment on other writing
  - Support as writing instructor, commentor, and feedback provider
- Broad range of writing support from 1st semester to the final send off
- Non-dissertation writing
  - Job market writing, professional writing
- Other academic genres
  - Literature reviews
- Support from advanced colleagues and faculty in accessible (online) formats

# Why Offer Graduate Writing Support?

- New traditions and conventions of writing (Gillespie, 2007)
- Higher-stakes writing tasks (Vorhies, 2015)
- Understanding academic style and stance (Phillips, 2013)
- Graduate students rarely exposed to WAC pedagogy
- Graduate students teach undergraduates

# Misconceptions About Graduate Writing Support

- Graduate students...
  - are “smart” enough to learn on their own (Rose & McClafferty, 2001)
  - will copy other models and learn that way (Silva-Ford, 2013)
  - can receive “remedial” support from undergraduate writing centers (Zawacki et al., 2007)

# Partnerships Between WAC and Writing Centers

- 70% of WAC programs foster writing center partnerships (Thaiss & Porter, 2013)
- Different epistemologies can strain WAC/writing center partnerships (Good & Baringer, 2013; Pemberton, 1995)



# Relationship Between WAC and Graduate Students?

- At large research institutions, like ours, graduate students play essential roles in both teaching and research.
- However, grads seem to be missing from Condon and Rutz's (2007) model of WAC's complex stakeholder relationships.
- Our WAC program conceptualizes graduate support as an integral part of the work we do.

# UC Davis' University Writing Program's WAC Program

“The WAC Program helps faculty and teaching assistants (TAs) in all disciplines integrate writing assignments and writing instruction into their undergraduate courses. The program also helps graduate students and postdoctoral scholars with various aspects of their writing, from global concerns such as organization to local concerns such as sentence clarity, and with writing in various genres, such as dissertation chapters, articles, proposals, teaching philosophies, and curriculum vitas.”

*Longest quote. We promise!*

# UC Davis' University Writing Program's WAC Program

- For over 25 years, the UWP's WAC program has offered these services from a team of UWP faculty members (who receive a course release for their service).
- For the last 10 years, the WAC team has also included WAC Graduate Writing Fellows, who offer one-on-one writing consultations with graduate students and postdoctoral scholars.

# WAC Graduate Writing Fellows

- Historically, the WAC Assistant Director for WAC Programs selected four to five graduate students (typically from the humanities and social sciences) to serve as Graduate Writing Fellows.
- Fellows earn a stipend for consulting two hours a week, hosting a graduate writing retreat once a quarter, and later, completing a year-long writing “project” informed by their work as Fellows.

# Programmatic Changes to the Fellows Program

- In 2013-2014:
  - A new Assistant Director for WAC Programs was appointed.
- In 2014-2015:
  - The Assistant Director for WAC Programs appointed a Lead Fellow.
  - Assigned a WAC faculty team member (Alison) to begin supervising the services and professional development of the Fellows.
- In the last two years, we've requested funding for additional Fellows (next year we'll have 7!), from Grad PathWays, our funding source.

# Programmatic Changes to the Fellows Program

- In 2014-2015 and 2015-2016, we've worked to:
  - Improve access to our services
    - Revised language/access to our website
    - Targeted outreach to graduate departments
  - Improve transparency of services, differentiating services
    - Drafted descriptions/protocols
    - Improved communication (between Fellows, WAC team, campus community, etc.)

# Programmatic Changes to the Fellows Program

- In 2014-2015, we began to offer (require) monthly professional development meetings for the Fellows.
  - PD meetings are typically an hour and a half long, and are focused around a central theme and related reading.
  - Meetings are designed to introduce Fellows to the best practices of one-on-one tutoring and guide Fellows in WAC pedagogies

# Programmatic Changes to the Fellows Program

- PD meetings now afford Fellows a space to share experiences and build a community
- We ask the Fellows to conceptualize themselves as experts in writing, in addition to experts in their fields
  - We regularly discuss the ways in which they can negotiate the disciplinary differences in the writing and writers they see in consultations
- We advise fellows to bring in personal expertise but also to ask questions



