

"I KNEW GRAD SCHOOL WAS GONNA BE HARD BUT...":
COMMUNITY AND FEEDBACK IN GRADUATE WRITING SUPPORT

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DEDICATION

I'd like to dedicate this thesis to the wonderful support communities I participate in. From my family to my writing center workplaces at both Marian University and IUPUI to the Graduate Writing Groups themselves, each has been vital through this entire process. They've continually reminded me that I am not alone and there is always something to learn from others. Each of these communities inspired some part of this project, and I would not have been able to pursue this important work without them.

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Often, one of the first areas to cave under the pressures of graduate school is a graduate student's writing. Sometimes this is because a writer feels unprepared for the amount or types of writing or it is simply due to the fact that writing is a layered process that has not been fully explained to graduate students before. In any of these situations, there remains a need for graduate writing support that accounts for these varied experiences and the larger graduate school environment. In order to better understand these needs on the IUPUI campus and begin to address them, this study collected data from current IUPUI graduate students and a pilot Graduate Writing Group program through the University Writing Center.

Through this research, two key themes arose as vital to addressing graduate writer needs and student success in graduate school: community and feedback. By encouraging consideration of these topics within graduate writing programming, support offered can encourage these areas for graduate writers. Community provides space for students not only to learn from each other but also share common experiences and struggles. Through these spaces, graduate students can gain insight into their writing, program, field, and themselves by recognizing what is a natural part of the graduate school process, what needs to change, and how they develop as a result. Quality and diverse feedback leads to deeper understanding of a student's field, their voice, and their writing process. Without an understanding of these two elements of graduate writing, students remain more likely

to struggle with the graduate school process and with the liminal space of being students and professionals.

Marilee Brooks-Gillies, PhD, Chair

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- GWG—Graduate Writing Group
GWR—Graduate Writers’ Retreat
IUPUI—Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis
T.A. — Teaching Assistant
UGO—University Graduate Office
UWC—University Writing Center
WAC—Writing Across the Curriculum
WOS—Write-on-Site

Introduction

One of the most prominent memories from my first semester in grad school occurred during a night class. Balancing school, work, family (including being in multiple weddings), and mental health struggles was proving more difficult than I ever could have imagined. Halfway through the semester, my classmate, someone with years of teaching under their belt, turned to me and said, “I feel like I’ve gotten dumber since coming to grad school.” While I hated that she felt this way, I was also flooded with relief that someone else, who I knew was competent and intelligent, felt the same way I did. We were able to communicate our experiences and support each other when we knew that our feeling (that I later recognized as imposter syndrome) was a shared experience among graduate students.

Going into Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis’s (IUPUI) M.A. program in English, I felt severely behind the other students and unsure of what to expect. Most of my peers in the program were several years older than me, and many brought work experience in teaching (my intended field of work) with them. Others spoke of the research and editing experience they gained through internships. Also, switching from my literature-heavy undergrad to a writing and rhetoric focused M.A. caused me to question whether or not I was cut out for a graduate program in English. I felt like a Freshman all over again with no idea if I had the right strategy to succeed or what to expect from the program.

This personal interaction with the challenges of graduate school and with other graduate students pushed me to explore what kind of support IUPUI offered to students engaging with this next step in their education like myself and how this programming

could expand. I also gained personal experience with graduate programming through my work at IUPUI's University Writing Center (UWC). Through one-on-one writing consultations, I engaged with graduate writers on an individual basis, listening to the successes and hurdles they faced and how each of these impacted writing. In addition to this, I worked alongside another graduate writing consultant, Logan, to create a condensed version of the Graduate Writers' Retreat (GWR). Previously, the GWR would meet weekly, introducing a topic for discussion and leading into a time for graduate students to write together. We sought to build a one day "retreat" that graduate students with limited and changing schedules could attend. It covered a range of topics from technology within graduate school to writer's block. These opportunities allowed me to see the general experiences and roadblocks graduate students face and how each situation manifested in their individual lives.

Not only did my work increase understanding about graduate student needs, but it also taught me more about writing itself. Through the interactions with peers and scholarly readings, I could more fully comprehend the complexity of what graduate students and graduate schools are attempting to accomplish through this layered experience. Almost without realizing it, I began to merge interests that I had been dwelling on since my undergraduate: how a student's writing can support them through identity shifts, mental health issues, new experiences, and educational progress. I engaged with the various topics through casual conversations with peers discussing connections between writing and mental health, class assignments about structuring lesson plans around exploring identity through writing, and conference presentations encouraging the creation of writing groups that considered aspects of a student's life

outside of the academic. My peers, professors, and mentors guided me to narrow and personalize these interests by focusing on graduate students. The direction they provided then led me to create a study that explored the necessary elements of writing support for graduate students and implement programming to support graduate writers at IUPUI.

Because graduate students have multiple identity positions, I knew I could not fully account for each sufficiently. Therefore, my IRB-approved study focuses on the needs and concerns of graduate students as writers, rather than another aspect of the graduate student identity, due to my previous and current studies in English and writing centers. By collecting and analyzing data through surveys, interviews, and graduate writing group observations and reflections, I developed an understanding regarding what aspects of graduate support and writing feedback are beneficial to graduate writers on campus. This work progressed concomitantly with the development of new UWC programming with continued support from the University Graduate Office (UGO).

My thesis focuses on information about the kinds of writing support graduate students seek out by collecting data via surveys, interviews, reflections, and Graduate Writing Group (GWG) meetings. From my interactions with and research on graduate writing, two major themes arose: community and feedback. In this first chapter, I lay the groundwork of literature that fed into the research question and design. In my two data chapters, I examine the two themes of community and feedback and how they impact the graduate writing experience. These two themes proved to be foundational to the success of the group and growth of the GWG participants (including myself!) and should remain centered as future UWC graduate writing programming develops. Finally, in my

conclusion, I explore some of the results from this study and the areas that would benefit from further research moving forward.

Because graduate writers and writing as a field are incredibly multifaceted, the literature that serves as the foundation for this research is broad and varied. It pulls from many different fields and requires consideration of various identities, mindsets, learning styles, and backgrounds. The following literature review will aid in providing the foundational knowledge needed to approach the development of the GWG, understand the experiences described in the following chapters, and move forward with future programming at IUPUI and other campuses.

Literature Review

Continuing education into graduate school maintains the multifaceted identity transformation individuals experience throughout their academic journey, often adding new hurdles through progression in family, career goals, and more complex projects. Also added is the pressure to stand out from our peers in the form of publishing, community involvement, networking, and resume building. Juggling all of this is, naturally, stressful, and graduate writers are often in need of someone to guide them at a point in their life when many professors and advisors take a step back to allow for “self-sufficiency.” All of these factors impact how a student experiences graduate school and being a graduate writer.

Writing Foundations

Often, one of the first areas to cave under the pressures of graduate school is a graduate student's writing. Sometimes this is because a writer feels unprepared for the amount or types of writing or it is simply due to the fact that writing is a layered process that has not been fully explained to graduate students before. Students of all levels, but especially in graduate school, must be made aware of three fundamental characteristics of writing in order to feel primed to take on writing projects: writing as a social activity, writing as a recursive process, and writing as rhetorical.

In order to prepare students for the progression in their writing, programming to support them needs to be aware of and center the multifaceted nature of writing—that it goes beyond transferring thoughts to a page to actually processing through their thoughts. Too often, a writer's concept of writing is of the “solitary writer”—someone sitting alone at a desk typing furiously away. Too often, that is exactly how people write. However, writing is a social activity and inherently communal—a foundational point. Writing scholar Kevin Roozen points out that readers—a second pair of eyes—are just as important to the writing process as the writer. He states that “writers are always connected to other readers” and writing “is always an attempt to address the needs of an audience” (Roozen “Writing Is Social”). By working in connection with others, these needs and the best way to address them can be explored in ways that a single writer cannot accomplish.

Building from writing as social and knowledge-making, Claire Aitchison and Cally Geurin emphasize in “Writing Groups, Pedagogy, Theory, and Practice: An Introduction” that the writing process is recursive which greatly impacts how writing is

approached in general. Again, rather than seeing writing as something that is completed toward the end of a student's research or once all the "thought processing" is finished, writing is something visited again and again as a way to understand their work and themselves in that work (Aitchison and Geurin 9). If this cyclical nature of writing is not made clear to graduate writers, they may not understand why their writing is taking so much out of them. Anne Ruggles Gere gets to the heart of this idea when she writes that there is a "contrast between seeing language as a conduit or conveyer of thought and seeing language as the medium in which ideas are developed..." (5) and that writers often need support to see how writing can develop thought. Writing consumes the graduate student's day and, whether or not they come from degrees that did not include much writing, this proves to be a large hurdle to overcome. How graduate students and writers are prepared (or not prepared) for graduate school significantly impacts their experience and transition into this new period.

Lastly, Roozen also makes visible the fact that writing is "rhetorical"—an act that is closely tied to the social nature of writing and must be contextualized by the thoughts of the writer and reader, the purpose for which the piece is written, and the field in which the piece is written. Doreen Starke-Meyerring draws this point nicely into graduate writing itself by noting that

a rhetorical understanding of doctoral writing means recognizing writing as a site of long-term socialization or 'disciplining' of doctoral scholars into the discourses and genres of their fields—the repeated discursive practices that have evolved in specific research cultures through repetition over time. (66)

The writing graduate students are expected to perform, how it shapes their research, how they incorporate it into their identity and many other aspects are all shaped by the inherited environments of the field, program, and school from which they earn their

degree. Starke-Meyerring emphasizes this again when she remarks that “understanding writing as rhetorical means that doctoral writing is highly socio-culturally situated; that is, it is specific to the research cultures whose work it does” (67). Nothing happens in a vacuum, and writers need avenues through which they can learn about the rhetorical nature of their own writing and who/what is shaping their mindset. Centering oneself within the past and present influences of graduate school (from institutional history to professors to peers throughout a student’s academic experience) requires tools to understand where these influences are coming from and how to engage with community.

Institutional Environments

Research conducted in the area of community and institutional environments contributes to making visible how people learn, interact, and do or do not thrive in academia and beyond. Andrea Riley Mukavetz’s research in the area of cultural rhetorics demonstrates the importance of community and looking at the ways hierarchies and systems of power can lead to marginalization and isolation. This perspective is particularly important when it comes to combatting the idea of the isolated writer which is often supported by institutional expectations. Graduate students begin to experience what Riley Mukavetz describes for all scholars as “institutional training to isolate [ourselves]—to be more than and less than human” (121). Isolation takes place in many forms: the push to become a primary researcher; the fear of plagiarism; and the act of sitting, secluded, at a computer to complete intense projects. All of these situations have the potential to cause graduate students to spend less time with their communities—such as their family, friends or peers—in order to avoid distractions, potential plagiarism, and

other obstacles to their future career. Professors, advisors, mentors, and peers perpetuate this perception because that is the picture presented to them, that they were expected to emulate. When graduate students are backed into isolation, Riley Mukavetz's prediction comes true—they feel more than and less than human. More than human because graduate school conveys the idea that accomplishments must be made on one's own without support or insight from others—a superhuman feat. Less than human because there is no acknowledgement of the emotional toll that this writing and identity work takes. Because of this pressure, graduate students often face difficulties that include uncompleted degrees, mental health issues, relationship issues, frustration at unanswered questions, imposter syndrome, and other struggles that wear them down.

In *Supporting Graduate Student Writers: Research, Curriculum, & Program Design*, Casanave explores what happens when the stories and struggles of graduate writers are ignored or do not have proper channels of communication. Confusion within and in relation to graduate school occurs for many reasons from cultural background to ambiguous boundaries in the advisor-mentee relationship. Casanave notices that these myriad reasons often lead to one result—attrition. The rate of graduate students choosing to leave school is alarmingly high at an estimated 40-60% (98). Whether it be the struggle of writing for someone who does not have a strong background in that area or burdens from family responsibilities or a lack of preparation for graduate school, many educators and advisors are worried for students as almost half continue to leave their programs (Casanave 98-100). Thus ensues the difficult process of understanding how to aid graduate students while maintaining healthy boundaries for both parties.

One common experience with graduate school assumptions is in relation to academic jargon that is incomprehensible to most students when first encountered. To many students, it is like learning a second language while the professors assume you are already fluent. Casanave categorizes this new language into “terminology (necessary), jargon (needless and pretentious), formal turns of phrases, and unfamiliar research methods, theories, and philosophical stances” (qt. in Curry 78). Few advisors, professors, and peers recognize these areas of language as something to be learned. Instead, disciplinary language is viewed as something absorbed along the way through school with no need for explanation or emphasis. In fact, if this language has not been absorbed before graduate school, students often face ridicule and self-doubt. When the hurdle of this language barrier is not recognized and students lack proper support and guidance, they are often forced to suffer in silence. The longer students feel they must tackle these issues on their own and endure “silent suffering” (Casanave 101), the more likely they are to become “silent leavers” (Thesen 168), vanishing into an ever-increasing statistic.

The reason for this silence often lies in student belief that, while their academic pursuits may become all-encompassing and entwined with every other area of their life, any struggles that arise personally or professionally should be kept private. Graduate students hesitate to reveal struggles or “weaknesses” to those who could help such as their advisors or peers (Casanave 100). This leads to Casanave’s “silent suffering”—a student flounders in both their academic and personal lives while those who could help or point them in the right direction are oblivious (101). By not recognizing how interconnected their personal and professional lives are, graduate students believe (and are sometimes encouraged to believe) that anything going on at home or any struggles

they encounter in their classes are self-inflicted and must be self-resolved. Rather than feeling as though they can reach out to their advisors or mentors, graduate students often feel they need to handle it on their own.

The structure of an environment shapes perceptions of accessible support networks. A person's environment impacts their experiences and development in large ways, from small places like their home to larger ones such as their city or state. The same idea is true about the institutional environment they enter. The development and culture of the graduate program a student joins shapes their mindset toward their field and their identity within that field. Starke-Meyerring investigates this idea in her essay regarding institutional cultures of writing. She notes that these institutional environments, whether positive or negative, "are not necessarily the invention of those who currently work in them..." (65). The expectations, support systems, and "feel" of a program are developed and shaped over many years. While work can be done to continue positive aspects or undo negative ones, understanding the context and foundation of these perspectives is important. The environment that a student walks into also helps determine what kind of network of support they feel is available to them, which plays a large part in their success and acclimation to graduate school.

Liminal Spaces

Adjusting to graduate school requires more than an outline of potential classes or being steeped in the jargon of a student's field. Damian Maher et al. explore the complex space of graduate school in their study "Becoming and Being Writers': The Experiences of Doctoral Students in Writing Groups." They note that, in graduate school, the line

between student and professional becomes exceedingly blurry as they engage in learning together while also contributing to the field through research (265) and, often, through teaching experience and other “professional” opportunities. This liminal space can be especially disconcerting for writers who have not received preparation for (either explicitly or implicitly) from their undergraduate professors, mentors, or family members. Graduate students then need avenues of communication where these experiences can be expressed and support extended. Kate Navickas emphasizes the key idea of “the ‘internal struggle’ that occurs whenever we transition into new positions...new ‘identities’” (56). Just as Maher et al. discovered, Navickas recognized that graduate school involves stepping into a new identity where students are faced with the challenge of exploring “...who [they] are, who [they] are in this place, and what the answers mean for [their] disciplinary labor” (Navickas 57). Answering these questions leads to intense labor that takes a toll mentally and emotionally for a student. Too often, students feel this liminal space and the struggle to explore the new elements of their life but engage in the challenge without explicit understanding that this is what they are doing.

Graduate school and writing, in particular, are catalysts for “‘disciplinary becoming’” or “a means of developing and displaying an identity as a scholar, researcher, or other professional” (Curry 80) often used as a tool to explore the liminality described above. In her chapter “More Than Language: Graduate Student Writing as ‘Disciplinary Becoming,’” Mary Jane Curry expands upon some of the struggles with identity that all students face in the varied and intertwined academic, personal, and professional spheres. Struggling with and exploring this space and transition can either ease or further

complicate the “becoming” portion of graduate school. Each of these support systems assists in fighting feelings of imposter syndrome and what many students call “feeling like a fraud,” but gaining access to support networks across campus proves difficult when moving between disciplines.

Multi-Disciplinary Support Networks

Many scholars note the importance of multi-disciplinary support to reach a larger range of students rather than limiting support to one field or school. Steve Simpson et al. in *Supporting Graduate Student Writers: Research, Curriculum, & Program Design* emphasizes demonstrating the “harmony—rather than the disconnect—among academic units and areas of study” (Simpson et al. 11) and encourages thought about how this can be accomplished. Separating students by discipline can lead to separating them from areas of support. For instance, a pattern for years, and that was acknowledged in the data collected for this study, is that non-Liberal Arts majors do not visit writing centers because they do not believe that it would serve them in any meaningful way. Brooks-Gillies et al. discuss the opportunity for writing programming to be expanded beyond a particular field to aid multi-disciplinary writers (196). Opening up students to support organizations across school campuses and not isolated in their own departments allows for personal and professional growth and a more complex look at how campus entities can relate to each other. It begins to break down the perceived walls in institutions and leads to deconstructing some of the negative barriers raised over years through pursuing academic exceptionalism. By lowering those walls, students can begin to lower their

personal walls as well, opening up to their peers, mentors, and professors. When this work fails to happen, there are drastic consequences for many graduate students.

