Entering a Community of Writers: The Writing Center, Doctoral Students, and Going Public with Scholarly Writing

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Abstract

In addition to taking advanced courses, graduate students navigate a potentially challenging transition of learning to write for publication. We, the authors, explored solutions to this transition with a study designed to explore the research questions: How does a systematic effort to help doctoral students enter a community of writers via writing center collaboration influence doctoral students': (1) proficiency with academic writing, (2) writing apprehension, (3) self-efficacy as writers, and (4) comfort with "going public" with their writing? We used a collaborative, multi-layered self-study research approach because it allowed us to focus on critical examination of teaching practices that are of interest to the practitioner/researcher and to the greater educational community. Authors/participants include the co-director of a university Writing Center; two professors of a doctoral-level qualitative research methods course; four doctoral students who participated in a series of writing center collaborations; and one master's student who served as a writing center consultant. These four perspectives provide unique insights into how writing center collaborations supported graduate students in developing their writing proficiency and efficacy, helping to initiate them into a community of writers who "go public" with their scholarship.

Keywords

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Entering a Community of Writers: The Writing Center, Doctoral Students, and Going Public with Scholarly Writing

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In addition to taking advanced courses, graduate students navigate a potentially challenging transition of learning to write for publication. We, the authors, explored solutions to this transition with a study designed to explore the research questions: How does a systematic effort to help doctoral students enter a community of writers via writing center collaboration influence doctoral students': (1) proficiency with academic writing, (2) writing apprehension, (3) self-efficacy as writers, and (4) comfort with "going public" with their writing? We used a collaborative, multi-layered self-study research approach because it allowed us to focus on critical examination of teaching practices that are of interest to the practitioner/researcher and to the greater educational community. Authors/participants include the co-director of a university Writing Center; two professors of a doctoral-level qualitative research methods course; four doctoral students who participated in a series of writing center collaborations; and one master's student who served as a writing center consultant. These four perspectives provide unique insights into how writing center collaborations supported graduate students in developing their writing proficiency and efficacy, helping to initiate them into a community of writers who "go public" with their scholarship. Keywords: Writing, Writing Center, Qualitative Research, Self-Study, Graduate Students, Writing Apprehension

Introduction

Given the general consensus that graduate student writing deserves greater attention (e.g., Ondrusek, 2012; Rose & McClafferty, 2001; Simpson, Caplan, Cox, & Phillips, 2016), graduate faculty often find themselves in a predicament: how might they design courses in ways that allow them to cover all of the content while also addressing their students' needs for further support with the students' writing? Sara, a co-author and a professor of a doctoral-level

qualitative research methods course, is one such faculty member who faced this dilemma; while reviewing her students' work on their major assignment for her course, a research pilot study, Sara observed two particular issues in their writing she felt needed to be addressed.

First, many seemed reluctant to share their writing with others. Sara found that few were willing to schedule voluntary writing consultations with her, many were reluctant to engage in peer feedback, and few had visited a writing center. Their hesitation is consistent with Wellington's (2010) study of doctoral students' challenges with the affective domain of writing. Wellington determined that the process of seeking and receiving feedback is one of the most emotionally daunting portions of the writing process. Additionally, he concluded that "a common inhibitor [of the writing process] is the fear of an audience" (p. 146). Since the very purpose of conducting qualitative (or any) research is to contribute to the body of knowledge about the topic under study, doctoral students need to overcome this reluctance to share their writing. We refer to sharing writing–from asking for formative feedback from instructors, to soliciting peer review, to publishing manuscripts-as "going public." Going public is an act that requires students to leave the relatively small world of the classroom and enter into the larger world as a contributor to a research community.

Second, several of her students seemed to struggle with the same aspect of academic writing: they wrote methods and results from a pilot study in a step-by-step manner that resembled announcers describe each action during a sporting event more than a comprehensive, engaging explanation of scholarship. The resulting products lacked depth and were not engaging to read, even though Sara provided specific strategies to help students create detailed methods sections, using Smagorinsky (2008) as a guide. Smagorinsky recommended that methods sections be the "conceptual epicenter" of qualitative research reports, with clear details that allow readers to ascertain whether the authors' methods were trustworthy. For example, one student wrote, "First I observed; then I came up with 8 codes. Then I made note cards." Without further explanation of how long and in what context the author observed or how they developed codes, the methods section lacked the details needed to determine trustworthiness.