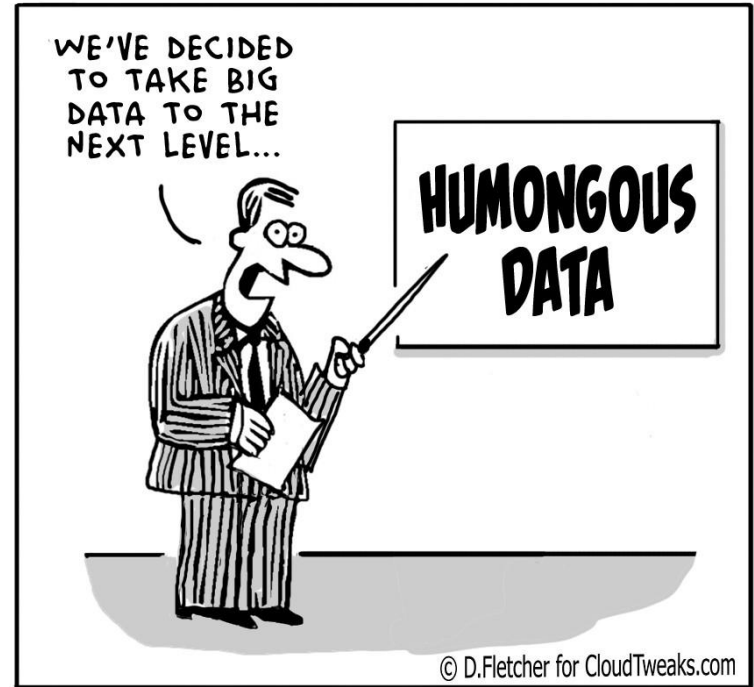
# Professional Development Meeting Goals

- A focused approach towards professional development
  - Thematic
  - Discussion of related, required texts
  - Invited speakers
  - Acknowledgment of the limitations of writing center theory; clear focus on WAC theory

# Professional Development Meeting Goals

- The meetings offer a space for Fellows to check-in on their projects
- This year, we also required that each Fellow contact a WAC faculty member to collaborate, either formally or informally
- Housekeeping items, such as publicity campaigns, are discussed and distributed
- Feedback loop is closed

# A Brief Look at the Numbers behind the 2015–16 Graduate Writing Fellow Consultations



[http://cloudtweaks.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/cloud\\_191-bigdata.jpg](http://cloudtweaks.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/cloud_191-bigdata.jpg)

# 2015-2016 Graduate Writing Fellow Consultations

- **59** Departments and Graduate Groups Served (39 STEM, 20 HSS)
- **290** 30-minute appointments scheduled
- **124** discrete students served

# 2015-2016 Graduate Writing Fellow Consultations: Languages Spoken



# Chinese

# 2015-2016 Graduate Writing Fellow Consultations

- Increasing number of discrete students served
- Focus on creating and disseminating relevant resources for our writers
- Increasing attendance to retreats
- Continued testing of virtual consultations
- Increase in professionalization of Fellows: publications, conference presentations, additional writing-related fellowships and work

# 2015-16 Graduate WAC Fellows



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**Matt Zajic, PhD Student, Education**

Matt Zajic is a third-year PhD student in Education (Learning and Mind Sciences emphasis) with a designated emphasis in Writing, Rhetoric, and Composition Studies. As a senior member of the Social Attention Virtual Reality Lab and a founding member of the Reading and Academic Development Center, he researches writing development in children with developmental and learning disabilities, and disability and writing in postsecondary education. Matt was a writing center and academic skills tutor at UC Santa Barbara, where he graduated in 2012 with a BA in Sociology and minors in Education and Professional Writing. When not writing, he can often be found behind his drum kit.



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**Jenae Cohn, PhD Candidate, English**

Jenae Cohn is a fifth-year PhD candidate in the English Department, pursuing a Designated Emphasis in Writing, Rhetoric, and Composition. Her scholarly work aims to articulate connections between new media theory and new media composing, considering both the theoretical and pedagogical implications of writing in a digital age. With seven years of experience as a freelance writing editor, four years of experience tutoring and leading an undergraduate writing center, and two years of experience teaching undergraduates at UC Davis, she has cultivated a love for helping others to communicate their compelling ideas. She is enthusiastic to serve as WAC writing fellow for a third year!



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**Lauren Fink, PhD Student, Neuroscience**

Lauren Fink is a second year PhD student in the Neuroscience Graduate Group. She received her BM in Percussion Performance from the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music and her M.Phil in Music & Science from the University of Cambridge (UK). Her master's thesis examined music's ability to modulate eyeblink patterns. At Davis, Lauren's research is focused on characterizing music-induced entrainment of ocular motor behaviors, e.g. eyeblinks and pupil dilation, and understanding the effect that music can, therefore, exert on not only temporal but also spatial attention.