The most common avenue of support for graduate students lies in their advisor. They act as a designated touchpoint and represent expertise in a field. However, Casanave takes care to point out that advisors are not counselors and often cannot fix or address every problem for the student; the burdens and struggles of a graduate student are too much for any one person to try to alleviate them all—including the students themselves. Brooks-Gillies et al. supports this statement, adding that “advisors often do not have enough dedicated time to work with individual writers consistently over several months or years, meaning writers need both direct curricular instruction as well as various forms of writing support and mentoring” (“Introduction” 6). Laura Brady et al. also note the need for cross-campus partnerships. The authors not only attempt to address the practical difficulties (such as attrition and completion rates) of graduate school but also the hardships of gaps in communication and identity formation when traditional modes of communication are lacking or do not operate in the predicted way (191). As student experiences become more complex and multifaceted so must the support networks designed to aid these students.

What these researchers build up to is the recognition that the graduate student experience and formation process is more multifaceted and complicated than many anticipate or recognize. They emphasize the need for multiple avenues of support because no one person can guide a student through the experience or meet their needs. This remains an important note because while some advisors believe in the hands-off “sink or swim” mentality for their advisees, others can feel pressured to aid their mentees in any

way they can and help them succeed. However, this other end of the spectrum from the “advisor-advisee mismatch” (Casanave 106) can lead an advisor to burnout, stress out, and/or provide unhelpful or misguided advice when they feel the need to fill a role that is not theirs. More development of programming on campus that can serve students in these varied ways is needed to divide the load while still ensuring that graduate students do not feel abandoned.

Mental Health and COVID-19’s Impact

While not anticipated during the first stages of this research, the needs identified by the previously cited scholars were only exacerbated and complicated by COVID-19 arriving in early 2020. Difficulties with imposter syndrome which easily feed into other mental health concerns, the emotional labor of caring for yourself and others within academia during a pandemic, and isolation that arises not only from your work but is enhanced by social distancing and online learning take a toll on everyone right now.

Even before the pandemic struck in the U.S., graduate student mental health and how to address gaps in support were gaining attention. In March 2020, a study was published examining how mental health connected to graduate student identity and support networks. This study occurred in response to a troubling observation that “graduate students are more than six times as likely to experience depression and anxiety as compared to the general population” (Evans et al.). The 2020 study by Caroline Waldbuesser and Angela M. Hosek attempted to alleviate some of these graduate needs through observing how “group membership influences [graduate student] self-concept and self-esteem” (132) and encourages individuals in their identity as graduate students.

They defined this final aspect as “identity salience” which contains “three dimensions: centrality, ingroup affect, and ingroup ties” relating to the significance, emotional attachment, and feelings of belonging that are experienced within the group (133). Waldbuesser and Hosek found that group membership and identity salience that contained these elements positively impacted student mental health.

Recently, writing and writing center studies have begun to explore the area of emotional labor and mental health within their own field. For example, writing tutors/consultants often experience similar (though not the same) feelings of liminality as graduate students—as both students and university employees engaged in education. This identity requires constant negotiation of boundaries and encounters with peers and professors that can weigh heavily, such as when a student is experiencing discrimination from a professor. This challenge is only increased when a consultant is “part of traditionally marginalized cultural locations [who] experience emotional labors more intensely than individuals who are not in such locations” (Costello). With an increasing number of international and minority graduate students, awareness of the unbalanced amount of emotional labor that goes into their work is necessary to acknowledge within graduate student programming. These are, of course, on top of the “common” experiences with graduate school challenges like imposter syndrome that comes from “feelings of inadequacy” and/or “conflicting senses of identity” (Villarreal), though many graduate students (see Waldbuesser and Hosek) do not disclose their struggles, leading to worsening mental health. Graduate students need opportunities to disclose these experiences with their peers, those who can understand and share their own experiences, in addition to other mental health options. But first, community must be developed in

order for trust and vulnerability to be an option. Unfortunately, COVID-19 interrupted many of these opportunities for graduate students.

The coronavirus increased feelings of isolation from peers, professors, mentors, research materials and participants, and even preferred workspaces for many graduate writers. From not being able to sit down with the chair of their project to moving research online to not having the helpful buzz of other customers in the coffee shop where they write, graduate writers experienced a forced shift of what graduate school looked like. For many writers, COVID-19 further removed them from the support systems (both academic and personal) needed to thrive in graduate school. Many graduate students rethought applying to graduate school after COVID impacted their application process and, for some, their funding even while program directors and professors work to move classes and other opportunities online (Okahana). Other students already in graduate programs recognize the layered impact COVID has on them. Not only are they juggling their responsibilities as students and family members, but they often also work as researchers and educators with added responsibility for their own partners and students (Wang). They strive for their own success while also supporting the success of those around them or under their supervision.

COVID-19 only increased the importance of offering graduate writers more avenues of support that are accessible and safe while still meeting needs. This is particularly important when it comes to combatting the idea of the isolated writer, an especially dangerous picture as separation from academic and personal support increases due to social distancing, quarantining, and moving to mostly online platforms rather than

in-person options. All of these concerns feed into the importance of developing graduate programming that encourages community.

Writing Group Elements

Building from past studies of writing groups, both the successes and the setbacks, results in frameworks that can be shaped to the unique needs of each campus. While a variety of programming is needed to meet the needs of graduate students, the format, timing, and flexibility of a writing group proved the best first step towards creating more graduate programming that supports writing. Much of the literature I explored contained helpful examples of various writing groups' formats and foundations that fed into the GWGs for this study.

Writing groups coming and going is not an uncommon occurrence. Though the writing group created for this study was the first facilitated by the UWC, many interview participants discussed past, negative experiences with writing groups because they fizzled out due to lack of structure. Writing groups often sound beneficial, a great way to support peers in an informal setting compared to a classroom. However, they often begin too informally, to the point where there is little direction and students drop out. I needed to know what would cause writing groups to fail and what at an institution could lead to the success of such programming. Historical and theoretical tracings of writing groups, such as Anne Ruggles Gere's book *Writing Groups: History, Theory, and Implication* from 1987, lay out the principles that should operate behind writing groups as they have been observed over time and shape the type of programming that is provided and needed. Gere remarks that "writing groups reduce the distance between writer and reader" (3) which

allows writers to be more aware of their audience throughout the writing process and not only when receiving final feedback on a piece from the professor of the class. Groups allow students to “join a community...” rather than “...isolate themselves from society to produce their work...,” an idea that has held on long past when her book was published (Gere 6, 56). Building off of her previous thoughts about the social nature of writing, Gere goes on to emphasize that,

writing groups highlight the social dimension of writing. They provide tangible evidence that writing involves human interaction as well as solitary inscription. Highlighting the social dimension enlarges our view of writing because composition studies has, until recently, conceptualized writing as a solo performance. (3)

Making this social dynamic visible for graduate students through writing groups creates the opportunity for them to apply this principle to their writing in a tangible and social way. Anthony Paré, in his chapter “Writing Together for Many Reasons,” picks up from where Gere leaves off in 1987 and follows the values that are upheld within these groups compared to those presented by the larger institution. He argues that “writing at work is firmly embedded in a social web” (23) hence the writing together for many reasons. Writing groups serve to add to this social web and allow for a space to safely test ideas (25). Gere and Paré emphasize the importance of communication, including with the students themselves about their social webs and understanding the gaps in support that they consciously or unconsciously have identified in their lives and how writing groups may be able to fit in.

Writing groups take on a variety of forms to best serve the participants but understanding all the variables can be difficult. Sarah Haas’s chapter “Pick-n-Mix: A Typology of Writers’ Groups in Use” explores these various aspects writing groups can contain and organizes them into categories: membership, purpose, leadership, contact,

time, place, frequency, length, duration, in-meeting activities, and between-meeting activities (34-39). By choosing and altering the ones that best suit the current group, Haas's approach guides facilitators through the process for constructing the most beneficial group possible. Approaching writing groups as moldable structures rather than a strict form allows for flexibility and accessibility when the participants come from a variety of disciplines and situations. I was able to utilize Haas's work to identify what was beneficial from other writing groups and implement a similar set-up.

One such writing group was the example included in the study by Maher et al., a group of doctoral students who formed a writing group to support each other academically and personally. As they noticed the improvement in their writing and engagement with academia, they decided to research why this was happening in two writing groups. They explored this because, as mentioned in a previous section, they observed that "historically, there has been a lack of systematic attention given to writing in doctoral education, and that there are tacit assumptions made in universities regarding both the competence of students who enroll in doctoral degrees and about the pedagogical responsibilities of universities" (264). Through the two groups, they recognized the "need to constantly re-negotiate patterns of participation" (266)—both emphasizing this important element that is not always available in a classroom and the need for avenues of this renegotiation as the group progresses.

While contributing greatly to my thoughts about the principles behind writing and writing groups, Brooks-Gillies et al.'s study also greatly shaped how the writing groups themselves ran. Within their study, Brooks-Gillies et al. work with the writing center at Michigan State University to create several groups of three to six people that are

facilitated by a graduate writing consultant (“Making Do” 195). Dr. Brooks-Gillies, as director of the UWC at IUPUI and chair for my thesis, insisted upon a writing group format almost identical to this in my own study. This format allowed for direction from someone with experience in explaining writing pedagogy and ensured a small enough group to encourage conversation. Within the Brooks-Gillies et al. groups, they also discuss the importance of the types and format of feedback such as distinguishing higher-order concerns and lower-order concerns that cover a range of writing elements from structure to sentence-level error (196) and how to prepare the participants well to engage in this aspect of writing groups.

The last few influences on the group structure come from outside of writing studies. Suhr et al. explores the effect of positive writing and resource writing on mental health (1593). Considering mental health is vital when discussing graduate writer experiences. Imposter syndrome, stress, depression, isolation, and many other experiences become even more of an issue in graduate school. By acknowledging that this is a struggle for many graduate writers and attempting to partially meet the need for support through activities like positive writing and acknowledging personal successes and resources, those supporting graduate writers can not only improve the students’ writing experience but also their overall well-being. While not a study on graduate writers’ mental health, it was important to me to consider this element and see how I could engage with this concept during my research. By incorporating time where the participants could engage in this positive writing about their work, take note of the resources and progress they have, and acknowledge the importance of their mental health,

I could at least nudge the other writers to consider the importance of this element when they thought about their writing.

Student voices remained foundational to this study, and I strove to center them whenever possible. The entire purpose of this thesis is to reveal the often-invisible struggles of graduate students and serve as an avenue through which those students could explore their journey and express their own experiences. Though not focused on writing groups, Paulo Freire's work in dialogics and what should drive investigation played heavily into how I viewed student involvement in the actual research process and constructed the groups. When ideas are dictated it "robs others of their words" (88) and interrupts the dialogue that creates and facilitates change. It also breaks the community that is vital to understand the world and lead to humanization—a concept also vital to writing group success. While change can be frustrating to work with, Freire encourages investigators to look at that struggle as a challenge rather than a disappointment. This mindset will drive productive investigation and foster a hopeful outlook that keeps the best interests of those involved at the center.

Freire emphasizes that those the investigation impacts should become co-investigators (106), and his perspective contributes heavily to how the research for this thesis was/is constructed, conducted, and considered. The point of Graduate Writing programming is to support graduate writers and tailor programming to what they need. That is why incorporating the voices of graduate writers was and is so important at every step. Engaging with student voices and disrupting imbalances in power remains foundational in much of Writing Center pedagogy. Laura Greenfield, in *Radical Writing Center Praxis*, reminds WC employees that "power is always already at play—our

various social identities position us within existing power structures independent of our awareness or intentions” (68-69). Institutions, such as academia, were built upon power dynamics and at the cost of many for the benefit of a few. The bulk of Writing Center work should and must be directed to illuminating inequality of power and working towards balance, largely through “dialogue”—a conversation of equals working towards authenticity (Greenfield 66). As the writing group and this study were developed, as seen in the following sections, it was important to not only collect data but also ensure that the participants felt heard and participated as co-investigators to assist in building programming that most benefits them.

Methodology

To more closely examine the effect of graduate writing groups on graduate students, I developed an IRB-approved study to engage in research on IUPUI’s campus with support and guidance from the UWC Director, Dr. Marilee Brooks-Gillies. Much of the previously listed literature, including Dr. Brooks-Gillies’ own work, influenced and guided the structure and proceedings of each part of the research process. Due to this strong foundation of theory, every step of the study built upon the previous one and narrowed in on the key elements that led to the research’s insight into graduate needs and how to meet them at IUPUI. The study contained six components to assist in gauging graduate student thoughts about writing and their experiences with writing at and support from IUPUI: 1) a general Graduate Writer Support survey, 2) interviews with graduate students, 3) a Graduate Writing Group intake survey, and 4) the actual Graduate Writing Group meetings which also included a 5) Reflection and 6) Focus Group.

Graduate Writer Support Survey

I began with a survey focused on general notions of graduate writing support across IUPUI's campus to better understand the specific needs and writing practices of IUPUI graduate students and provide a baseline where I could see what needs they already identified. The survey (see Appendix A) includes 24 questions with a mix of multiple choice and text entry. The variety of questions allowed for the collection of needed data such as whether or not the student was a graduate student and what school their degree was with, as well as opportunities for the participants to identify what projects they were currently working on and what programming they already used on campus. The survey was distributed through several listservs, social media announcements, and personal connections. I received 63 survey responses; 39 respondents answered all of the survey questions. Of the 39 complete responses, two were discarded because respondents disclosed that they were not current graduate students.

Engagement with the survey came from across campus and degree programs. There were an equal number of Master of Arts and PhD respondents to the survey (22.7%). Roughly 18% of respondents were earning a Master of Science, and 9% were pursuing a Graduate Certification of some kind. The remaining respondents who answered "Other" came from a variety of degree programs including Master of Public Health and Master of Social Work. While many students attended the School of Liberal Arts, the survey responses also included many earning a degree from the School of Nursing, School of Informatics and Computing, School of Medicine, and even a student

from the School of Law. Though the response group remained small, these responses do demonstrate the interest across campus in graduate writing support.

The design of the questions included in this survey gauged the general experience of graduate students. The questions included: “What feedback do you generally seek about your work?,” “What questions do you have as a graduate student about the writing process?,” and “What programming would you like the University Writing Center to offer graduate students?” which aided me in understanding how graduate students thought about their writing and the feedback they received. Two questions at the end asked willing graduate students to participate in an interview about graduate writing needs and about interest in joining a Graduate Writing Group. If they were interested in either, they could leave their name and e-mail. Otherwise, the survey answers remained anonymous. This survey served as the baseline and guide for the rest of the project. By beginning with this survey, I strove to construct this project around the shared needs of graduate writers and not simply my own hypotheses.

Interviews

Based on the responses to the general survey, I contacted interested graduate students to conduct interviews via Zoom. This allowed me to hear first-hand from graduate students about what they are experiencing, what they need, and how they think the UWC could help. These interviews aided in drawing out themes and creating programming for supporting graduate writers while also seeing where the gaps in support are at IUPUI.

Four students participated in the interviews, but one interview was discarded because the interviewee was not a graduate student at IUPUI. The goal of the interviews was to conduct a guided conversation that allowed graduate students to discuss their experiences that illustrated the thoughts of the survey responses. While I used questions such as “Who have you sought out for feedback or support as a graduate student?” and “How has your perspective about writing and the support you need changed as a graduate student?”, each interview took on a unique flow as I responded to the interviewee’s answers and experiences. For a list of interview questions, see Appendix B.

Graduate Writing Group Intake Survey

Gauging graduate student interest in and experiences of writing groups was accomplished through an Intake Survey sent to those requesting further information about GWGs. Through this survey, graduate students could convey what projects they were working on, how comfortable they were giving written and verbal feedback to other writers, and what kind of feedback they were looking for with their writing projects (see Appendix C). On a practical level, the information participants shared helped me organize meeting times for the writing group, how to contact them in the future, the field each member approached writing from, etc. More importantly, however, the data collected gave me additional insights into how the participants understand writing, what kinds of writing support they sought from peers, and how comfortable they felt with providing/receiving feedback. This information would then guide how I structure the meetings, particularly the first meeting, so that everyone could be on as close to the same page as possible. This would also cause slight adjustments in the later activities of the

reflection and focus group to circle back to these ideas of support and how they were or were not met and even may have changed.

Graduate Writing Group

The UWC pilot Graduate Writing Group (GWG) began in October and ran until the end of the year. It allowed me to observe the response and efficacy of graduate writing groups and begin incorporating these types of groups into the regular programming offered by the Center. This writing group met weekly for an hour and a half. In this group, made up of four graduate students, participants would take turns reading other writers' work and providing feedback that met the expressed needs of the designated writer. By utilizing a writing group format (Appendix D), the needs of graduate writers were explored more personally and the impact of writing groups on graduate writers could be witnessed in the weekly growth of the participants.

The first meeting opened with the opportunity for some icebreakers and get-to-know-you prompts that were then replaced by time for visiting in the subsequent meetings. Over the course of the week, I would gather event information from the Graduate Office on campus and compile a list of upcoming opportunities (such as citation seminars, graduate parenting network meetings, and conferences) that could benefit the other graduate writers. There was also the opportunity here for the group members themselves to bring up any events they were involved in or knew about. This allowed us to build connections to the larger graduate community at IUPUI and begin identifying other avenues of support open to graduate students. IUPUI, for instance, has multiple entities such as the Underrepresented Professional and Graduate Student Organization

(UPnGO), Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Adaptive Education Services (AES), the University Graduate Office, additional UWC programming, and many others. However, these programs are only effective if students have knowledge of and access to them. By creating a time to share these resources with each other, the group could begin engaging with the campus as a whole, reinforcing a more holistic view of graduate school as involving places and people outside of their school.