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**Julia Singleton, PhD Student, Human Development**

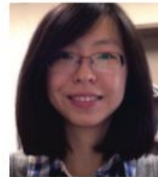
Julia Singleton is a third-year PhD student in the Human Development Graduate Group. She received B.A.s in Psychology and Liberal Studies (Elementary Education) from Loyola Marymount University, and a M.S. in Child Development from UC Davis. Her master's thesis examined the factor structure of a mindset, a self-belief about how malleable one's abilities are. Julia's dissertation extends this research to understand the role of people's beliefs about their abilities in different domains (e.g., math) and how this relates to other aspects of their life (e.g., self-esteem). Julia loves mentoring and teaching students from young children to adults.



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**Lina Yamashita, PhD candidate, Science and Agricultural Education**

Lina Yamashita is a PhD candidate in Science and Agriculture Education at UC Davis. Lina studies the teaching practices and learning outcomes of food education programs that aim to develop students' and teachers' understandings of food systems and sustainability. Before coming to UC Davis, she worked at Primary Source, a non-profit organization based in Boston that offers professional development programs on global education for K-12 educators. Lina has a BA in biology and environmental studies from Oberlin College and an Ed.M. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She lived in Japan, Singapore, and the Philippines before coming to the U.S. in 2004.



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**Jingjing Chen, PhD Student, Sociology**

Jingjing Chen is a third year PhD student in the Sociology Department. She studies family structure, social inequality, gender and social change. Currently, she is working on how divorce changes over time, and how it reflects and induces social inequality. Jingjing obtained her MA from Renmin University of China with a degree in Public Policy in 2013. She has been working as a teaching assistant in the Sociology Department, and has been working with students from various fields of study.

# Graduate Writing Consultations

- Offer 30-minute consultations (2 hours per fellow per week)
- Can bring in any type of writing (theses, dissertations, conference proposals, grant proposals, course papers, journal articles, etc.)
- We are not a copyediting service!



JEF FELT CONFIDENT IN HIS ABILITY TO  
USE MINIMALIST TUTORING PEDAGOGY

<https://superbentley.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/minimalist-tutoring-comic.png>



# Our Consultation Sign-Up System

- Online sign-up system through UWP website
  - <http://writing.ucdavis.edu/programs-services/graduate-writing-consultations>
- Graduate students and postdoctoral scholars able to sign up for 30-minute time slots with any fellow (depending on time constraints)
- Provides preliminary information about session intent (goals, type of writing, etc.)

# Some Quick Numbers: Word Frequencies in Consultation Goals over the Years

Word Frequencies throughout "Goals" for 2014-16

Unique Words = 486; only showing words  $\geq 5$  frequencies

Count	Word	Count	Word	Count	Word	Count	Word	Count	Word
164	my	27	grant	11	evaluation	8	chapter	5	skill
149	and	26	statement	11	cv	7	write	5	sbir
128	writing	26	revise	11	clearness	7	purpose	5	reading
102	to	25	i	11	about	7	proofreading	5	question
100	of	22	sentence	10	revising	7	plan	5	polish
92	the	20	essay	10	publication	7	organization	5	patterns
84	improve	18	skills	10	make	7	organize	5	paragraph
65	paper	18	ideas	10	letter	7	learn	5	mistakes
64	on	17	organization	10	is	7	edit	5	like
63	review	17	how	10	identify	7	am	5	journal
63	for	16	overall	9	work	6	you	5	clearly
62	a	15	checking	9	progress	6	would	5	clarify
56	proposal	14	personal	9	personal	6	sure	5	better
55	structure	14	assistance	9	papers	6	reviews	5	advice
46	grammar	14	an	9	more	6	paragraphs		
44	with	13	some	9	improving	6	if		
44	thesis	13	research	9	from	6	general		
35	help	13	nsf	9	english	6	ford		
34	application	13	draft	8	writing	6	first		
33	feedback	13	check	8	word	6	errors		
31	in	12	scientific	8	style	6	discuss		
31	get	12	manuscript	8	revision	6	content		
30	fellowship	12	flow	8	organizing	6	clear		
30	clarity	12	essays	8	need	6	as		
28	getting	12	editing	8	cover	6	address		
28	dissertation	11	teaching	8	consultation	5	travel		

Couple quick highlights:

- Number of different goals
- Diverse needs

## Some Quick Numbers: Word Frequencies in Types of Writing over the Years

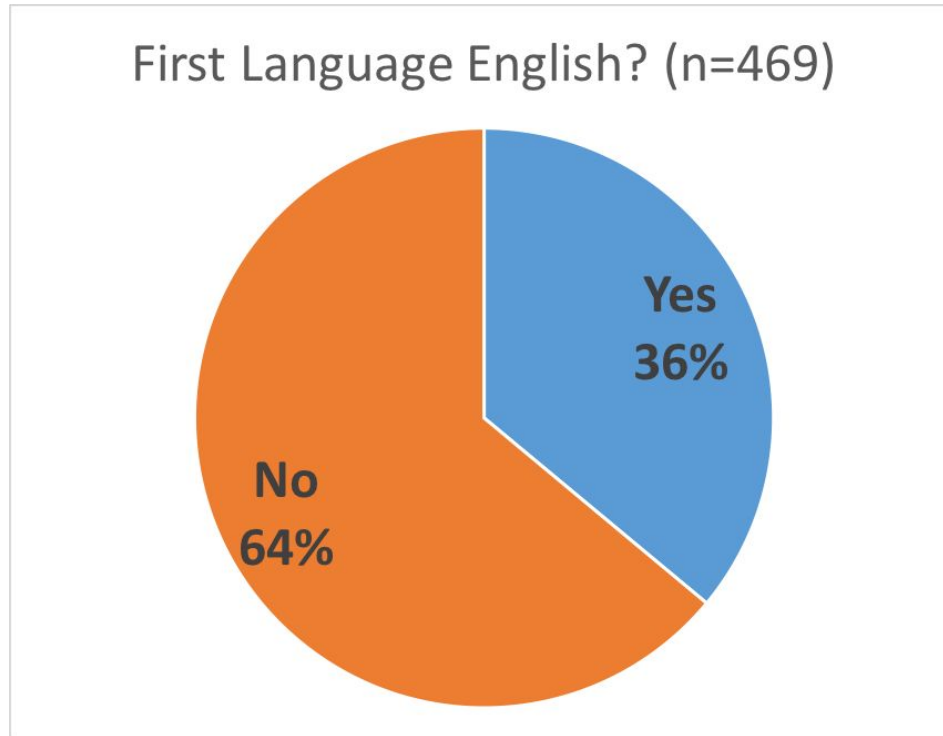
Word Frequencies throughout "Types of Writing" for 2014-16  
 Unique Words = 263; only showing words  $\geq 5$  frequencies

Count	Word	Count	Word	Count	Word
139	paper	18	purpose	8	in
119	a	18	draft	8	exam
112	proposal	17	my	7	report
82	thesis	17	manuscript	7	philosophy
67	dissertation	16	job	7	on
67	chapter	16	grfp	7	introduction
58	statement	15	teaching	7	essays
58	of	14	the	7	class
53	for	13	letter	6	technical
52	grant	13	conference	6	part
41	fellowship	12	essay	6	memo
41	application	12	cv	6	literature
33	seminar	11	market	6	chapters
33	research	11	cover	5	that
31	personal	10	i	5	short
30	journal	10	graduate	5	resume
28	article	9	submit	5	papers
28	and	9	qualifying	5	is
25	nsf	9	history	5	ford
24	review	8	scientific	5	assignment
20	to	8	publication		

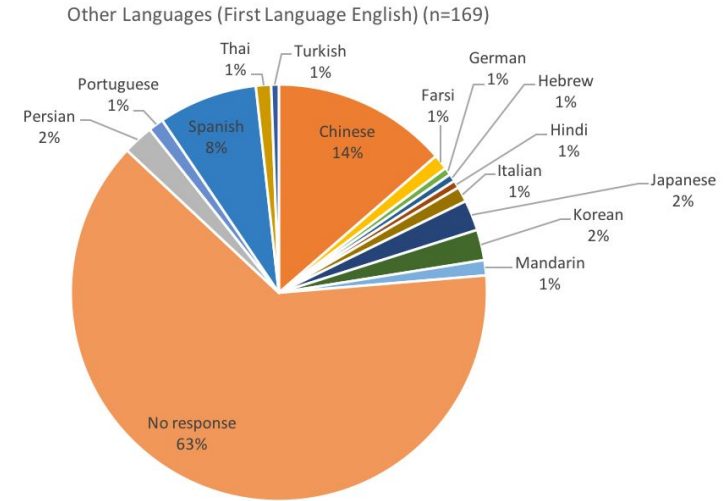
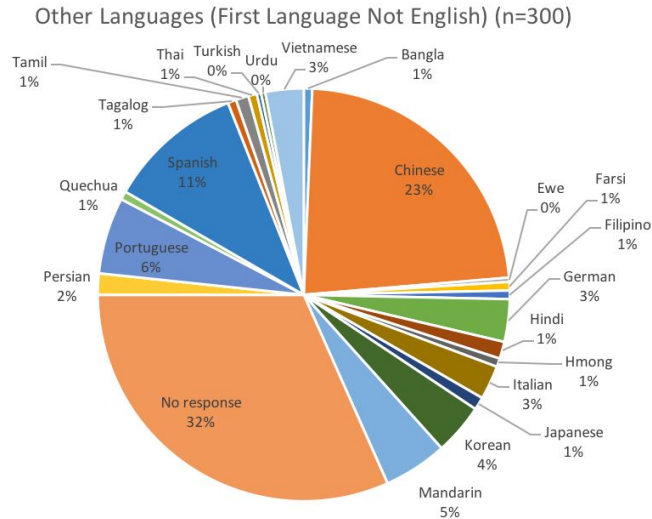
Couple quick highlights:

- Graduate student genres
- Heavy emphasis on different grant applications (notice any peculiar acronyms?)

## Some Quick Numbers: English as a Second Language (Data from 2015-16)



## Some Quick Numbers: English as a Second Language (Data from 2015-16)



Main takeaway: Graduate students from a number of different language backgrounds are seeking these services!

# Feedback and Comments from Graduate Students

“Thank you so much for running this program. It was truly helpful for me.”

“Thank you for your help! I had a great experience and cannot think of any areas for improvement.”

“The essays are done now, and were submitted in a fellowship application. I was very happy with the result at the end after my consultations.”

“I really felt like [the consultant] helped me make my essays for my fellowship much better than they were before.”

# Graduate Writing Retreats

- Offer 3-hour quiet writing spaces for graduate students run by WAC fellows
- Open to any and all graduate students
- Each fellow holds one per quarter
- Offer drop-in writing consultations during these retreats
- Snacks, coffee, and tea!



[http://www.widebaykids.com/images/images/Alison\\_Marsh/KIDquiettime1.jpg](http://www.widebaykids.com/images/images/Alison_Marsh/KIDquiettime1.jpg)

# Feedback and Comments from Graduate Students

“The writing retreats provide great spaces for graduate students to write quietly. There isn't much space on campus to do that so I really appreciate the effort.”

“Helpful to get another perspective, especially from someone in a different subject area.”

“It could help to have more writing retreats! Perhaps even on a weekly basis.”



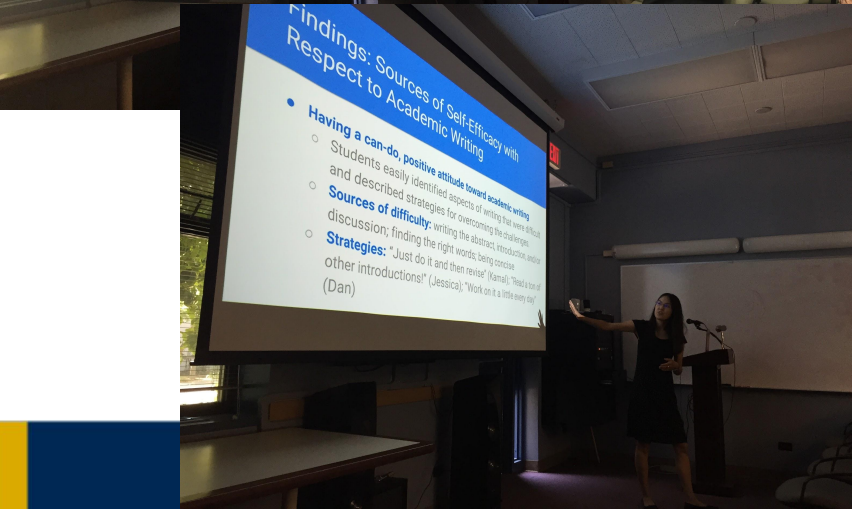
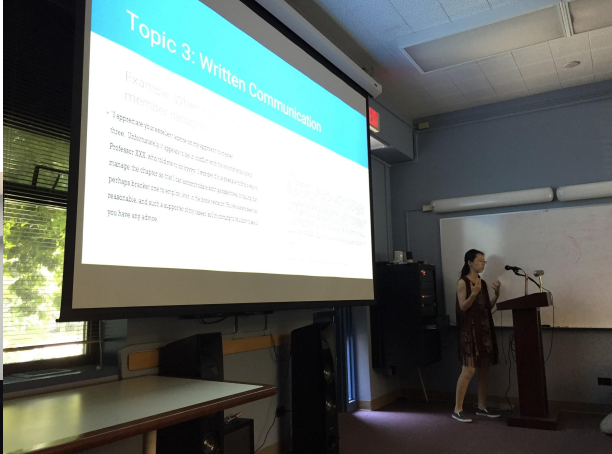
# Professional Development Highlight: Fellow Projects

- "Analyzing Consultation Trends and Reflections on Building a Dissertation Committee Workshop" **Jingjing Chen**
- "NSF Workshop Series: Preparing for and Writing for the NSF Graduate Student Fellowship Program" **Julia Singleton**
- "Postsecondary Writing Instructors' Self-Reported Attitudes and Actions Regarding Accessibility and Disability: A Small Pilot Study" **Matt Zajic**
- "Graduate Students' Self-Efficacy with Respect to Academic Writing and Seeking Help" **Lina Yamashita**
- "Building a Writing Partner Program for Graduate Students" **Lauren Fink**

## Professional Development Highlight: WAC Showcase

- Opportunity for fellows to present on their projects to interested parties at UCD (including UWP faculty, graduate program staff, and fellow graduate students).
- Opportunities for discussion, questions, and ideas for this last year and for years going forward.

# Professional Development Highlight: WAC Showcase

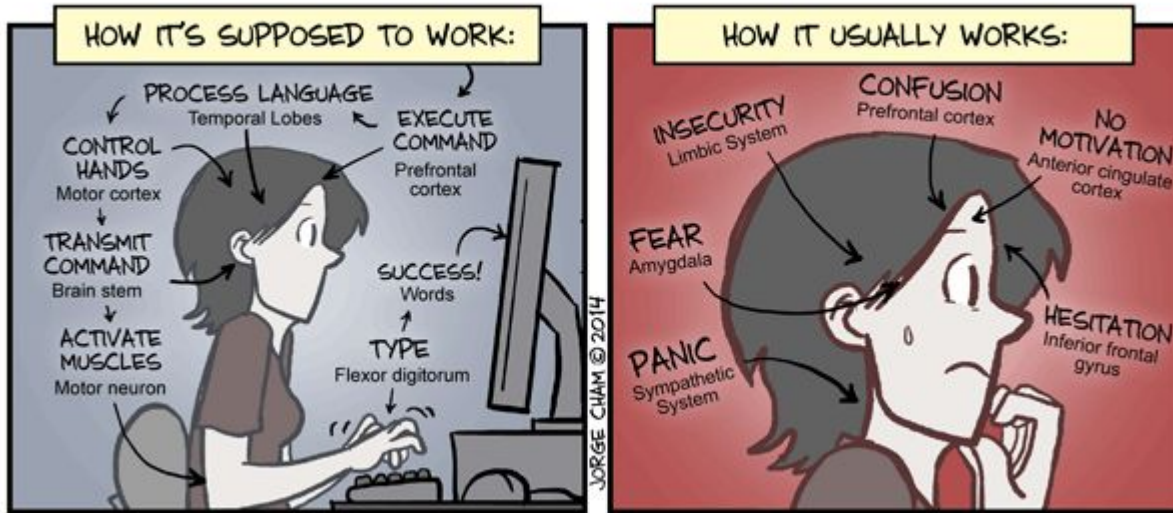


## **Future Steps and Looking Ahead to 2016-17**

- Increase in the diversity of Fellows from different disciplines
- Involve fellows more centrally in the activities of the WAC program at large
- Empower fellows to help other graduate students form writing groups and support networks
- Continued professionalization of Fellows within the WAC discourse community