For the feedback portion of the meetings, I asked that the participants attempt to follow the distinction of feedback between high-order (HOC) and low-order concerns (LOC). HOCs focus on the overall clarity of the argument or point, the “flow” of the writing, and the organization. LOCs tend to occur at the end of the writing process and focus in on grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and smaller citation details. Alongside the HOC/LOC direction, I also asked that, when discussing the feedback during the GWG, we attempt to follow the “Praise, Question, Suggestion” format. This combination was chosen to focus on the feedback needs identified in the surveys and interviews and avoid falling into the trap of focusing on the minutia and missing larger content needs.

Reflection

Halfway through our meetings, I had the GWG participants fill out a brief reflection to assess how they felt about the groups and where changes might be made (Appendix E). It asked a range of questions from a measured “How satisfied have you been with the Graduate Writing Group (GWG) so far?” to questions that required more specific, personal answers like “What has been the most beneficial aspect of the writing group so far?” The survey also asked if the participants had ideas or examples of how the

group could be improved. This reflection allowed for the participants to be involved in the very structure of the group, aiding in the process of making graduate programming the most effective it could be.

Focus Group

Lastly, participants engaged in a Focus Group towards the end of the semester. During this meeting, the participants and I answered a variety of prompts. Between prompts, I provided 3 to 5 minutes to write before moving on to the next question. These questions encouraged the writers to think about the progress they made throughout the semester, in the group, and in their writing process (Appendix F). They also were prompted to consider what communities they were a part of and would want to participate in for the future, to support them in and outside of writing (though “outside” support networks are still important overall for the writing process). After completing these prompts, we spent a few moments reflecting on our answers, and then sharing what stood out to us or surprised us about what we wrote.

After we discussed these answers, we took a bit of time to do some positive writing about the semester as a whole rather than our typical week-to-week discussion about writing progress or wins. I had them take about ten minutes and write out as much as they could, celebrating and acknowledging the work they accomplished during an intense and unusual semester. I also encouraged them to push aside any doubts that might arise as they wrote that would attempt to tarnish what they viewed as a writing win and then count that action as an additional writing win. This practice resulted in positive reflection that took into account writer’s realistic struggles and helped to locate them

within their writing process—the progress they made and where they wanted to continue growing.

Participants

All participants in the interviews and GWGs filled out the initial anonymous survey through which they were recruited for these additional avenues of data collection. Table 1 provides a pseudonym for each participant, how many years they’ve been working toward their degree, what kind of degree they are seeking, what School their degree program is housed in, and which components of the project each participant completed beyond the survey.

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Degree</u>	<u>School</u>	<u>Events</u> <u>Participated In</u>
Rachael	4 th	PhD	Informatics and Computing	Interview
Sophia	3 rd	PhD	Nursing	Interview
Mason	1 st	Non-degree	Education	Interview, GWG, Reflection, Focus Group
Charlie	1 st	MA	Liberal Arts	GWG, Reflection
Georgia	2 nd	MPA	SPEA	GWG

Susan	2 nd	MA	Liberal Arts	GWG, Reflection, Focus Group
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Table 1: Research Participants

The culmination of the literature and these methods resulted in a pilot program that has already grown—in both numbers and offerings—as well as sparked new program development within the UWC. The following chapters will explore two main themes that arose during the pilot meetings and will, hopefully, continue to impact UWC programming and writing programming in general. The goal is to encourage deeper thought about how and why programming is developed to support graduate students and whether or not that programming responds to the students’ deeper needs.

The next chapter will investigate the importance of community in graduate students’ lives—the communities they are already a part of and the ones they see missing in their lives. Due to the common occurrence of advisors and professors limiting their roles to push graduate students into *their* new role, the need for guidance increases. Graduate school also operates as a time of specialization. While our family, friends, and others can often relate to the struggles of undergrad, the move into graduate school is increasingly multi-faceted while our focus becomes narrowed. We cannot always gain the support we need from those nearest to us. Locating a community that can provide not only this directed support but also can share in our struggles is vital to our understanding and journey through graduate school.

The following chapter then discusses the role of feedback in supporting graduate students through the many changes of graduate school as well as the day-to-day struggle

to write. While sharing common experiences and establishing rapport is important, it is most effective when leading to concrete support that can be incorporated into the, often, most difficult portion of graduate school—the overwhelming amount of writing. As discussed above, many graduate students come from majors that require minimal writing. Others from more writing-centric majors, like myself, can also feel the impact of the increased demand as assignments grow in length and rigor, pushing us into unfamiliar areas.

Lastly, I will discuss what was accomplished through this study, the shortcomings of the research, and how this work can be continued at IUPUI and beyond. Through expanding this research and the programming offered to graduate writers, the transition from student to professional can be eased and demystified. Rather than feeling thrown to the wolves, graduate writers can engage in this complex process with the resources needed to succeed.

Chapter One: Community

“Writing is so personal, in a way, that you need to build that rapport before you can give constructive feedback.”

--Rachael, Interview participant

Introduction

Diving into graduate school, students are often surprised at the amount and variety of writing involved. However, even more daunting than that is the challenge of knowing who to turn to when support and direction are needed. Whether because of time, opportunity or perceived accessibility/understanding, having trusted sources of support becomes more difficult in graduate school. As a student's field narrows, so does the amount of people who could relate to what they experience. This can lead to feelings of isolation, separation, and desperation especially when combined with a lack of guidance that many graduate students feel going into graduate school. In a vicious cycle, desperation and imposter syndrome fuel each other and can lead to a spiral. Often, graduate students suffer in silence and take that mindset into their future career (continuing the cycle) or they decide it is better to drop out (Casanave 97). Rising attrition rates in graduate students are troubling to advisors and schools in general (98). In this chapter, I will explore the role of community in graduate school, how it can benefit graduate students who face these challenges, and how I incorporated community (intentionally and unintentionally) into the graduate writing group that I designed and piloted for this study.

The Solitary Writer

When first approaching writing, community is not always considered an important part of the process. However, writing is a social and public activity that requires other people and is inherently communal. By working in connection with others, these needs and the best way to address them can be explored in ways that only having one perspective cannot accomplish. Kevin Roozen emphasizes this connection when he remarks that “writers draw upon many other people”; nothing happens in a vacuum. Writing groups make that inspiration visible as we discuss ideas, explain how we arrived at a particular conclusion or reevaluate our entire perspective.

Continuing on from Roozen’s foundation, Charles Bazerman reminds writers that they are only half of the writing equation. Once a piece is written and distributed, through publication or submission for a grade, readers then take that writing and reconstruct the meaning. Through this process, sometimes what the author intends is lost when the writing is presented to its audience. By having a trusted group of people who can provide feedback and engage with the text before this point, the writer sets themselves up to present a more understandable and accessible piece. Writing is “so personal,” and the type and quality of feedback can often determine whether or not a participant views a writing group as effective. The feedback experience also impacts how invested a writer will then be in that group and the relationships that are forming. For these reasons and others, community is vital to the research and writing process because it creates an “ongoing conversation” about the writing and true dialogue (which will be revisited in the Feedback chapter) rather than having to wait for a professor’s feedback—feedback that is often viewed as more “high stakes” than that of peers or friends. By investing in a

group of peers who are coming from a place of solidarity as they all trudge through graduate school, progress can be made both in addressing the more personal hurdles of graduate school while also more directly supporting graduate students in their academic pursuits.

Writing as a social process not only provides an additional source of encouragement, discernment, or clarity about a topic but also leads to writing viewed as an avenue of thought processing. In the introduction to the collection *Graduate Writing Across the Disciplines: Identifying, Teaching, and Supporting*, Marilee Brooks-Gillies et al. echo the criticism of writing as a solitary activity, often “reduced to sentence-level considerations” rather than viewed as the “dominant way in which knowledge is presented and assessed” (5). Instead of viewing writing in this one-dimensional way, writing must be understood as an avenue of engagement with others and to understand your own thought processes. Heidi Estrem notes that “writing is often defined by what it *is*: a text, a product; less visible is what it can *do*: generate new thinking” (emphasis original). When writing is engaged within a community, it expands beyond its role as transfer (from mind to page) to a role of engagement with an idea, constellating perspectives, and understanding self. Later in the collection, Brooks-Gillies, this time accompanied by Elena Garcia and Katie Manthey, discusses how writing groups make visible this process of supporting writers from all disciplines *alongside* other avenues of support to understand the complexity of writing. While conducting the study, the researchers noticed that these groups “have softened boundaries and are spaces of negotiation” that allow for greater discussion about what writing is and other information that may be more difficult to share with professors or others in perceived positions of

power (“Making Do” 194). While in discussions with professors and advisors, it often feels as though there are right and wrong answers to whatever questions or suggestions they offer.

By combatting the idea that writing and creation must happen alone, each individual’s writing process can be better understood by sharing what works and what does not, “demystifying” the process and allowing for repeated success rather than feeling as though each project is starting from ground zero. As in Maher et al.’s study, each group member shared about their experience, and one participant pointed out that “involvement in a writing group helped me move my thesis writing from a predominately private activity to a more public activity...I found that being a part of a thesis writing group helped to demystify thesis writing” (269). Through understanding the unintentional writing moves that we make, we can begin to intentionally choose those that work best for us and lead to writing success. This once again addresses the common experience of imposter syndrome within graduate studies as well. As individual writing processes become clearer, there is less expectation to compete with the perceived progress of peers and more ability to focus on where an individual student is with their own progress while learning from others.

Research on writing groups heavily emphasizes the concept of community and how having a community in an academic setting aids students in acclimating to their new environment. To assist graduate students in their development, Terri Fredrick emphasizes enculturation or “the process by which individuals are inducted into the values and practices of a community, including the practices of reading, writing, and creating knowledge” (Fredrick et al. 143). As a professor and three graduate students, Fredrick et

al. recognize the liminal space many graduate students find themselves in—“not yet teachers but no longer only students” (145). As stated before, because of this development, more is expected of graduate students without the helpful aspects of thorough orientations, first-year seminars, or other avenues open to Freshman/First-year students when first approaching college. Graduate students need shared spaces with their peers where they can not only receive practical feedback on their writing but also have explicit conversations about these transitions and share personal stories.

A network of support to engage the new environment of graduate school does not only have to be made up of faculty and staff. In order to help bridge the previously discussed gap in support from advisors, professors, and other programs, peer mentoring and support can reach graduate students in a way that these other entities cannot. Janine Morris et al. discuss the many facets of support that branch beyond writing support into mentor- and friendship. Their work, “Writing Groups as Feminist Practice,” demonstrates the importance of “horizontal mentorship.” Rather than working solely through the often-hierarchical support from an advisor, seeking peer support (on the same level) allows for vulnerability. Recognizing the “painfully social” nature of graduate coursework, they emphasize the need for graduate students/departments to form programming that provides the multifaceted support (made up of faculty, staff, and peers) these writers need for a healthy journey through graduate school and into their next stage.

Tying into this concept of vulnerability within writing groups is Lucia Thesen’s essay “If They’re Not Laughing, Watch Out.” Thesen took the title of her chapter from a quote by a colleague—“Laughter is an index of how well [a writing group] worked, and how likely people are to come back. If they’re not laughing, watch out!” (162). While

accountability and accomplishing academic goals are large reasons for why many seek out writing groups, this serious work tied closely to identity must be balanced through levity that encourages participants to feel comfortable enough to be vulnerable and provides a break from the stressful demands and high-stakes communities that are often the classroom or work environment. Thesen argues that laughter and humor release the tension that comes from the emotional labor that often accompanies graduate writing.

Laughter draws us back to community as the humorous moment is “not directed at an individual but involving the group—pointing to a deeper shared aspect of postgraduate identity” (165). This ties into Wadbuesser and Hosek’s research into graduate student mental health and the effects that belonging and “ingroup ties” can have on graduate students. Encouraging connection through a variety of avenues, including humor, can not only encourage a student’s writing but also their outlook. Even within a group that sets out with the goal of combatting the “writer in the tower” image that dominates most perceptions of graduate writers, a group can become focused on the “writer of the week” and forget that we are all learning from each other each week. Humor draws us back into the community of sharing and “seems to index community, spontaneity and a critical commentary on the prevailing image of the cerebral, isolated, gendered postgraduate student” (165). She notes that “researcher[s] work collaboratively ‘at the center of a constellation of others’” (163) never on their own. By drawing the attention of the group through shared humor, it reminds those involved that we are all working together to develop ourselves as academics, continually needing to support each other and to disrupt damaging and dangerous precedents that do not serve us as emerging professionals.

The Solitary Facilitator

Being in a position of vulnerability required to build group dynamics places every participant in an uncomfortable situation. It is unclear, at first, whether or not that vulnerability will pay off, and the only way success will occur is if everyone partakes in vulnerability. When one person assumes the position of facilitator, it can feel as though that person is exempt from the vulnerability—doling out feedback and critique without having to lay out their own work and insecurities.

This idea arises repeatedly in the literature in various formats and phrasings. Christina V. Cedillo and Phil Bratta discuss the importance of vulnerability and how you must “be willing to forego a position of ABSOLUTE authority to build knowledge with students” (emphasis added 221). This idea of equality and sharing also comes through in the very nature of Andrea Riley Mukavetz’s research about “talking *circles*” (emphasis added 108) where no one is the “head” as all participants listen to each other, investing in their stories and experiences. Freire dives into this concept as well through his emphasis on research subjects actually operating as co-investigators rather than as the object of the research. This balancing or flattening into “horizontal mentorship” proved vital to creating a sense of community and lowering the stakes of feedback because it infers that group members “need not, even should not, rely on mastery” (Morris et al.). Though the participants in my own group may come from differing fields, we can all still support each other without feeling the need to gain mastery in each other’s disciplines. The “expert” became whoever was the writer-of-the-week. Through keeping in mind these principles of writing and investigation, there would be more ability to engage in the research and process with my fellow graduate students rather than acting as a distant

observer or expert director. This approach allowed for more vulnerability and identification of shared experiences as seen in the related stories included later in this and the following chapter.

Methodology

Several elements from the structure of this study allowed for a better understanding of how graduate students view community's importance in their life and to assess how the influence of their communities impacted the group interactions. After collecting contact information from willing participants through the general Graduate Writer Support survey, I sat down (virtually) with three students through individual interviews to discuss their experiences with graduate school. For the interviews with these graduate students, many of the questions were structured to assess the types of communities the students were a part of, how they interacted with those various communities, and where they saw gaps. Such questions varied in specificity from simply asking what school they were a part of to "Who do you seek writing support from?" and "How important is community to you in graduate school?" Through their answers to these questions, I was able to gauge whether or not community was something these students consciously knew was needed for their success or would need to be explored over the course of the graduate writing groups. The three participants included Rachael, a PhD candidate in the School of Informatics and Computing; Sophia, a PhD candidate in the School of Nursing; and Mason, a student taking PhD-level courses in the School of Education to determine if he wanted to complete a degree at IUPUI. Having students from three different academic backgrounds proved beneficial because it allowed me to

identify similarities between their perceptions of and experiences with graduate school. The commonalities shared in these interviews continued into the graduate writing group (GWG).

Our group meetings consisted of weekly recorded Zoom calls lasting an hour and a half, during which we would discuss one writer's work and share about our graduate school experience. The ideas of community, isolation, and imposter syndrome arose both during intentional moments of inquiry and naturally as we conversed together. The first GWG meeting began with introductory, get-to-know-you questions that encouraged the participants to discuss their communities and how they were impacted by graduate school and the pandemic. The four participants who joined in this part of the process were Mason, the non-degree seeking student; Susan, a dual degree M.A. student in Public History and Library Science; Charlie, a M.A. student in English; and Georgia, a PhD student in the School of Public and Environmental Affairs, though Georgia left after the first meeting. During the group meetings, conversations naturally arose where we could discuss available support networks and whether or not they sufficiently met student needs.

In addition to the "typical" group meetings, there were two opportunities for the participants to reflect on whether the GWG was meeting their expectations and effectively acting as one of their support networks. The first opportunity occurred during a short reflection at the end of one week's meeting that asked questions such as "What has been the most beneficial aspect of the writing group so far?" and "What other forms of support across campus do you use for your writing (Grad Office, University Writing Center, Library, faculty, peers, family, etc.)?" They filled out a short Qualtrics survey

with these questions and submitted their answers anonymously for me to look at after our meeting finished.

The second opportunity took place during a week when we rearranged our meeting style since the writer for that week could not make it at the last minute. I turned this into a chance for the participants to reflect more consciously on the writing communities they participated in and how joining a community of writers through a GWG affected them as graduate students—a mini focus group. During this meeting we moved through several prompts as I read them aloud and provided 3 to 5 minutes for everyone to write before moving on to the next question. One prompt asked them to consider what communities they were a part of currently and would want to engage with in the future both to support them in their writing and outside of writing (though these would still be important for the overall writing process). After completing these prompts, we spent a few moments reflecting on our answers, and then sharing what stood out to us or surprised us about our answers.

After we discussed these answers, we took some time to focus on positive writing about our progress and development over the course of the semester. We took about ten minutes to write out as much as we could, celebrating and acknowledging the work accomplished. Each of these steps in the GWG process allowed for the information and experiences to build and for identification of patterns within graduate student responses.

Isolation

One reason community is so important to build within a GWG and leads to a successful program is because graduate students are already hungry for it. Throughout the interviews, surveys, and group meetings one common word carried through—“isolation.” This isolation is caused by a variety of factors. Due to the common idea and experience of writing being a solitary activity, one student, Sophia, acknowledged that she is “here, by myself, in my house, writing all the time” without designated opportunities to interact with people from her class, department, or campus in general because her work is focused on self-motivated writing rather than meeting in a classroom or even via Zoom. Another student, Rachael, echoed Sophia’s sentiments and added that she felt isolated as a PhD student due to the amount of work, the majority of which is writing. Added on to this was the lack of a sense of a cohort within the department. They “barely see each other” even though they are willing and try to create community. The dissertation process is simply not naturally conducive to that type of structure.

Many graduate students on campus do not feel like the department or school at large offers many opportunities to build that rapport within a cohort or even between the greater graduate student community. Part of this dissatisfaction at IUPUI is due to the structure of events aimed at graduate student community building. All of the introductory/orientation events are condensed into one opening week of activities. If the timing of the extra events does not fit within their schedule for that one week, graduate students miss out on the chance to establish that initial community. This then makes it less likely that they will attend future events because they have fewer connections to build upon. Riley Mukavetz points out that this “distance, isolation, and anonymity” is

part of the nature of the institution within higher education (114). She acknowledges that the natural instinct in academia is to partition, to separate by difference—discipline from discipline, department from department, concentration from concentration. The feeling of anonymity within the large field only leads to the desire to stand out by emphasizing difference of focus. The pressure of current recognition and future job searches often diminishes the attraction of collaboration. These experiences then combine with the stress of daily life and the difficulty many graduate students have with simply trying to show up to events when they are offered because “...it’s cold outside, I’m tired, or I have a deadline” (121). Community takes work.

Some students may consider creating their own events for developing grad school relationships that would work with their schedule and cater to the people they know to foster those relationships. There is still difficulty, however, because, as Rachael put it, “being proactive when you’re overwhelmed with family and school and all of these stressful deadlines... it’s hard to kind of really step out of that and schedule [events]...organizing events is so time consuming and it takes a lot of effort.” The immense work leading to isolation is not only due to the workload of school but comes from the commitments students have to family and other, more personal responsibilities. While we want community and opportunities to be involved with each other, creating those openings takes time and energy that many students simply do not have. In a time where energy is low and stress factors are higher than they have ever been, attitudes toward various activities becomes apathetic, and students accept this isolation. During his interview, Mason admitted that for many graduate students it’s— “If you’re not forced to do it, you don’t always do it.” The switch to online classes and events leads to an

increased need for self-motivation and desire for connection, but the bandwidth for being able to do that is at an all-time low. Graduate students need an outside entity (such as a department or association on campus) to see their need and do the work to arrange openings that are many and varied. This would allow activities to fit within the already all-encompassing graduate school schedule and provide graduate students with the potential for connection they need.

“In Pandemic Space...”

The common feeling of missing a cohort is not only due to lack of opportunity or the nature of the institution but also because of the onset of the “unprecedented” 2020-21 academic year. COVID-19 has impacted IUPUI departments and organizations’ ability to arrange any sort of “ice breaker” or community event due to social distancing and quarantine. As a new graduate student taking PhD classes, Mason acknowledged that “in pandemic space, I don’t have that level of interaction with my fellow students” that would otherwise be there to allow for an understanding of the campus and what to expect from earning a degree here. Both new and established students within the IUPUI graduate programs have a desire for community and the gaps they notice are felt within the larger graduate student population.

The move to online classes not only limits in-class interaction but also removes many of the chance run-ins on campus. In his interview, Mason went on to say that outside of classes at IUPUI, he found it hard to gauge the campus in general. There was less opportunity to build those connections to the campus and Indy community without the opening to engage with others through discussions during in-person classes, grabbing

a drink with peers at Caribou Coffee, impromptu walks down by the canal and other naturally arising meetings. During our conversation, he lamented this loss—

Zoom classes have been good, but, in grad school, so many people are so busy...already teaching or doing full time work that I'm not going to say, "Hey! You wanna grab a cup of coffee?" That's difficult, and then you have that on top of the pandemic. It's not great. I'll just say that; it's not great...I'm a pretty...kinda gregarious person, and I like to think I make friends easy, but it's been a little hard. I've only been in Indy for three months now. It's okay. My girlfriend's been here longer but...it's tough. It's tough.

Between the already full lives of graduate students and the added precautions from COVID-19, developing accessible and varied opportunities for community becomes vital to the success and health of those students.

When the GWG began, the participants shared what their favorite and least favorite parts of their program or classes were. There was a dominant theme of frustration about dealing with the pandemic during the semester. One participant, Susan, echoed the sentiments of the interviewees as she remarked on the new class structure: "Everything has to be remote. I don't get to see my cohort. I don't get to go into my internship in-person and do things in groups...so it's been an interesting adjustment period." Georgia, a mom in her second year of graduate school, shared that she "knew grad school was gonna be hard but with the pandemic, with my children home *all the time* it has been overwhelming...it's kind of a lot." Graduate students who often are juggling school, work, and family have the added weight of trying to make a shared space work because of COVID. Even when her kids went back to school, that situation just became "another mess of anxiety" as the constant worry of someone catching COVID grew. Where one stress was alleviated, another increased.

Personalizing the Group

Sharing our experiences (of our fears and apprehensions for the semester or with our programs, our goals, and parts of our story) allowed us to begin to participate in what Cedillo and Bratta describe as “rhetorical listening to create bridges across diverse experiences” (234). Each participant in the GWG came from a different background. As covered in the methodology section, the participants in each step of this project came from a broad range of degrees, years, and fields of study. However, their academic situation was only one aspect of each multi-faceted participant that did not even touch on families, hobbies or post-academic goals (though those topics did arise at times through icebreakers or while waiting for members to join each week). As we uncovered these new perspectives about each other, it allowed for us to begin investing in one another simply through listening to how each person experienced IUPUI up until then. Riley Mukavetz refers to this “visible, present, and active” participation in community as “there-ness” (121). As difficult and uncomfortable as showing up can be, it is worth it because we know what this there-ness can lead to, and we hunger for it when it is not there—community.

Personalizing ourselves and the graduate writing group could not only be accomplished through a few ice breakers at the first meeting. To grow our community, we needed to continually work towards it and incorporate it. Part of this was through the avenue of sharing knowledge inherent in a writing group—providing feedback and encouragement to each other for our writing (as will be explored in the following chapter). However, constructive writing criticism was not our only opportunity. Often, building community is simply making visible the avenues that are already there. Again, a common sentiment that arose during the meetings and interviews was “If [someone]

hadn't told me about it, I would have had no idea." Starting the group meetings with these types of announcements, led to communication and greater opportunities to build knowledge of support networks as well as relationships. Each week I would review the newsletter sent out by the IUPUI Graduate Office for helpful programming (such as workshops or conferences) or interesting opportunities (such as speaker series or movie/trivia nights) that piqued my interest or could engage the other participants. One instance of this paying off was when I introduced that the Graduate Office was collaborating with the Library to offer a workshop on helpful citation programs—Zotero and EndNote. Several participants had expressed interest in citation support, and this seemed like the perfect opportunity to supplement the group feedback. Another participant and I both ended up attending the program and were able to share our experiences and insights during the next GWG meeting. Through creating opportunity to share our knowledge—even about small opportunities on campus—we can begin to encourage each other in our personal and writing needs and address a common concern on campus.

Positive Self-Reflection

Equally or more important than sharing these opportunities was sharing what I originally called “writing wins” each week. I wanted there to be an opportunity for each participant to not only receive encouragement through positive feedback on their writing but also for the group to recognize the hard work that goes into each week of simply being a graduate writer. This portion of growing community evolved over the course of our meetings, however. As we settled in each week for the GWG, we would ask each

other how the week went. The responses often ran along the lines of “doing okay”, “I’ve survived”, “could be worse”, and “boring.” Moving from these reactions into what our “writing wins” were during the COVID-ridden, Fall 2020 semester was difficult as the answers often revealed the struggle to accomplish anything— “this week was a wash”, “not much writing happening”, and “time means nothing and there are no seasons.” Recognizing our success and progress during such a stressful time with the added weight of COVID proved more problematic than I imagined it would be. Merely having each participant try to summon up feelings of accomplishment through their own attempt to recall successes was insufficient. A new tactic was needed.

The reflection the GWG participants took mid-way through our meetings demonstrated the impactful ways engaging graduate students in the very research can be beneficial and even alter parts of the study and future programming. In response to the question “Is there any aspect of the GWG that could benefit from an adjustment?” on the reflection I had the GWG participants fill out, one member brought to my attention an important point. Charlie suggested some changes to the group structure that would take into account the difficulties graduate students often face but are particularly felt during the pandemic.

Having a bit more peripheral activities not directly related to the writing that we're giving feedback [on] would help. For example, you ask us every week to reflect on some writing successes from the past week; what if we had a little journal/Word document where we wrote things like this down? On the one hand, we might not feel as self conscious [sic] talking about small accomplishments (or a lack of accomplishments), and additionally, that could give us a little something to look back on and see progress over time.

From then on, we began to take a bit of time at the beginning of the meetings to write out writing “wins” or even small steps of progress that could be reflected on without the pressure of attempting to compete with others perceived success.

In addition to this, as relationships grew, the participants would begin pointing out each other’s accomplishments which would encourage everyone to share. For instance, one week Mason actually paused the group to point out that Susan competed in the Three Minute Pitch competition (3MT) for Master’s and Professional students. The University Graduate Office hosted this event during the Preparing Future Faculty and Professionals Conference—an opportunity brought up during our opening announcements for the group. He praised her pitch, and she was able to acknowledge the excitement of the event and the positive feedback she received. Later, I was able to locate a recording of the event and share it with the group. Relating these opportunities to each other provided room for praise, encouragement, and mutual celebration that was vital in order to feel accomplishment and progress during an “unprecedented” semester.

Identifying Writing Progress

Because of this development in our positive writing practice, I added in a section to the focus group that concentrated on positive writing about the entire semester. This practice resulted in beneficial reflection that considered writers’ realistic struggles and helped to locate them within their writing process—the progress they already made and where they wanted to continue growing. We then shared some of these with the other participants to encourage celebration within the group and combat imposter syndrome.

While there were many ideas brought up during this portion of our meeting (such as recognizing tools like Zotero that led to ease of organization), the main “writing win” identified and shared was a more complete understanding of academic language, research methodologies, and locating self within the academy—which the participants tied closely together. Mason began by noting that a goal of his was to “figure out where my writing style lands from a research perspective” and finding out that, as he searched, the style most comfortable for him to write in was a possible research method such as narrative inquiry or bricolage. Susan jumped in, remarking on a similar experience of settling into her own more narrative voice in her academic writing because, as she received feedback, people would remark about how it was incredibly readable and felt like a story. When she spoke about her writing, at events such as the 3MT, strangers would remark about her style and voice. She enthusiastically recounted when “someone said [her research] sounded like a podcast! So exciting. I’m not going to forget that for a long time. I’ve achieved what I’m looking for.” Due to the common experience of graduate students feeling lost in the jargon of academia and struggling to locate themselves and their voice because of narrowly perceived expectations about acceptable writing, I was ecstatic to hear the participants were settling into their unique places and feeling confident in what and how they were writing. This practice tied in nicely to what Suhr et al. describe in their study of positive writing on mental health. Those who engage with positive writing and resource journaling “subsequently have a more accessible and larger pool of memories of successful coping experiences and strategies than do controls who did not specifically reflect on their resources until posttest” (1594). By identifying what worked and taking the time to recognize it, the GWG participants were provided with a “pool of

memories” to look back on for encouragement and stimulus when writing progress proved difficult.

By sharing our accomplishments and strategies with each other before the end of our meetings, we were also better able to see how we could support each other in continuing this progress and learn from each other’s successes. In the end, Susan remarked that she was “glad we got to reflect in a group” rather than on our own during the week. It allowed us to build off each other’s ideas, acknowledge shared experiences, share resources, and continue to build bonds. Though we were disappointed that we could not do more for Charlie, who was unable to attend the focus group, we were able to give them the space they needed and still create a time that was beneficial for everyone and respected where they were at.

Accountability

Taking time to reflect on our writing progress is important, but graduate writers also need support to stay on track with that progress every week in other ways. As we have public conversation through the GWG meetings and come to expect meeting with other writers each week to gain their insight, there arrives a bit of responsibility and accountability with writing groups. While potentially daunting, these two aspects are required for writing groups to succeed. There needs to be an element of intentionality, allowing each writer to receive the needed support because writing, community, and feedback are reciprocal activities. All parties must be willing to contribute to the knowledge that is shared because all will benefit from giving and receiving feedback. Accountability and feelings of responsibility also provide that extra nudge to students

who need support to keep writing when overwhelming feelings, writer's block, or procrastination strike.

COVID-19 has also increased the need for accountability in very different ways for graduate students. For some, like those above, the added stress of family being home or attempting to complete assignments or research from apartments feels like too much to accomplish. For others, schedules opened, and they need structure to help guide and encourage progress rather than being lost to the lethargy of the day. After moving to a new city and coming back to school, Mason felt this later experience greatly shifting how he approached his entire writing process.

I can elongate my schedule because my days are wide open—I don't know if it is procrastination, but I give myself more time. When I was writing, for my Master's, my thesis three years ago, I did almost all my writing in the library at a specific block of time again and again and again for weeks on end, and that's just not going to happen. It's just not. It's not how the world is functioning now; there's been a time shift. The amount of time that I allow myself to complete a piece is just longer—at least 50% longer. While an open schedule and extra time for assignments may sound like a dream come true, not having the structure of going to class, participating in extracurriculars, and needing to adhere to a schedule can do more harm than good. Without those outside structures for accountability, it can be difficult to stay on task and accomplish our goals.

When I asked whether or not Mason found this extra time for assignments helpful, he responded with vigorous head shaking and a definite, "No." Rather than having the impetus of a deadline and other commitments to navigate, this extra time actually led to "over revision." For an assignment that he would otherwise complete and be able to move on, he ended up revising and re-editing it four times—hyper-focusing on unnecessary details and issues that ate up his time. In an academic year that often feels

ephemeral and intangible, the steady pattern of meeting together can provide a sort of anchor and motivation to continue making progress.

Because of this new mode of life, Mason's entire writing process shifted, and he encountered one extreme of a spectrum that many graduate students are attempting to deal with. On one end, there is no time to balance all the requirements of family, work, school, COVID precautions, etc. On the other, there is more time than ever before, and it becomes difficult to self-impose accountability structures to stay on track with deadlines. As someone with more time on his hands, Mason recognized the need to analyze this change and fill in the gaps. "I don't think I would give it as much editing time [pre-Covid] and reworking, and I don't know if that is helpful or not. I'm happy with what I turned in, but I'm like 'Was that necessary?' Am I giving myself extra work because I have extra time?" He also noted that he made more revisions in his head. While this can be helpful, at times this type of revision can push writers into extra revision, second guessing, and hyper-focusing on elements that otherwise could be quick changes. With fewer people, such as our peers, there to relieve our imposter syndrome and reassure us, it is easier to spiral into this pattern. Were we receiving feedback from others and getting outside of our own perspectives to gain the other half of the equation (Bazerman), we would be able to move on more quickly, saving ourselves time and headaches.

When engaging with others in the social act of writing and feedback, each participant takes on a responsibility which, naturally, adds pressure. While this pressure can lead to active and intentional participation, it must be relieved somewhat to prevent the same affect that professor feedback can cause—frustration, burnout, and becoming overwhelmed. Though accountability is helpful, it can also end up pushing someone over

the edge and reinforce thoughts of insufficiency or imbalance with other life requirements. If deadlines ever prove to be a difficulty, some students may feel as though they need to sacrifice important parts of their life to meet the deadline or just let it blow by. I attempted to avoid this through allowing the writers to sign-up for the weeks that worked best for them and reassuring the participants that they could still attend the group even if they had not been able to do much of the reading. However, sometimes this feeling is inevitable.

Expectations

Again, the focus group helped to illuminate these feelings of insufficiency or imbalance in the GWG members and aid us in reflecting on these moments of needed accountability. The first common theme to arise was that of motivation and trying to locate what places, things, and people aided each of us to write outside of the writing group. This idea then tied closely into our ideas of progress and how we counted it—which would often motivate or dishearten depending on the answer. All three of us had a common experience of a “pendulum swing” from high motivation and chunks of progress into a slump. Susan and I shared the experience of reading one paper and counting that as our thesis work for the day, and Mason chimed in saying, “That was me today. Like today I just wrote e-mails to people. And not even that many...just like three...” This caused us to discuss our writing strategies and how we might meet in the middle—not spending hours in front of the computer to make up for lost time but also finding ways to continue progress on our important topics. We discussed how we could create writing habits during the upcoming winter break and map out our projects more effectively to

monitor the progress we made rather than leaving it to a certain page number or hours per day. Susan also brought up an excellent point at the same time, reminding us that “we have to cut ourselves a little slack given how everything is weird right now.” While it is important to meet deadlines and not fall too far behind (a major reason for this group in the first place), we reminded each other that writing three e-mails for the day or annotating one source was still progress that we needed to contextualize in the situation of the semester.

Susan and Mason also commented on the element of feedback from the group. While I will dive more into that concept in the next chapter, community is a large part of what makes feedback accessible (as one interviewee identified at the beginning of this chapter). Though at this point in the semester we had only reviewed Mason’s writing once, he noted that

I know in the grand scheme of things it didn’t seem like we went over that many of our writing pieces, but just the fact that you guys gave me feedback on the one paper that I submitted...that’s huge because I was really disappointed in the peer review from my two classes...but it was just glossed over or when it did happen the feedback I got just stunk. Not a judgement on those people but it was just obvious that it was second, tertiary to what they were doing...this isn’t feedback so much as you spell-checking my stuff.

Because there was not the foundation of community and connection built up, there was no jumping off point to know what the other members of their classes needed which led to frustration and disconnect from peers. Mason identified an area of need because he had “been out of classes for a while and was hoping for more of that [guidance]” about voice and organization rather than input on the LOCs that he felt more comfortable managing on his own. Susan echoed his frustrations, “That’s funny that you mention the feedback because that’s something I found myself reflecting on, the different kinds of support—

listening support and writing support...in the GWG I felt like I actually made significant progress...so I really appreciate how that ended up working out this semester.” As we built rapport, listened to each other’s needs, and held each other accountable to projects that would have been put off or drug out, we were able to create a recursive and reciprocal community. One that built off of each other’s strengths, revisited points of interest, and fed back into each participant’s goals.