# Research, Pedagogy, a Pinch of WAC, and Stir: The Life of a WAC Fellow

## THE NEUROBIOLOGY OF WRITING



WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM

# Graduate Writing Fellows are still Graduate Students

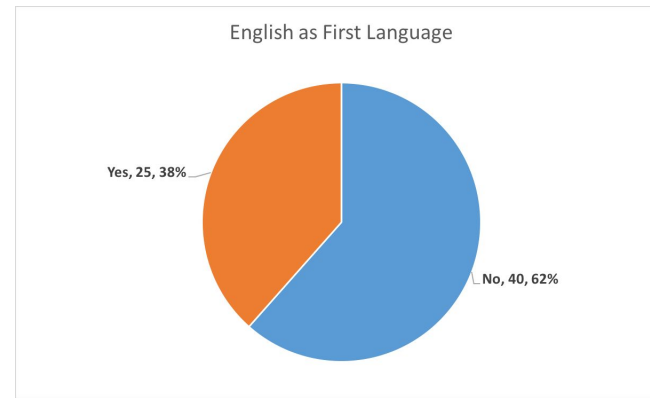
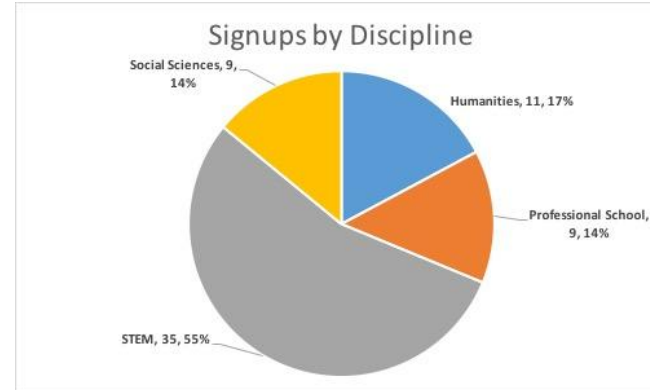
- Each of us with our own research interests, commitments, and experiences.
- Though I do writing research, I do not specifically do WAC-related writing research.
- Each writing fellow has varying degrees of writing studies theory, and knowing about writing studies is not an application requirement.

## All of that is really to say...

- I'm here sharing my experiences as a graduate writing fellow and not as a WAC-focused researcher conducting graduate writing consultations.

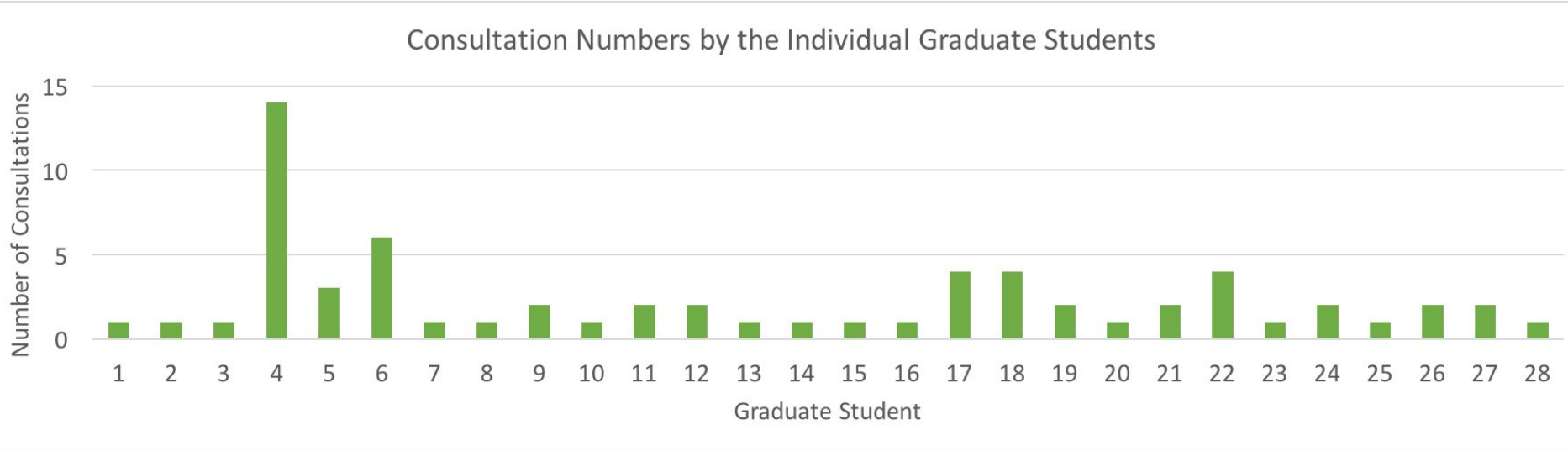
# Large Picture: My Consultations during this Last Year

- 70 total scheduled consultations
  - 5 formal cancellations
  - ~10 informal, last minute cancellations
- 28 unique signups