Risk

While respecting writer’s boundaries and needs is an important part of relieving writing anxiety, fears about performance and perceptions can also arise within the group meetings. Participants increase vulnerability with one another through sharing their writing and their writing process which includes many personal facets of their lives such as family, mental and physical health, and past experiences with academic criticism. This anxiety needs release then as well, and one way this can be accomplished is through humor. As described in Thesen’s work, humor breaks through much of the trepidation that writers bring with them when engaging in baring their printed soul.

For the first few weeks of the GWG, the writers cycled through as deadlines approached for which they needed feedback. However, we reached a lull where no one particularly *needed* feedback, and Mason asked if I would be providing any writing excerpts of my own. I had considered sharing my own work if the need arose, but now I felt unsure. Everyone was doing so well, and I did not want to disrupt anything by veering. Would this even be usable data for my thesis if we reviewed my work? I agreed that I would go, hastily adding that it would probably be shorter, and I would have

another activity for us to do. A buffer for myself. I sent out my work (an annotated bibliography for this thesis), we met the next Friday, and I set up the piece like any other week, allowing them to skim their notes for a bit before we started. We began discussing my ideas, the various sources I pulled from, how I was planning to incorporate them, and which ones sparked the interest of the other group members. It turned into a wonderful conversation about my thoughts regarding graduate writing and how I saw these various areas intersect. In short, it turned into exactly what I had been researching and hoping the GWGs would do for graduate writers—including myself. Yes, there were definitely moments of discomfort when the other members would point out a paragraph that said nothing though there were plenty of words or an elementary flaw in my MLA citation, but, as with every other writer, they were insightful and gracious. Being able to share my own work and trust in the process allowed for me to share in the risk and vulnerability of the project and drive home an important element of my research as well as that of the Writing Center pedagogy I'm steeped in—not positioning myself as the expert.

I could listen and learn from the other participants, shaping my research to fit them as they critiqued and questioned my project via the annotated bibliography. I also received support and reassurance that I was on the right track and narrowing in on something important as they pointed out sources that interested or impacted them. The “activity” I planned for the end of this meeting demonstrated this nicely. I asked each of the participants to fill out the short list of reflection questions I prepared in Qualtrics. Based off of reading the annotated bibliography excerpt from Suhr et al. that discussed positive writing, Charlie was able to bring up their preference to switch to writing down writing wins. This would lead to less stress about needing to reach a certain level of

production or progress in the week in order to feel comfortable enough to share in the group. The reflection caused an immediate change to the group and to the structure and thought process of future groups. While having a facilitator to help guide conversations and assist in creating connections from the feedback to the larger writing process is important (as will be explored in the next chapter), involving all the participants in the structure and execution of the programming—making them true participants in the research and making myself a true participant with them—allowed for a better understanding of what benefits graduate writers and leads to successful writing support.

Community Serves as the Foundation

These moments of sharing life—the struggles and the successes—led to opportunities of vulnerability, academic development, and friendship. As I reviewed the last of our meeting recordings, I was saddened by the thought that, in all likelihood, I would not see most of the members again due to being in different schools and departments. The strong connections developed within the pilot GWG affirmed for me the importance of this work and the value it had to offer graduate students simply through providing community and human interaction, particularly in a semester where already isolated students became even more restricted. However, the benefits of community did not stop there. While community, accountability, and encouragement are important for a writing group, they are not the only aspects to creating a successful writing group.

As the Graduate Writing Group (GWG) progressed through the semester, it became clear that community served as the foundation to the cohesion of the members and contributed greatly to our success. Without the trust, comradery, and humor that we

built together over a few short weeks through vulnerability and sincerity, our experience would not have been of the quality that it was, and it is quite possible that the group would have fizzled out. As the student stated at the beginning of the chapter, trust and rapport need to be built to create constructive feedback. In this chapter I explored the complexity of community within the writing process and writing groups. In the next chapter, I will begin to demonstrate how necessary intentionally incorporating community and relationship-building into graduate writing groups is for encouraging impactful and intentional feedback.

Chapter Two: Feedback

“It wasn’t the greatest experience for me in my thesis class, and I didn’t get all that much feedback from my professor or from the peer review because we just didn’t get a whole lot of support. But in the GWG I feel like I actually made significant progress...”

--Susan, GWG Fall '20 participant

Introduction

When approaching a writing project, the most potentially helpful and terrifying aspect is receiving feedback. As acknowledged in the previous chapter which focused on the importance of community for graduate students, writing takes vulnerability and sharing your work feels like baring your soul to the world. That world is also holding a red pen, ready to tell you everything you have done wrong. For a demographic already experiencing disconnect, imposter syndrome, and overwhelming stress, adding the opportunity for someone to tell them they are as fraudulent as they feel is daunting. In “Learning from Multiple Voices,” Claire Aitchison explores what makes effective feedback and how the relational dynamic of a writing group impacts the feedback process. She emphasizes that feedback and authority are closely related for writers. Both parties (the writer and the reviewer) must approach the work with care and intentionality in order to reinforce the writer’s authority while equipping the reviewer with the most effective tools for providing applicable and productive feedback. While stroking a writer’s ego does no good, neither does completely destroying their confidence in their work. The large consequences and effects of feedback lead it to be a complicated aspect of writing with some students seeking it fervently and others rejecting it outright.

Productive feedback remains surprisingly elusive during graduate school—requiring effort to hunt down the type and availability of feedback needed to feel confident about your progress. Whether this is due to lack of time, direction or care, graduate students are often frustrated when they cannot attain the guidance and support needed for their writing. To receive the desired response, graduate writers must not only understand the various types of feedback they want but also the type of person who can best provide that feedback. In this chapter, I explore the academic conversation surrounding feedback, IUPUI graduate students’ perspective on what feedback they need, and the impact peer review can have on not only graduate students’ writing but their experiences with graduate school in general.

Foundations of Feedback

The writing that accompanies many graduate degrees in the form of literature reviews, seminar papers, theses, and dissertations can prove daunting to anyone. Particularly for writers who do not come from writing-heavy majors, and then do not receive the needed support for reorienting their mindsets, writing becomes something demanded but ambiguous. Christine Pearson Casanave recognizes that “doing a dissertation involves much more than drafting chapters, just as writing in general involves a lot more than constructing sentences” (101). As graduate students progress through assignments or tackle their capstone projects, they begin to realize the shift in writing expectations as well. “Writing Difficulties” remains one of the largest problems and contributors to attrition for graduate students (Casanave 109). Because they are

unprepared for the complexity of writing they experience, many believe their feelings of confusion mean they are not cut out for graduate school.

Often the “support” and feedback they receive is no help to relieve confusion or pressure. Professors and peers leave comments on the page that range from unclear to devastating. Claire Aitchison discusses the most beneficial types of feedback and the relationships required to receive it. She explores how both parties (the writer and the reviewer) must approach the work with the mindset of engaging in a “dialogue” in order to reinforce the writer’s authority while equipping the reviewer with the most effective tools for providing applicable feedback. In discussing the process of providing feedback in her writing group of eight people, Aitchison states that, “Feedback that was perceived as dialogue was more favourably received and more effective...” (55). So often, students want to be heard. Graduate writers, in particular, need the recursive process of writing and discussing their work with others. Aitchison’s chapter clearly lays out the necessary elements of both the relationships and the types of feedback needed to best support graduate writers.

Drawing Roozen and Bazerman’s discussion of writing as a social activity into feedback, Anthony Paré discusses the idea of “reader response criticism,” directing a conversation to negotiate the meaning of a text based on the viewpoints of the writer and the readers (21). The importance of engaging with an audience who can dialogue about your writing with you is an essential step while developing a writing project, engaging with the content during the writing process, and before submitting or publishing because it helps catch meanings the author did not intend or needs to consider. Communal writing can also add reassurance when the author’s meaning *is* followed by readers! An emphasis

on dialogue and recognition of the larger nature of writing is vital in supporting graduate writers to succeed in their writing and understand why it can be so challenging.

Additionally, in a writing group, there is more opportunity for discussion and exploration because each member is a peer working through the assignment together. Heidi Estrem's "Writing is a Knowledge-Making Activity" supports this idea, observing that "through making the knowledge-making role of writing more visible, people gain experience with understanding how these sometimes-ephemeral and often-informal aspects of writing are critical to their development and growth" (Estrem). Expanding writing beyond the solitary writer or one-way of engagement opens up a student's writing process to engage with much larger ideas that clarify some of the struggles and successes a graduate writer encounters through their work.

Methodology

The beginning of the writing groups felt detailed-focused, but I needed to build feedback expectations into the structure of the GWG. Before our first meeting, I sent out an e-mail with the time, Zoom link, and other basic information the participants would need to feel prepared. The e-mail also contained optional readings about feedback and the importance of peer support. These chapters were Claire Aitchison's "Learning from Multiple Voices: Feedback and Authority in Doctoral Writing Groups", Muriel Harris's "Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors", and Hughes et al.'s "What They Take with Them: Findings from the Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project." A small summary followed each resource in case the participants did not have time to read three chapters for an extra-curricular activity. Though I do not know whether or not

anyone took the time to read these, it established up front that the feedback structures of the group were not accidental. Also, several responders to the GWG Intake Survey noted that they had negative past experiences with unstructured writing groups. These readings would reassure these participants that the UWC GWGs would be based in information geared to support them.

There were also weekly e-mails that contained the writer-of-the-week's work and some guiding thoughts from the author on what feedback they were looking for from the other participants. This allowed for the graduate writers to have a jumping off point when approaching a piece rather than going in blind and falling into the habit of picking at small details (such as grammar or punctuation) for fear of disrupting or offending the writer or feeling that they lacked the knowledge to provide feedback addressing high-order concerns. These initial steps laid the foundation for our interactions and feedback before we met each week.

The next step to prepare the GWG participants to provide feedback was establishing common ground about feedback preferences from the first meeting. After the get-to-know-you portion of the meeting, I asked each participant to answer the question—“What feedback are you looking to get from the other members?” Again, it remained important to establish up front that the GWG participants had influence over the feedback they received or gave. This was accomplished through creating a shared picture of what feedback the writers expected and expanding some participants' ideas of what feedback they might ask for by hearing from others. During this portion, I once more reminded the participants of the difference between HOCs (high-order concerns)

and LOCs (low-order concerns) and connected those categories to the type of feedback each participant stated they wanted to receive.

During our second meeting, before the feedback began, I asked the GWG members to structure their feedback as closely to the Praise, Question, Suggestion format as possible. This system provided the graduate writers with a structure to work from, so they had a place to start and lead to during the feedback process. As stated in the previous chapter, this format also allowed writers to receive positive feedback first and attempted to avoid a pattern of only bringing up revisions—something that can quickly diminish a writer’s confidence and an issue many already struggle with. After the writer offered clarifications about their piece and answered preparatory questions, the rest of the GWG members were given the opportunity to review our notes on our own for 5-10 minutes. This allowed time for the readers to reorient their feedback to the Praise, Question, Suggestion format and remind themselves of their comments if it had been a while since they reviewed the piece. Though there were varied experiences with writing before our meetings, through this process, everyone then felt heard and prepared to continue into the feedback portion of our meetings.

Reorienting Attitudes Toward Writing

Strong feelings accompany discussions of feedback and peer review, and many graduate students are eager to describe their experiences. In response to the question “What causes or motivates you to seek out support or feedback for your writing?” on the preliminary Graduate Writing Support survey, there were varied reasons. Some were as simple as “needing to bounce thoughts off of others” or “always want to be better.” This

is a typical response, reflecting the nature of those who often choose to go into graduate programs—wanting to “be better” by earning a degree that gets them closer to their ideal job or expanding their knowledge of their subject area. Other responses revealed troubling situations like “No[t] having confidence and feedback from Chair” and “My crippling impostor syndrome.” These are unfortunate yet common experiences for those who are still learning how to navigate graduate school and the relationships it entails. Still additional responses reflected the sometimes-ambiguous feelings that arise during graduate writing as one respondent merely wrote, “Need help.” This graduate writer accomplished the difficult step of acknowledging they need support but remains in the dark on what exactly that support should or could look like. What all the responses have in common is the understanding that graduate students want support but are not always positive how to go about receiving feedback.

One reason for this uncertainty is the fact that many graduate students are coming into writing-heavy Master’s and PhD programs from degrees that do not require as much writing or contained much different genres of writing. “Sophia,” an interviewee in a Nursing PhD program, shared that “as [an undergraduate] student, you think, ‘Writing is writing is writing’. And that’s certainly not the case, and I’ve learned that now.” She recognized the need for a shift in how she simply approached the idea of writing, let alone the various stages and styles it contains. She went on to talk about her realization that “Writing for research is different than for a general essay...” as the audience, the preparation, and many other aspects of writing changed in graduate school. She unintentionally echoed what Casanave warns many graduate students of: “...doing a dissertation involves much more than drafting chapters, just as writing in general

involves more than constructing sentences” (101). Rachael, another PhD student, admitted that she “never realized how hard writing is and how long of a process it is and how much effort it takes until [she had] been exposed to courses and writing classes and the publication process.” Coming into graduate school, there is not much preparation for the new forms and audiences that graduate writers encounter. Graduate students soon realize that they need to reorient themselves and work to understand the multi-faceted nature of writing. This idea was echoed by Mason during his interview as he discussed how he needed to remind himself of the different audience he was writing for in his PhD-level class. In previous degrees, he noted that he wrote more “lay-focused” papers, accessible to the general population rather than to a specialized audience. Now he felt he needed to shift into more technical writing for other researchers as he engaged in concentrated topics. One way Mason, and other graduate writers, could begin to make the shift into this new stage of writing is through feedback.

Misunderstandings About Feedback Support

Figure 1 outlines the types of feedback graduate writers at IUPUI perceive they need. While some do want the lower order concern (LOC) feedback such as support with grammar or punctuation, the most desired feedback centered on the clarity and organization of student writing. Could the reader understand the writing and does the writing make sense as it progresses? Having the feedback from the survey, interviews, and GWG meetings together provided insight into a discrepancy within graduate writer answers and illuminated misconceptions that graduate writers often have about their own assignments and projects. During the interviews, graduate students would admit

hesitation about seeking out support from places like the University Writing Center and multi-disciplinary writing groups. They wanted someone who was “similar to their field” and could understand the complex topics they were writing about. Correspondingly, Rachael shared that, in her view, “what is lacking in the Writing Center is that it’s not based on your field; it’s just general writing.” When first seeking out writing support, writers tend to focus on disciplinary feedback about the topics and examples included in their work rather than requesting support regarding broader knowledge of the writing process or style.

Often, what graduate writers have in mind is the only picture of graduate writing support naturally included in graduate programming—an advisor or mentor. One interviewee remarked that she stopped using the UWC because she was “looking for a more smooth [sic] relationship...” and wanted to share materials ahead of time with the Writing Center consultant. While it is possible to continually schedule with one consultant throughout the semester so that there is a more fluid and developed relationship and knowledge of the materials, the load of one-to-one consultations within a Writing Center can make it difficult to keep this up. The set-up this writer is looking for is more focused toward that of an advisor who, ideally, walks through the thesis or dissertation process with the graduate student, able to recognize the progress they are making and provide topic-specific feedback. A separation between the different aspects of writing and the steps of an individual’s writing process needs to occur to provide clarity for graduate (and all) writers. Coming to an advisor for every aspect of the writing process and for developing the array of relationships necessary for success in graduate school becomes dangerous, as Casanave and others have pointed out, because no one

person can meet all these needs (Casanave 102; Simpson et al. 5). Advisors, as well, experience significant pressure and ever-growing lists of requirements which only increased with the onset of the pandemic. However, within her same comment, Rachael revealed that what she was really looking for with her writing was, “someone who could follow the logic...” of her argument and research. This matches the responses to the survey question in Figure 1 and falls in line with what many researchers have already discovered.

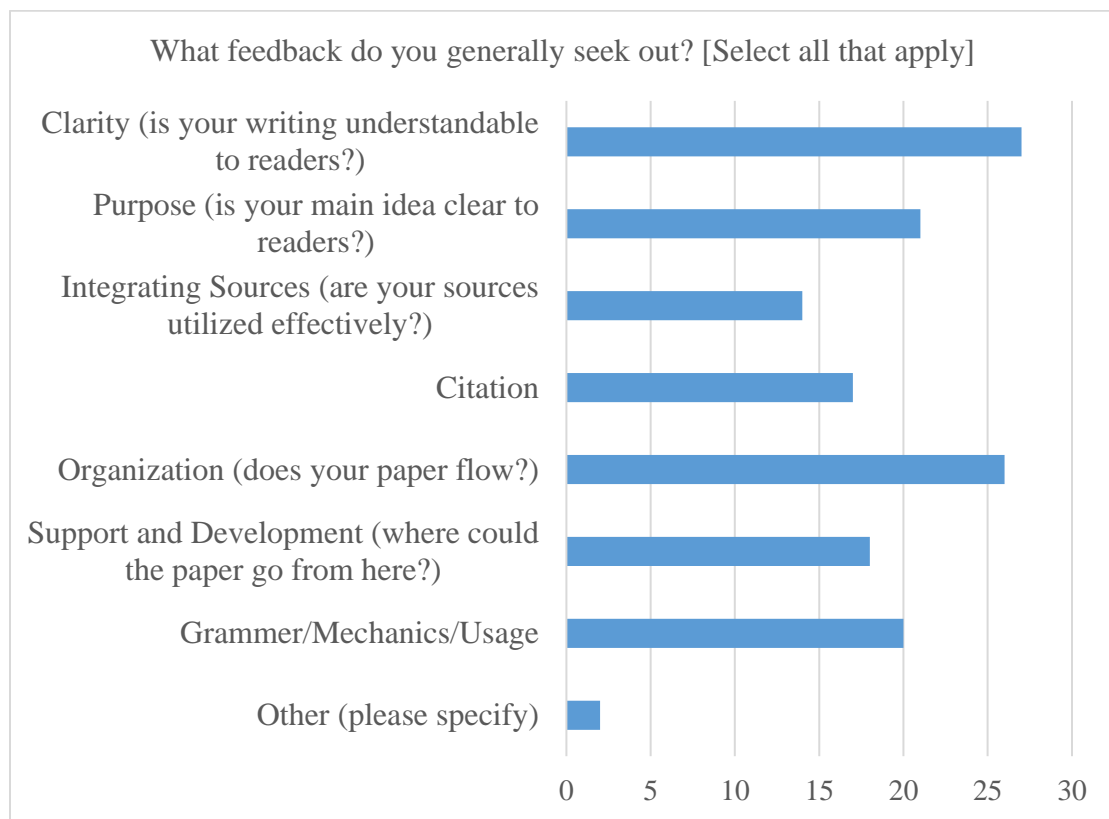


Figure 1: Survey Responses for Feedback Sought

As pointed out before, clarity and organization were the highest ranked feedback types that graduate students identified they needed at 27 and 26 responses, respectively, from 37 responders. These aspects deal more with the “logic” of a writer’s argument or

research—something that people other than an advisor could provide. More discipline-specific feedback that graduate writers often assume they prefer, like purpose or source integration, fell more closely to the level of citation support and grammar/mechanics. This pattern repeated when graduate writers were asked to fill out an intake survey (Figure 2) before joining a writing group. Eight of the participants who indicated interest in joining a GWG from the Graduate Writer Support Survey filled out the Graduate Writing Group Intake Survey. Again, the participants were asked to indicate the types of feedback they wanted from the other group members; however, this question had more concrete grounding because it was based in the potential for inclusion in a GWG. Rather than asking about hypothetical feedback, like in the above question, “What feedback would you want to receive about your work?” connected to an event the respondents could actually participate in and benefit from.

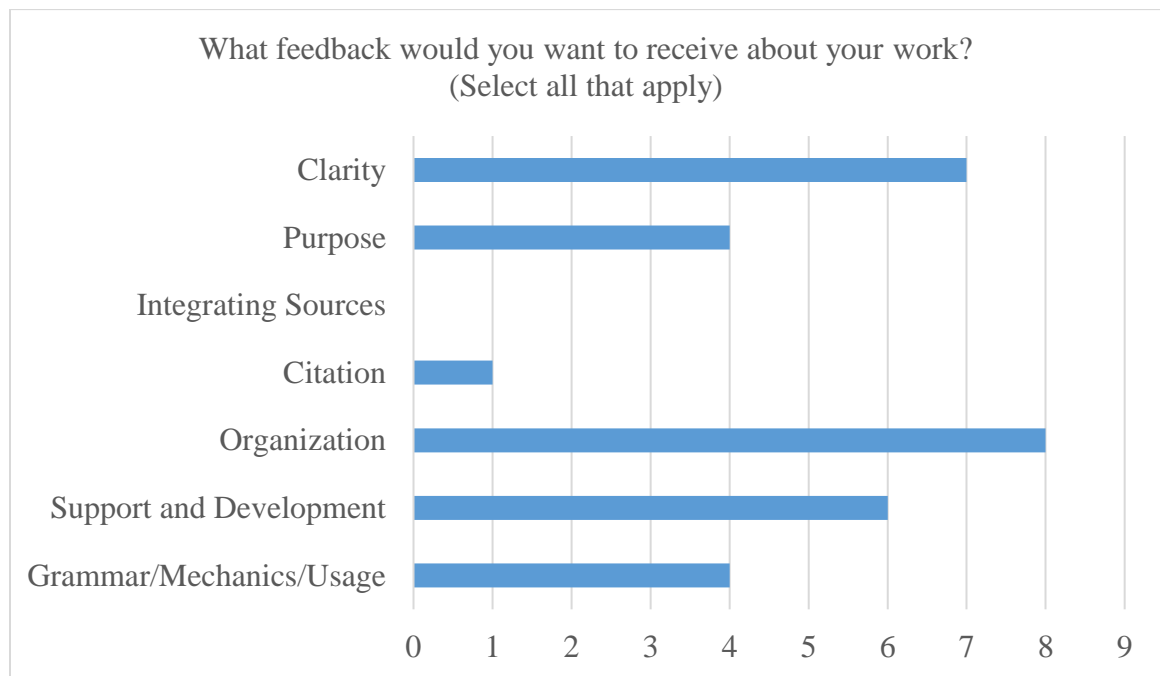


Figure 2: Intake Survey Responses for Feedback Sought

Clarity and organization once more outstripped all other options. Participants shared feedback preferences such as wanting feedback paired with mentorship. Someone needed to walk them through the feedback process to support them in knowing “what is too much or too little” explanation and “how to be explicit.” These are common but general phrases that can leave writers in the dark in terms of actually moving forward with their writing. When approaching such large and daunting projects, expectations from the genre, advisors, and potential audiences (such as journals and editors) are not always known. Often, writers simply need someone to tell them if their ideas and writing make any sense, building upon the idea of writing as knowledge-making.

There were also students who could identify the various parts of their writing and writing process (comprehension/clarity, structure/organization, etc.) but could not see how they linked together. Sophia shared that she found peer review helpful, but that it tended to be more about comprehension rather than structure and organization (what she was really hoping for). As was the pattern, she soon followed this up with a statement that proved she was receiving the feedback she needed but required some guidance into how that feedback could tie into her broader writing process. For example, she noted that in past peer review experiences, her reviewers would provide feedback such as “I see what you’re saying but I’m not clear on how this links back to the previous paragraph” and “I’m really unclear about this term you used. I’ve never heard it before; you didn’t define it. What does that mean?” While these statements do relate to the comprehension of the piece, her peers’ advice also ties into the broader structure and organization of the paragraph. Why is it unclear how one paragraph comes from the previous one? How might rearranging your argument and restructuring your work ease that confusion?

Writing is immensely reciprocal, and many writers simply need someone to point out how to ask the most effective questions and build connections between feedback and their worries for their writing. Advisors and peers with more specific content knowledge are definitely needed, but they do not have to remain the catch-all for graduate writers. Until the distinction of feedback is pointed out to writers, it can often lead to confusion and missed opportunities for support.

Many professors and advisors also make assumptions about students' writing knowledge. As with academic jargon, professors sometimes presume that graduate students come into the academic environment with more knowledge than they actually possess. For some, this includes the process of providing and receiving quality feedback. Again, during the GWG Intake Survey, graduate writers were asked how prepared they felt to provide oral and written feedback for the other group members. The majority response was that they felt "Somewhat prepared." Without intentional preparation, graduate students can sit in this uncertainty. In the GWG, one of the participants illustrated this point nicely. Mason pointed out that his professor provided a rubric to guide their peer feedback, but it became more of a checklist rather than a tool. The students were not instructed on how to use the rubric to ground their feedback so remained surface-level with their responses. The lack of depth or preparation from the professor led to frustration and viewing the task as superfluous or tedious which then led to a lack of effort. This snowball effect disrupted any chance for connection with peers' topics or experiences. Thankfully, setting expectations within our GWG community allowed for clear goals and healthy communication, reinforcing the importance of relationship leading to quality feedback.

Because of this confusion surrounding feedback and the writing process, there is some disagreement as to how much students (particularly graduate students) want peer feedback. Some writers (such as the above interviewees) feel that those outside their field may not be able to appreciate or understand their work if the reviewers do not have the same foundation of knowledge. Others have experienced poor feedback from peers or through writing groups and are wary to try again—though this is often due to a lack of guidance from professors or facilitators. One interviewee, who was unsure about how helpful writing groups might be, shared that a writing group she participated in fell apart because it was not structured. She emphasized the need for having the school or department support the group to provide that structure and guidance to keep everyone on task, leading to sustainability within the group. The writing group and the people inside it needed to feel like a priority.

This sentiment also arose during a focus group with the GWG participants. Due to past experiences with peer review, the writers were pleasantly surprised at the quality and quantity of feedback from the writing group. Two participants, Mason and Susan, shared their disappointment in the peer review from their classes. Mason noted that, in his classes, either peer review was “glossed over or when it did happen, the feedback I got just stunk. Not a judgement on those people, but it was just obvious that it was second, tertiary to what they were doing...” He noted that the response felt more like “spell-checking” than feedback—unhelpful as he attempted to readjust to writing in an academic setting and in a new field. Since no investment or relationships developed within the class and feedback process, Mason admitted that it led to “self-censoring” and the thought that “if they are not going to really engage or critique—even harshly—then

I'm probably not going to either." Rather than peer review leading to a better understanding of the field and their own writing habits and style, it led to frustration and fracturing of relationship. Susan followed up Mason's remarks by relating the lack of support from her own program—

This graduate writing group was very, very helpful. Legitimately, I got better advice here on my writing than I got in my thesis class the entire semester. It wasn't the greatest experience for me in my thesis class, and I didn't get all that much feedback from my professor or from the peer review because we just didn't get a whole lot of support. But in the GWG, I feel like I actually made significant progress in enhancing the readability as well as the overall argument of my paper.

Both of these responses reveal the absence of support or guidance in most programs for how to go about providing feedback or support between peers. While Susan would recount times when her professor and advisor provided content knowledge—they introduced her to her thesis topic—she was still frustrated because she noted the gap in writing support. This led to differing expectations, exasperation, and—eventually—a lack of effort by even those who wanted peer review.

One positive aspect of peer feedback identified was that, though peer feedback was not viewed as satisfactorily as professor feedback in the initial interviews and GWG meetings, there were “lower stakes attached to [peer] feedback.” The expectation is that peers will provide feedback that is more “informal.” One interviewee framed it as, “Hey, I'm not judging this for a grade. I'm judging this because I'm a colleague, and because I want you to do well, and I respect you.” While an advisor's or professor's feedback is valuable, it often remains attached to a grade or a student's perception of their success in their field. If the response to their work is not overly positive or requires heavy revisions, that can damage a writer's self-esteem, feeding right into the feelings of imposter syndrome. The student believes their feelings “prove” they are not cut out for graduate

school. However, feedback from peers weighs less heavily. Graduate writers can choose whether or not to accept peer review suggestions, while advisor feedback feels more imperative. Taking these feelings and realities into account, I decided that our outline and execution of feedback needed intentionality which led to discussing these themes and structures within the group itself from the first meeting.

Feedback Within the GWG

From the beginning, due to personal experience with writing center pedagogy and peer review, I knew it would be important to set up feedback guidelines to avoid a number of potential difficulties. The data from the interviews and surveys only confirmed this thought. Peer review can quickly feel as though it is falling into eviscerating critique or bland and disengaged grammar nitpicks. While all the participants were open to receiving feedback on grammar and mechanics, receiving only that feedback would kill the energy of the group; something we experienced in one of our last meetings. Having taken the steps to build the community and camaraderie necessary for peer review to feel intentional and well-intentioned, the next move entailed equipping the participants with the tools and methods that would reinforce what they already felt they needed and wanted.

Through the preparation done before the first GWG meetings, the expectations of participation remained clear. Providing supporting readings, putting terms to the types of feedback possible, and laying out the preferred order of providing feedback made visible an accessible feedback process and the importance aspects each reader needed to focus on. When asked about the type of feedback each participant wanted, the answers were all

quite similar. Each writer expressed a desire to hear how their piece flowed and determine whether or not the writing followed a narrative thread or clear structure throughout the piece. Did the order make sense to more people than just the author? Would someone get lost without the author explaining every transition?

One participant, Georgia, humorously shared about past experiences with her writing. She would feel confident about a piece until she read it aloud or had someone else read aloud and would realize “Wait this sounds crazy...this sounds like a fever dream...This is not what I anticipated this to sound like at all”—a sentiment quickly echoed by everyone else in the meeting. Until a piece is shared with other people, sometimes “self-reflection” on your writing is difficult to accomplish. Two of the members also added that they were “eager” for support regarding grammar, mechanics, and punctuation or the “micro-level” adjustments for their papers. This led nicely into a discussion regarding the difference between “higher order concerns” (HOCs) and “lower order concerns” (LOCs) within the writing feedback provided.

While I intended to address the difference between HOCs and LOCs within writing feedback, I did not anticipate the writers themselves leading into the discussion so naturally (a common occurrence within our group meetings). These conversations demonstrated that, often, graduate writers “know” the support they need, and they simply require specific vocabulary and reassurance that they are on the right track. I echoed their distinction between the larger structural feedback desired and the way they defined grammar and punctuation as “micro-level” concerns—connecting this to the language of HOCs and LOCs. This, again, allowed the group to begin on the same level of

understanding with a common language that provided a foundation for the kind of feedback we asked for and received.

One of the sources included in the e-mail was also a primary resource that I pulled from to frame the feedback and strategize how to prepare the participants. Aitchison's chapter regarding writing groups discusses the types of feedback most needed to aid writers and the types of feedback that students found least helpful during the writing process. She does this by centering her entire argument around the idea of feedback as dialogue (55). Rather than feedback working as disembodied, cold words on a page in red ink, feedback should be living, able to be responded to, and open to discussion, explanation, and/or rejection by the recipient, the reviewer, and the other members of the group. In other words, writing is and should be recursive and reciprocal (Aitchison 52). As kept happening with this project, many of the sources I pulled from (including Aitchison) soon found support from graduate writers' comments. One of the interviewees shared some of her difficulty with her mentor's feedback that was written down on her work: "You learn. You look at what's been done but you can't really understand the structure or the process of why she changed it, what was wrong with it. Is it just like she's beautifying the writing or is it flawed?" Without walking through the process together, graduate writers are left at the mercy of their mentor's written feedback and the assumption that the writer should already know what they are doing.

Without even reading Aitchison's work, some of the graduate writers already identified this in the feedback they received. While Rachael had one mentor who was vague with their feedback, she had another professor who engaged animatedly with the text. This meant that, at times, she could be harsh, writing "Oh no no no no!...You can't

do this in academic writing” in the margins, a blunt comment that Rachael noted, “evokes that emotion that you’re like ‘Oh! I’m never gonna do this again.’” However, she also left expressive encouragement to where it “felt like you could hear her reading your writing”—mimicking the feel of dialogue—which allowed for the feedback to feel helpful rather than merely diminishing. This mentor would not simply modify the graduate student’s words but point out where she could expand as well as noting the “weird stuff” that was not working for the student’s writing. However, while the dialogue aspect is important, it was also important to me to avoid “blunt” comments as much as possible since that type of phrasing can often cut through any confidence a graduate writer has built up. For this reason, I asked the participants to follow the “Praise, Question, Suggestion” structure for their feedback.

Praise, Question, Suggestion

While we would not follow this layout strictly, the general structure reinforced the necessary aspects of feedback—reinforcing the positive while still providing constructive criticism. These three categories encouraged dialogue and kept the focus on supporting the writer rather than eviscerating the text. By leading with praise, the comments set up the author to feel confident about their text, allows them to expand upon why they made the successful moves they did (which provides wonderful resources and techniques for the other writers to draw from), and often transitions into pleasant conversations about their topic. From the very first meeting, I could tell this provided an excellent way to start the feedback process. As we traded back and forth, complementing the writer on the narrative feel of her piece and the entertaining editing techniques such as creating a

“word graveyard” for the excerpts she liked but just did not fit any more, a feeling of ease crept in. I noted how I particularly enjoyed the idea of the word graveyard as it combined the idea of “kill your darlings” but left open the chance that they might come back—a sort of writing necromancy. The writer was smiling, and we established off the bat that the intent of the group was to encourage each other in our writing process rather than mark up each piece in red.

Moving from praise into questions reinforced that sense of dialogue. Rather than instructing the author on areas of their paper they needed to change, the participants were encouraged to engage the author on the “whys,” often causing the peer reviewers themselves to try to better understand the author’s point of view and new writing techniques they may not have considered before. Again, this placed the author in a position of author-ity. Rather than having to defend their work, they explained their choices or asked questions of the reviewer as well. It set up the expectation that each participant still has something to learn about others’ and their own writing processes. This tied nicely back into what one interviewee noted they wanted out of a writing group or writing program—a way to analyze their writing style and find what worked and what needed to be revisited through new techniques. By asking questions and engaging in discussion, this analysis could occur naturally over time with people who could provide examples and a fresh perspective that we sometimes miss with our own writing.

The feedback then finished with suggestion. Ending on suggestions would, hopefully, provide enough of a foundation to reassure the author that they understood their own work, through the praise and question sections, before receiving critique. At this point, the writer could feel confident in deciding whether or not to accept or set aside

a suggestion. The author could also push back on our suggestions, explaining why they chose to make the move they did because we had already engaged in a sort of question and answer previously. Some of my favorite moments were when two peer reviewers would give contradicting advice because it allowed us all to see that no one person held the answers and provided an opportunity for that week's writer to make an intentional and definite decision about what they felt was the best fit for their writing.