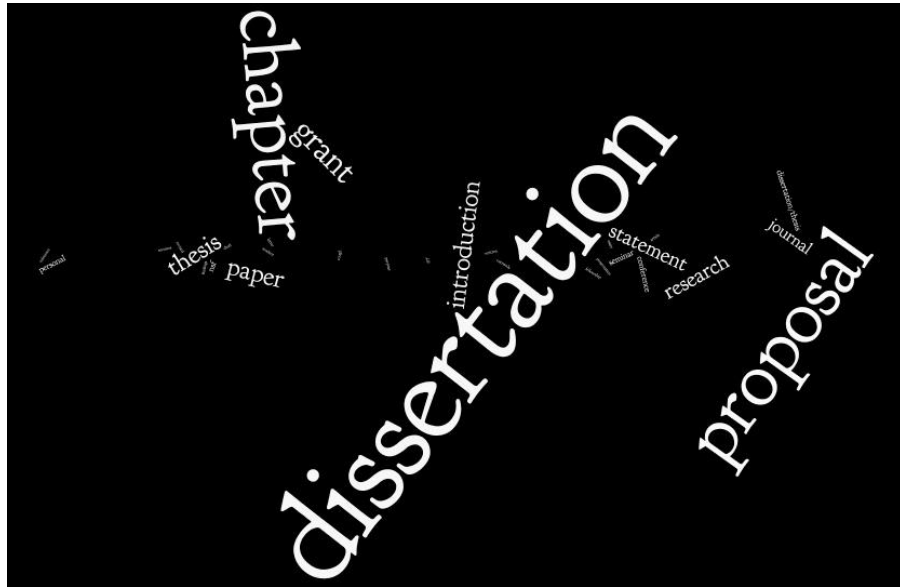
# Consultation Numbers by Individual Graduate Students



On average, most graduate students signed up for 1–4 consultations. However...

# Writing Pieces & Goals during Consultations - Word Clouds

Writing Pieces



Goals



## Two Quick Stories

- The graduate student with 14 consultations
- A postdoctoral scholar making the jump into independent writing

# Graduate Student with 14 Consultations

- First visit in early Winter Quarter (January-February)
- Walks in with a huge stack of paper
- Appears to be a full draft of a dissertation, though not quite...

# Graduate Student with 14 Consultations

- First visit in early Winter Quarter (January-February)
- Walks in with a huge stack of paper
- Appears to be a full draft of a dissertation, though not quite...
- Lots of notes, lots of pictures, and lots of anxiety
- Worked on organizational strategies and working through the drafting process
- “Hands-off” advisor

# Graduate Student with 14 Consultations

- Winter ended with a plan for spring and a plan for systematic consultation signups
- Spring started, and no sign. Until...

# Graduate Student with 14 Consultations

- Winter ended with a plan for spring and a plan for systematic consultation signups
- Spring started, and no sign. Until...
- Midway through the quarter: Five immediate signups for the next three weeks
- Different project this time and had a different trajectory for his dissertation

## Graduate Student with 14 Consultations

- Throughout our entire time, both organized in his ability to pull together sources and layout materials (using Scrivener).
- Though at the same time, student experienced major anxiety on an ideal structure of the dissertation.



# Postdoctoral Scholar & Independent Writing

- Postdoctoral scholar came in with two concerns:
  - 1) extreme independent writing anxiety
  - 2) concerns with language in a recent journal article.
- I decided to approach the writing anxiety first
  - Discussed resources, books, strategies, etc. for our entire first session.
  - Left with a smile on his face.

# Postdoctoral Scholar & Independent Writing

- Second session focused on more resources and more worries about independent writing.
- When we turned to the writing, we focused on language use (specifically “dictionary hard” words).
- Again, expressed gratitude and left with a long list of both resources and strategies to address some of the language concerns in the paper

# Postdoctoral Scholar & Independent Writing

- However, when feedback came in, this individual expressed major concern and worry on not focusing on the paper itself, neglecting to mention the resources or the support received in the first session.
- Feedback was highly critical of the focus on resources to become an independent writer rather than directly addressing (and correcting) all language concerns.

# These Two Stories and Many More

- Graduate students deal with writing situations quite different from undergraduates, and consulting with graduate students requires a different perspective.
- Writing support is a core component of the graduate school experience, and each consultation may represent a different, specific need.
- Need to balance both the direct support as well as available resources in order to help colleagues address issues beyond the consultation.

# Review: Ways in Which UCD WAC Program Works to Support Graduate Student Writers

- Consultations
- Retreats
- Workshops
  - “Dissertation Day”
- Targeted UWP Graduate Courses
- Writing Partner Program

# Huge Acknowledgement to the Full WAC Team

- Brenda Rinard, WAC Assistant Director for WAC Programs
- Melissa Bender, Katie Rodger, and Kelly Crosby, UWP lecturers and Current WAC Team Members
- Carl Whithaus, UWP Director
- Teresa Dillinger, GradPathways
- Numerous Graduate Writing Fellows!

# Thank You!

Now, let's WAC & YAK again!

- In which ways does your institution support graduate student writers?
- In which ways could your institution better support graduate student writers?
- Or feel free to bring up completely different questions!

Feel free to contact us as well!

**Alison Bright, PhD**

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**Matthew Zajic**

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