Before diving into the writing for that week, we would pause for a moment and let the writer reestablish the specific feedback they were looking for. Sometimes the writer merely repeated the original request from the e-mail I sent out earlier in the week. At other times, this reestablishment of the agenda meant they added clarifying statements or additional cautions from their advisor. This pause also provided an opportunity for the other participants to clarify any questions they had or information needed to frame the topic. For example, when the GWG reviewed my annotated bibliography, Susan asked me to provide a short thesis statement that would allow them to better understand what I was attempting to accomplish through my research. By taking that step and clarifying, they were equipped to guide me in whether or not my projected uses for the sources would help me to accomplish my goal. Additionally, this moment reestablished the writer as the authority and guide for that week's meeting, reinforcing their ability to make decisions about their writing and removing the facilitator from a position of absolute authority. Finally, this pause also allowed the peer reviewers to scan their notes and refresh their memory of the writing, enabling each participant to feel prepared to provide feedback and fully engage with the conversation.

Through engaging in this type of writing feedback process, the participants were not only able to make progress on their writing goals, feel equipped with personal knowledge of their writing style and process, and spend time learning about new writing techniques, but they were also set up well to become the “peer reviewers” that they hoped for themselves in graduate school and for future colleagues, journals, and other avenues.

Student Experience with GWG Feedback

One of the reasons I chose feedback as a data chapter was because of the response by the GWG participants, interviewees, and survey responses. To my “co-investigators”, feedback continually arose as something that troubled, excited, and supported them—needing to be untangled yet still holding its value as an essential part of the writing process. Throughout the GWG meetings, I was intrigued to see how our feedback would develop as we grew to know what each member needed, the areas where they excelled (and needed to be told that), and where we would laugh because we were talking about *the same thing again!* Without fail, every single writer would receive feedback to either add in or remove a few semi-colons (an especially typical suggestion for Susan). It became a running gag that was sure to cause shared laughter. This feedback (feeding into Thesen’s research on the importance of shared humor in a group) allowed us to set up a baseline and feel as though we were connected and deepening that connection through each meeting.

While I was a bit disheartened at the initial size of the group (four people), it soon revealed itself to be beneficial to increase the quality of feedback and understand each writer’s style. Identifying a writer’s style was one of the types of feedback identified in

the initial interviews as desired and beneficial, and I was curious how I might be able to incorporate resources about this into the group. I wondered if I should include a mini workshop (which may be beneficial for future groups or programs). However, the group size actually led to us revisiting various pieces from the same author several times. This reexamining allowed us to identify patterns, successful strategies, and fun quirks from each individual author which in turn fueled more of the community and more effective feedback. We could laugh at Susan's overuse of semi-colons while pointing out that they tended to cause her to cram several ideas into one sentence that she needed to tease out a bit more. We also came to realize that she was not exaggerating when she confessed to far exceeding page limits and needed help to know what could be condensed or tied more concisely to the main topic of her thesis (that should only have been about 30 pages but was breaching 60). From the beginning, Mason admitted that he was worried about how his tone came across in his work. Was it professional and did it fit the genre of his work while remaining engaging and readable? As we revisited his writing, not only could we reassure him that his tone worked for his piece but also that his writing sounded like him which was only possible from the multiple opportunities to hear him speak about his subject and demonstrate his writing style within the GWG.

Despite the unfortunate circumstance where Charlie could not make it for their week, when I asked the writers to reflect on their experience within the GWG, they still noted meeting each week as a positive experience. In response to "What has been the most beneficial aspect of the writing group so far?" they wrote, "While I haven't yet had my writing looked at, I've appreciated seeing examples of other forms of graduate writing, as well as the sense of community with the other members of the group." Though

the goal of the GWG is to provide an avenue of feedback for each grad student's writing, Charlie demonstrated the reciprocal nature of the groups as we learn from each other. Further, they noted that "the feedback that I've given others, and that I've seen other members give others, will definitely help me as I self-analyze and revise my own writing. Giving feedback to other writers helps me see the same issues/things (for lack of a better word) coming up in my own writing." Charlie took the vital step of analyzing the examples and new perspectives of the group and applying it to their own process outside of our meetings. Even though we did not have the opportunity to review their work, they still chose to invest in the group to provide quality feedback which benefitted them, regardless.

Negative Experiences with Feedback

Because of the community foundation provided and the intentionality of the writers (like Charlie), the GWG differentiated itself from the participants' negative classroom experiences. Rather than feeling as though they were floundering and having to strike out on their own, the provided framework guided the experience while still allowing for restructuring based on the needs of the participants. Everyone was invested, encouraging, and recognized the need for mutual support that would lead to a better understanding of their own process and style. It also allowed for us to recognize when we were falling short and needed to reorient ourselves to prevent a repetition of Mason and Susan's experiences of "spell-check" feedback that did more harm than good for the writers.

The feedback process within the group was not always smooth, and there were times where we fell into the trap of focusing on LOCs during our meetings. The stall in energy and the slump in confidence from the writer were tangible. Mason brought in a piece he already completed and wanted another perspective on after submitting it to his professor. The ideas, flow, voice, and concept of his project were all there—something we emphasized and praised since this was a focus for him throughout the group meetings. However, after moving out of the praise section and past our few ideas for how some HOCs could be addressed, we began to focus in on LOCs of spelling errors, specific sentences that were confusing, and a few amusing mix-ups.

Because of our past discussions, those of us providing feedback attempted to balance the “nit-picking” feeling of our comments. We were able to bring in a bit of humor which helped to keep the meeting from slumping into damaging confidence and souring the experience. Mason chuckled as we asked whether or not he meant to use “feels” instead of “feelings” in his research proposal, and he murmured that he hoped his professor had a good time reading it with the small changes that were needed. We followed this up with a hearty discussion of what words should be accepted into academic writing, including the word “feels,” which lightened the atmosphere of our conversation. It also allowed us to draw the conversation back to Mason’s passion (or “feels”) for this project that was evident through his writing and structure, once more focusing in on his expertise and the positive aspects. Despite our attempts to reassure him of his successful writing strategies, he dejectedly mumbled that he should not have turned in the project yet. Eventually, we called out the situation explicitly, voicing our struggles to find less pedantic topics to talk about within his work and desire that he not be

frustrated with his decision to turn in his paper already. Just like the writing process, writing groups require recursive work. While at times it may feel as though we are talking through the same feedback qualities again and again, drawing each member back to the point of the GWG—to encourage each other through graduate school—necessitates revisiting the basics of feedback and how each member perceives it.

Continued Application

I routinely find myself returning to the feedback practices and principles that I provided and heard within the GWG. We discussed reverse outlines, tying our content clearly to the thesis, and learning to bypass the introduction until we have a better grasp of the main subject matter. Each of these areas are especially poignant now as they were all areas I struggled with for this project. I became stuck on the introduction and lost in how to set up my readers because I was still unsure what form these chapters would take. I also became lost in my content and veered from my original outline. Thankfully, I had support networks in place, providing feedback and gently reminding me to take the advice I so often give to other writers. Sometimes, all we need is a community with people who remind us of principles we preach but do not always practice.

Moving forward from this piece, my hope is that not only myself but also my co-workers and others involved in graduate student programming will be able to reflect on their experiences and the content of these chapters to create opportunities that will benefit graduate students. In this chapter, I have laid out the importance of feedback and of specific traits that feedback should have. Despite my best efforts, these two chapters on community and feedback do not even begin to touch the massive nature of each of these

topics. In my conclusion, I will lay out my hopes for how this research will continue, at IUPUI and beyond, regarding these two topics and the multitude of others that arose during my research with graduate students.

Conclusion

Going into the first semester of my second year at IUPUI, I felt unsure about what to expect. Beginning my thesis, completing classes, staying involved with my family, working as a Teaching Assistant, creating and facilitating a graduate writing group all during a pandemic that forced everything online seemed like an immense amount of work to complete. An amount I had no idea if I could handle. By the end of the semester, I accomplished all these goals because of the strong support system that guided me through the entire process—including the writing group. The input into my writing from the other participants, learning from others' writing processes, and the simple joy of seeing people once a week who understood graduate school provided immense relief to the weight of the semester. I expected to learn from my co-investigators, but despite all the literature telling me the impact this type of support could have, I never anticipated the integral part the graduate writing group would play in accomplishing all I needed to that semester in a way that was healthy and caused me to learn more about myself and my research.

Over Winter Break, I revisited all the recorded GWG sessions to transcribe them and code the data. Aside from their immense contribution to the data collection, these recordings allowed me to revisit the evolution of the group, re-watch the developing relationships, and pick up details I missed before. At times when I left the meeting briefly to grab a drink or check on something, I would always come back to a quiet group. I worried that this meant the participants sat there in silence until I returned. When I revisited the videos, however, I watched as conversations about professors, vocabulary that should be viewed more positively in academia, *Twilight*, and many other topics occurred during my absence. After finishing the last video from the series of wonderful

conversations and experiences, I wanted to cry because I knew, most likely, that I would not see many of the participants again. I would miss our wild tangents, deep insights, and the experience of enduring graduate school together.

At the end of this entire process, from creating instruments to facilitating groups to re-watching meetings to writing my thesis, my main goal continues to be visibility. As I experienced graduate school and spoke with other students, the importance of making visible the graduate school process—assumptions made about graduate students, understanding the feedback needed, finding community—became apparent. When students recognize and name their personal and shared needs as graduate students and the types of resources required to meet them, they become better equipped to attain their goals. Through discussing those needs and examining one avenue of support with graduate writing groups, this research can serve as a foundation for future work in the area of graduate writing support.

Focusing on the topics of community and feedback allowed me to narrow in on two crucial parts of writing groups and how they reflect larger themes within graduate school. However, given more time and space, there are innumerable directions this project could have gone. My hope is that future study, based in this research, will continue serving the graduate community at IUPUI and beyond. In this final chapter, I explore some of the gaps in my research, how those areas can inspire other studies, and beneficial partnerships for the future. As the work to support graduate students at IUPUI continues, my hope remains that the UWC, in tandem with other entities on campus, keeps these themes and graduate students themselves at the center of that work.

Future Research

Some of the gaps in my research begin with how the instruments were created and the data they collected. Little information about the demographics of graduate students who engaged with this research was included. While participants listed their schools and pronouns, information about age, gender-identity, whether a participant was an international student, whether a student was first-generation, whether they had children or were caretakers, and many other aspects were not recorded. These other parts of a student's identity could certainly impact how they experience graduate school, their writing process, and their perception of resources available to them. To better understand the varied identities of the graduate students at IUPUI and create programming that takes these identities into consideration, this information and more student perspectives would be needed. While this would make many of my instruments longer and studying that information would have been beyond the scope of this thesis, collecting this information for further research would allow for the programming to grow in ways that would create more focused programming to reach more graduate students.

Research into the above could go in myriad directions. As discussed in the introduction, many students feel pushed into the deep end of academic jargon when entering graduate school. How might peer writing groups support these students with academic language acquisition and feelings of proficiency in their field? Going a step further, how might ESL or L2 students, a large portion of many graduate programs and of the IUPUI graduate programs, be impacted by the need to overcome two "language barriers" upon joining academia? Do either of these situations impact a student's willingness to join a group or do they feel they would be exposing their "lack" of

knowledge through engaging with peers? Many students become disheartened when they begin to feel “behind” their peers, even if that feeling is false. These are some of the “silent leavers” Thesen discusses in her work (168). Because there is not discussion of this difficulty throughout graduate school, many graduate students have the perception that they are just not cut out for graduate school and choose to leave. Having this conversation openly and incorporating it into discussions during a graduate writing group, which occurred during this study, allows for a sense of camaraderie and breaks the silence around this issue. Expanding this study intentionally will allow for better understanding of why this perception occurs and how to best combat it.

Many graduate students discuss the difficulty of balancing graduate school, work, and family. Some students are returning to school after working for a few years. Others went right into a graduate program having just started a family, and others have been in PhD programs for years. How does this balancing act impact their ability to seek support outside of classroom hours? Are they less likely to utilize support networks like writing groups because of limited time? In my own study, the participants who disclosed this struggle were all women. Do women face more pressure to do more to balance family and school than men, and, if so, how might that impact the support they do or do not seek out? In his chapter on imposter syndrome, Benjamin J. Villarreal notes that, often, “women who cannot juggle both family and academia with ‘ease’ end up feeling that they are not suited to being scholars” and connects to the idea “that any scholar who does not meet familial or cultural expectations of success may feel that they must not belong [within academia].” Research into these scenarios and others listed would all provide valuable data for how to shape and expand not only the writing groups but also other

support programming. For instance, shaping programming to support Graduate Parents includes considering the questions listed above as well as smaller details like the best time and day for the groups to meet to recognize bedtimes, school pick-ups, respecting family weekends, etc.

Another limitation of my study is the time frame. The group that I studied met once a week for an hour and a half over the course of one semester. Other studies that looked for similar themes met over several years and went through several iterations (Brooks-Gillies et al. “Making Do”; Maher et al., Thesen). Given longer periods of time, the themes of community, feedback and many others could be studied as the group developed and created stronger relationships. Also, additional research could look at consistency across these shorter, semester-long groups as well. Do they all report similar successes? How many weeks into the groups do the facilitators and other participants begin noticing benefits? Patterns of how writers first interact with each other, how quickly relationships can develop based on what information participants choose to share, what types of feedback IUPUI graduate students consistently ask for and provide are a few of the many ways a longer study with more groups could expand the data. This further research could also lead to fine-tuned group structures, reflection questions, and workshops that support group members.

Further fine tuning of the study could even examine the details of how long the groups meet for each week and how many writers are able to share their work at each meeting. The time frame and membership vary greatly from group to group within previous studies. A portion of the previous studies researched reported enough time and limited participants to look at every writer’s work each week. Others covered two writers

for each week. My own study focused on one writer per week. Are writers satisfied with this trade-off? Are they able to keep up with this schedule? During this study, most graduate students reported wanting feedback on their writing every other week, but, when scheduling out the next week's writer, would often say they did not have more writing to contribute until a few weeks out. How do graduate student expectations for their writing match with the reality of their writing process, and how can writing groups (particularly the facilitators) support writers to reach this understanding?

COVID-19 struck just as I was developing my thesis and research plan. The pandemic and following restrictions drastically altered what the UWC could offer and how I could conduct my research. This experience could have been a much larger portion of my thesis, and COVID-19's impact could definitely be beneficial to explore in the future. For this study, I wanted to recognize its effect without diminishing the other difficulties graduate students often deal with by looking solely at the pandemic and graduate writers. Also, the pandemic scene was ever changing and became difficult to predict since, as many e-mails love to reiterate, these are unprecedented times. The pandemic has a place in this research but could be centralized by later studies with greater scope and understanding. As looked at in the two data chapters, COVID-19 significantly altered the way academia conducted itself and how graduate students were able to approach their work. Further research into this impact on graduate writers, especially as we reach the one-year mark since social distancing and isolation were implemented, will be important as we moved forward to understand how the pandemic will impact students now and in the future.

This past year has also introduced a greater amount of online programming to attempt to continue education and lessen the pandemic's impact. Building off of studies into COVID-19, research into graduate writer reactions to online programming would yield interesting and important data. Several participants remarked on the struggle they felt with online programming, whether that be from feelings of isolation, reduced access to resources, and/or less communication with peers and faculty. This then partially leads into ideas about accessibility. While some students felt that the online format allowed for greater involvement such as with reduced travel times, there are other students who were negatively affected by the movement to online programming. In the Spring '20 semester, I had a classmate who had to drive to campus and sit in the parking lot to have access to the internet to turn in assignments and attend the required, online, class meetings. Research into technology requirements and how it affects graduate writers from various backgrounds would be beneficial.

The areas mentioned above are a few out of many directions new research could expand into. However, the data and sources already collected could directly tie into these new foci as opposed to some other research topics. My goal through this conclusion is to offer an optional foundation for future researchers, just as past and present UWC employees provided me with a foundation for this research. In this next section, I will examine some of the programming and concepts that already exist in the Writing Center and how they could connect to graduate programming.

Continued Program Growth

Already, the University Writing Center and University Graduate Office at IUPUI have worked together to relaunch the Graduate Write-on-Site (WOS) for the AY 20-21. This expansion in programming alongside the two Graduate Writing Groups that have resulted from this research are a wonderful start but leave room for other programming. Diversifying and expanding programming to provide the kind of frequent and varied opportunities that graduate students often need for their intense schedules must continue. One participant in the GWG left because she felt that the format was not the right fit for her and that she needed something more closely resembling a WOS where she could consistently work on her own writing rather than providing feedback to others. While providing feedback can benefit your own writing, it is only helpful if graduate students feel they can accomplish their writing goals. Thankfully, one of the other graduate consultants, Nathan, began facilitating a WOS in the next few weeks, but this should only be the start of the types of programming IUPUI offers for graduate students as many factors dictate what each student would find beneficial.

As many in the initial survey indicated, workshops, tools, and retreats targeted at specific writing experiences would greatly benefit the IUPUI graduate community. Two of the survey questions asked “What kinds of writing projects have you done so far in your graduate experience (i.e. thesis, dissertation, seminar papers, literature reviews, personal projects, etc.)?” and “What writing projects are you working on currently or will work on during this next semester (i.e. thesis, dissertation, seminar paper, literature review, personal project, etc.)?” to help me (and future facilitators) have an idea of what writing the GWG participants were likely to bring for feedback. However, the responses

also provided a gauge for what future programming could be developed to support students through those projects. Included in the responses were many references to literature reviews, grant writing, thesis writing, and research writing. All of these would be wonderful starting points for creating programming, like workshops, that targeted these areas of the graduate experience.

In the past, the UWC hosted the Graduate Writers' Retreat (GWR) which followed two iterations. The first served as a workshop and WOS series that met weekly during the semester. The first part of the meeting covered various topics such as "The Role of Technology in Graduate Writing" or "Combatting Writer's Block." The facilitator would then move into a portion of time where attendees could all write together and ask questions of each other as they came up. The second format for the GWR was a one-day retreat where attendees would attend a series of lectures over a short period of time and be able to engage with other graduate students to ask questions and exchange strategies. Many of these workshops were pulled from the weekly GWR started by previous graduate writing consultant, Logan. Logan and I collaborated to condense the most pertinent workshops into a one day "retreat" for graduate students who were too busy to attend each week. Though these retreats halted due to COVID-19, creating iterations that could be presented online and planning to bring back this programming once in-person meetings are available again would serve a need in the graduate community as many graduate students (as seen from the survey data) requested such workshops.

Also due to COVID-19 is an increased need for easily accessible tools for those who cannot attend online workshops or for programs that do not have the needed staff or

resources to hold many workshops. Several of the PowerPoints created for other programming by the UWC, like the GWR mentioned above, and in response to the survey responses could be turned into self-guided activities that would walk graduate writers through tools or strategies to support their work. One such tool that the UWC has already created is a guided PowerPoint that walks writers through mapping their writing process to make visible the strengths and weaknesses in their current approach to writing. The hope is to make these widely available to the IUPUI community and could easily include tools that target graduate writers or are applicable to all writers.

In order to best meet the writing needs of diverse graduate students, the development of a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program or support of the UWC in its WAC efforts as it often works to fulfill that role would be needed. A WAC program “recognizes and supports the use of writing in any and every way and in every and any course offered at a learning institution” (“What is a WAC Program?”), a principle that is not always recognized by students or faculty. As mentioned in the previous chapters, graduate students are often surprised at the amount of writing they encounter at the graduate level because writing was not incorporated into their undergraduate majors in any significant way. A WAC program, which “is any organized, recognized, and sustained effort...to help faculty in any and every course use writing more deliberately and more often” (“What is a WAC Program?”), would help diminish this gap and allow for students to understand the connection between their work (as well as many other areas of their life) and writing, while also easing their transition into writing-dominated graduate programs, should they choose to continue in their education.

Beneficial Partnerships

As demonstrated through the need for a WAC program, writing is something used by everyone and needs development across the board. Due to the nature of how writing is often taught and the fact that the UWC is mainly housed in the Liberal Arts building at IUPUI, there can often be a disconnect between students outside of the Liberal Arts and their desire to visit or knowledge of the UWC. This then limits their interaction with our modes of communication, such as social media, which impacts how visible our programming is to the wider student population. In order to better serve IUPUI students, building partnerships across the campus to support the wide array of graduate students would allow for more effective programming. While there are some partnerships already in place or growing, developing writing-related programming in tandem with other programs would not only lead to a wider reach of students but also better quality of programming.

As we gain more information about the identities and needs of graduate students through more extensive or focused research, it may be beneficial moving forward to build connections to various programs and entities across campus that already do some of this work. Building relationships and programming with places like the LGBTQ+ Center, the Multicultural Center, Adaptive Education Services, and others would allow for greater productivity of future writing programming to better serve a diverse range of students and help prevent the expectation that one type of programming will benefit all graduate students.

Through the development of the Graduate Writing Coordinator role at the UWC and the greater involvement of other graduate consultants in the Center, there are more

opportunities to expand this programming and build these connections. Working with Nathan, the consultant who will take over this role once I graduate, allowed for wonderful brainstorming opportunities, expansion in programming we could offer (such as the WOS), and perspectives that I would not consider on my own. Knowing that a designated consultant will continue these projects and expand programming in ways that I could not is exciting as I know they are passionate about supporting graduate students and have a personal stake in maintaining this work.

In the course of creating the GWGs and the WOSs, the UWC has continued its work with the University Graduate Office to collaborate on and develop opportunities to support graduate writers. Their continued support will allow for us to raise more awareness of the current opportunities offered by the Graduate Office, such as Citation Workshops and presentations on Library Resources. We will also be able to advertise to a larger audience who may not be connected to the UWC but do monitor Graduate Office offerings. Lastly, the UWC and the UGO created an assistantship line to continue graduate writing work between the two. The line will reinforce the focused graduate writing work within the UWC and emphasize the importance of developing writing support for graduate students.

Investing in multidisciplinary collaborations will reinforce the importance of gaining multiple perspectives regarding writing and graduate student identity. Limiting writing support to Liberal Arts will rob students of opportunities for growth and insight in their fields and experience with who they are within the liminal position of graduate student. Expanding programming to join with other departments and programs builds

toward a visible representation of the inherent complexity with writing as and becoming a graduate student.

Last Thoughts

My hope remains that this project will motivate future graduate students, writing consultants, faculty, and anyone else involved in graduate writing to identify those who are struggling and offer support. The topic of my research spawned from my own struggles with writing, school, support, guidance, and understanding of academia—something I found out was not unique to myself. Through this process, I gained a vocabulary for what I felt, my writing process, integral parts of the graduate experience and could share that with fellow grad students. Moving forward, if this work can assure someone else that they are not the only one feeling this way, just as my peer did for me that first semester, I will have accomplished what I hoped. If this work then goes on to influence new programming, research, and modes of thinking about and supporting writing, then all the better. These ideas are not new or revolutionary, but IUPUI has the potential to take them and put them to work in ways that lead to radical shifts in how graduate students think about themselves, their writing, and their place in academia.

Appendices

Appendix A: Graduate Writer Support Survey

1. Are you a graduate student?
Y/N
2. What degree are you currently pursuing?
 - a. M.A.
 - b. M.S.
 - c. PhD
 - d. M.D.
 - e. Graduate Certificate
 - f. Other_____ (please specify)
3. In AY 2020-2021, what year of graduate school will you be in?
 - a. 1st
 - b. 2nd
 - c. 3rd
 - d. 4th
 - e. 5th
 - f. Other (please specify) _____
4. What School is your degree with?
 - a. School of Liberal Arts
 - b. Kelley School of Business
 - c. School of Nursing
 - d. School of Social Work
 - e. School of Science
 - f. School of Informatics and Computing
 - g. School of Engineering and Technology
 - h. School of Education
 - i. Other (please specify) _____
5. What kinds of writing projects have you done so far in your graduate experience (i.e. thesis, dissertation, seminar papers, literature reviews, personal projects, etc.)?
[Fill in the blank]
6. What writing projects are you working on currently or will work on during this next semester (i.e. thesis, dissertation, seminar paper, literature review, personal project, etc.)?
[Fill in the blank]
7. What feedback do you generally seek about your work? [Select all that apply]

- a. Clarity (is your writing understandable to readers?)
 - b. Purpose (is your main idea clear to readers?)
 - c. Integrating sources (are your sources utilized effectively?)
 - d. Citation
 - e. Organization (does your paper flow?)
 - f. Support and development (where could the paper go from here?)
 - g. Grammar/mechanics/usage
 - h. Other (please specify)_____
8. When in your writing process do you typically seek/want support? [Select all that apply]
- a. Planning/Brainstorming
 - b. Outlining
 - c. Drafting
 - d. Revising
 - e. Editing/Polishing
9. What is the most difficult part of your writing process? Why?
[Fill in the blank]
10. What questions do you have as a graduate student about writing or the writing process?
[Fill in the blank]
11. Who do you seek out to support your writing? [Select all that apply]
- a. Classmate
 - b. Faculty Member
 - c. Former Teacher
 - d. Friend
 - e. Parent
 - f. Thesis/Dissertation Chair
 - g. Writing Center Consultant
 - h. Other (please specify) _____
12. What causes or motivates you to seek out support or feedback for your writing?
[Fill in the blank]
13. How often do you seek out feedback for your writing?
- a. Never
 - b. During finals week
 - c. For large projects
 - d. Throughout the semester
14. Do you provide feedback for others? [Peers, friends, family members, etc.]
- a. Yes, often
 - b. Yes, sometimes

- c. Yes, once or twice
 - d. No
15. If yes, what do you focus on when giving feedback?
- a. Clarity (is their writing understandable to readers?)
 - b. Purpose (is their main idea clear to readers?)
 - c. Integrating sources (are their sources utilized effectively?)
 - d. Citation
 - e. Organization (does their paper flow?)
 - f. Support and development (where could the paper go from here?)
 - g. Grammar/mechanics/usage
 - h. Other (please specify)_____
16. How often do you visit the Writing Center?
- a. I've been there once or twice
 - b. I've frequently visit
 - c. I've never visited
17. If yes, what is most beneficial from your conversations with Writing Center consultants?
18. Have you participated in any Writing Center events? [Select all that apply]
- a. Semester Open House
 - b. Citation Celebration
 - c. Graduate Writers' Retreat
 - d. Difficult Conversations
 - e. Spooky Stories
 - f. Other (please specify) _____
19. What programming across campus have you participated in? [Graduate mentoring center, Preparing Future Faculty and Professionals, Rev Up Your Writing, Library workshops, etc.]
[Fill in the blank]
20. What programming would you like the University Writing Center to offer graduate students?
[Fill in the blank]
21. What do you wish IUPUI would offer for graduate students? [Writing support, graduate workshops, writing groups, etc.?
[Fill in the blank]
22. What other support do you want or need as a graduate student?
[Fill in the blank]

23. If you're particularly interested in participating in a graduate writing group, please include your email below or contact the researchers at bworrel@iu.edu.
[Fill in the blank]

24. If you would be willing to participate in a 30-45 minute interview discussing graduate writing support, please include your email below or contact the researchers at bworrel@iu.edu.
[Fill in the blank]

Appendix B: Sample Interview Questions

1. What School is your degree with?
2. What year of graduate school are you in?
3. How have you seen your writing shift between undergraduate and graduate classes?
Did you come from a writing-intensive discipline? Was the amount of writing in graduate school a surprise?
4. What kind of support or programming would you find helpful to navigate that shift?
5. Is there a particular point in your writing process where you typically seek support?
6. Who do you seek out for that support? Is it mainly peers or family? Do you have access to professors?
7. Have you ever used the University Writing Center?
8. Are there any workshops or resources that you would like to see offered for graduate students?
9. Would Graduate Writing Groups be helpful? How would you feel about participating in multidisciplinary groups?
10. How has COVID-19 and the switch to online affected your work/studies? How have they affected your connection to campus and/or peers?
11. Have you noticed your writing process shift because of COVID-19? A different environment, schedule, etc.?
12. What other outside factors (family, work, etc.) impact your writing process?
13. Is there anything else that you want to make sure we are considering while developing programming, resources, etc.?

Appendix C: Graduate Writing Group Intake Survey

1. By filling out this survey, I _____
 - a. Would like my answers to support my placement in a graduate writing group and to be included in the IRB-approved study about the motivations and interests of IUPUI graduate students in seeking graduate writing support.
 - b. Would like my answers to support my placement in a graduate writing group but do not want my answers included in the IRB-approved study about the motivations and interests of IUPUI graduate students in seeking graduate writing support.
2. Please provide your name, pronouns, and preferred email address.
3. Are you a graduate student? Y/N
4. What degree are you currently pursuing?
 - a. M.A.
 - b. M.S.
 - c. PhD
 - d. M.D.
 - e. Graduate certificate
 - f. Other _____ (please specify)
5. What School is your degree with? [Select one]
 - a. School of Liberal Arts
 - b. Kelley School of Business
 - c. School of Nursing
 - d. School of Social Work
 - e. School of Science
 - f. School of Informatics and Computing
 - g. School of Engineering and Technology
 - h. School of Education
 - i. Other (please specify) _____
6. In AY 2020-2021, what year of graduate school will you be in?
 - a. 1st
 - b. 2nd
 - c. 3rd
 - d. 4th
 - e. 5th
 - f. Other (please specify) _____

7. What writing projects are you working on currently or will work on during this next semester (i.e. thesis, dissertation, seminar paper, literature review, personal project, etc.)? [fill in the blank]
8. What are you hoping to receive from a writing group? [fill in the blank]
9. How often would you want to receive feedback on your work?
 - a. Every week
 - b. Every other week
 - c. Once a month
 - d. Other (please specify) _____
10. What feedback would you want to receive about your work? (Select all that apply)
 - a. Clarity
 - b. Purpose
 - c. Integrating sources
 - d. Citation
 - e. Organization
 - f. Support and development
 - g. Grammar/mechanics/usage
11. How prepared do you feel to provide oral feedback to other group members?
 - a. Very prepared
 - b. Somewhat prepared
 - c. Unsure
 - d. Somewhat unprepared
 - e. Very unprepared
12. How prepared do you feel to provide written feedback to other group members?
 - a. Very prepared
 - b. Somewhat prepared
 - c. Unsure
 - d. Somewhat unprepared
 - e. Very Unprepared
13. How many people would you prefer to meet with in a writing group?
 - a. 2-3
 - b. 3-4
 - c. 4-5
 - d. No preference
14. Do you have past experience with writing groups?
 - a. Yes, positive experience
 - b. Yes, negative experience
 - c. Both positive and negative experience

d. No

15. If yes, what--if anything--made your past writing group experience positive?

16. If yes, what--if anything--made your past writing group experience negative?

Appendix D: Graduate Writing Group Format

First meeting format:

- Announcements
- Get to know you
 - Name
 - A bit about the grad program each participant is a part of—what they like and don't like/best or hardest/most enjoyable part
 - What writing are everyone is working on
 - How everyone feels about writing/what their approach is
 - Anything else they want to add!
- Lay out the group format/how they will work
 - One writer's work a week— they will send the paper/work to the facilitator ahead of time (4-5 days in advance of the meeting) along with the types of feedback they are looking for
 - The facilitator will pass on that info to the rest of the group along with any activities/announcements that need to be made before the next meeting
 - Everyone will have their feedback prepared ahead of time, so they are ready for the meeting!
- What feedback are you and the other participants looking for?
 - If you notice patterns, point those out!
 - The facilitator can also begin to point out the difference between high-order concerns or HOCs (clarity, organization, etc.) and low-order concerns or LOCs (punctuation, grammar, mechanics, etc.)
 - What experience does everyone have with giving/receiving feedback? How prepared do they feel to provide oral/written feedback?
- Lay out the feedback structure
 - A helpful structure is the Praise, Question, Suggestion format—this will get muddled, but it is best to at least start with Praise
 - Utilizing this structure will begin with encouraging that week's author and aid in avoiding the LOCs
- Decide as a group how much writing they feel able to review each week
 - Typically, between 8-12 pages is the maximum required reading
 - The writer could send a larger portion, leaving the option for the other participants to read more than the 8-12 pages if they are able
 - Participation is encouraged even if you feel you didn't get through very much
- Have them go ahead and sign-up for weeks via a GoogleSheet or other easily accessible schedule
- Finish off with asking about the types of writing resources they would be interested in—citation support, Write-on-Sites, writing process, identifying writing style—that way, if anyone comes across any info on this, they can share it!
- You did it! Thanks everyone!

Format for other weeks

- Talk about writing goals/successes/coping methods from the past week
 - Take a few minutes and have them write these down; encourage them to keep a notebook or WordDoc so they have a running list
 - These can often lead into announcements quite naturally
- Announcements
 - Pull from Grad Office Newsletter, University Writing Center events, and other campus resources
- Ask the writer to give an overview of their project and the feedback they were looking for
 - What drew them to this project?
 - Why did they choose the topic, etc.?
 - Let them brag a bit and center themselves as the authority on their project
- Give everyone 5-10 minutes to review their notes in the context of what that week's writer just said
- Dive into the Praise, Questions, and Suggestions!
- Finish out the meeting
 - Revisit any pertinent announcements
 - Gently remind next week's writer to send you their work

Appendix E: Reflection

1. How satisfied have you been with the Graduate Writing Group (GWG) so far?
2. What has been the most beneficial aspect of the writing group so far?
3. How do you see the feedback you have received impacting your writing process?
4. How do you see the feedback you provided impacting your writing process?
5. Is there any aspect of the GWG that could benefit from an adjustment?
Y/N
6. If yes, please provide examples for your answer to the previous question.
7. What other forms of support across campus do you use for your writing (Grad Office, University Writing Center, Library, faculty, peers, family, etc.)?
8. Is there anything else you would like us to know?

Appendix F: Focus Group

1. How have your writing habits over the past semester? Positively or negatively?
2. With your previous answers in mind, what are your takeaways from the past month? How have you changed as a writer?
3. Based off of these answers, what writing goals do you have moving forward?
4. What communities are you a part of this semester? What communities do you want to use/join in the future? Writing communities and otherwise
5. Look back and celebrate/acknowledge the steps you've taken. Write down as many writing wins as you can.

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Curriculum Vitae

Brandilyn Nicole Worrell

Education

- Master of Arts in English, Indiana University, earned at IUPUI, June 2021
- Bachelor of Arts in English, Marian University, Summa Cum Laude, May 2019

Conference Presentations

- Worrell, Brandilyn, and Zoe Hanquier. "Challenging Sessions: Shifting Our Perspective on Conflict in the Writing Center." East Central Writing Centers Association Conference. Indianapolis, IN, 2020.
- Worrell, Brandilyn. "Expressive, Reflective, and Positive Writing in Writing Groups." East Central Writing Center Association Conference. Indianapolis, IN, 2020.
- Worrell, Brandilyn. "Expressive, Reflective, and Positive Writing in Writing Groups." International Writing Center Association Collaborative. 2021.

Awards and Honors

- St. Clare Academic Scholarship, Marian University
- San Damiano Scholar Scholarship, Marian University
- Outstanding Senior in English, Marian University, 2019
- Teaching Assistantship for IUPUI University Writing Center 2019-2021
- University Writing Center Consulting Award 2020

Professional Experience

- Writing Center Consultant, Marian University 2018-2019

- Graduate Writing Center Consultant, University Writing Center at IUPUI 2019-2021
- Graduate Writing Coordinator, University Writing Center at IUPUI 2020-2021
- Graduate Representative, East Central Writing Center Association Board, 2020-2021