In response, Sara made modifications to her instructional approach for teaching about writing these sections of a pilot study but noted little improvement in their writing. This suggested a need for a systematic effort to improve these students' proficiency with academic writing. Sara sought additional guidance from her former professor Audrey, who has remained a trusted colleague and mentor, and is one of the co-authors of this article. Audrey regularly collaborated with colleagues at the University of Wyoming Writing Center, and she recommended that Sara reach out to the writing center on her campus as well. She did, and together with Melissa, another co-author who works as Director of the Boise State Writing Center, Sara created a systematic process to address the deficiencies in her doctoral students' writing. Through this process, Sara also helped her students begin going public by becoming part of a safe, welcoming relationship with consultants at the Writing Center.

Sara offered her qualitative research a choice between using the Writing Center and a written assignment. The students who opted for the Writing Center are co-authors of this paper, in which we systematically explore the beneficial elements of this experience by examining the following research questions: How does a systematic effort to help doctoral students enter a community of writers through writing center collaboration influence doctoral students' (1) proficiency with academic writing, (2) writing apprehension, (3) self-efficacy as writers, and (4) comfort with "going public" with their writing? This study was situated within existing research that identifies the need to enhance support for graduate student writing in the four areas of our research question; we turn now to a brief review of that literature.

Literature Review

Proficiency in scholarly writing is essential for graduate students to successfully complete a thesis or dissertation. Unfortunately, most writing instruction assistance for graduate students focuses on remediation of deficiencies rather than development and content work (Kamler & Thomson, 2006; Sallee, Hallett, & Tierney, 2011). All graduate students can benefit from academic writing instruction, even those who demonstrate proficiency in their work. They may also benefit from instruction and experiences that help them recognize the affective dimension of writing that could potentially impact their written work. Earlier scholars have identified constructs that influence writers' affective domain, including writing apprehension.

Daly (1979) defined writing apprehension as one's tendency to avoid writing due to anxiety brought on from the fear of being evaluated or judged. Writers who experience a high level of apprehension during the writing process tend to view the process as unrewarding or even punishing (Daly, 1983). These negative feelings are reflected in the written products, which creates a type of negative, self-fulfilling prophecy for graduate writers (Onwuegbuzie, 1998, 1999). A relationship between writing apprehension and another affective construct exists. Pajares and Johnson (1994) found significant correlations between writing apprehension and writing self-efficacy—decreased self-efficacy increases apprehension, and increased apprehension decreases self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in his or her capability to complete a particular activity or course of action (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy may affect the choices people make about activities to engage in, the effort they expend on those activities, and how much they persevere when challenges arise (Bandura, 1977; Pajares, 2003; Pajares & Johnson, 1994; Prat-Sala & Redford, 2012). Additionally, research has shown that peoples' beliefs in their abilities are a stronger predictor of future accomplishments than their past accomplishments (Bandura, 2012; Mascle, 2013; Pajares, 1996, 2003). Students who had high levels of self-efficacy, in regards to their writing, have an increased chance of performing well on writing tasks because they are more motivated to engage, and are more resilient to challenges (Mascle, 2013). On the other hand, writers with low self-efficacy were more likely to become discouraged as challenges arose, possibly giving up completely (Mascle, 2013).

One way to increase self-efficacy is to offer writing experiences with an audience other than the instructor and the opportunity to focus on the student's growth instead of errors (Mascle, 2013). A calm, non-threatening atmosphere for writing also is likely to increase self-efficacy as it lowers students' apprehension (Mascle, 2013). Writing centers can provide such an atmosphere, and offer writers the opportunity to receive extensive, individualized feedback. Although instructors can provide growth-focused feedback, the added layer of their evaluative responsibilities may make a writing center consultant feel more approachable. Additionally, providing meaningful feedback at multiple points in the writing process may increase self-efficacy and lowers apprehension. Specifically, feedback that highlights performance gains, instead of performance deficiencies, seems to encourage students to become more efficient, effective, productive, and satisfied in their performances (Bandura, 2012).

Mannon (2016) described writing center efforts to support graduate writers in their thesis and dissertations. Boquet et al. (2015) presented how writing centers can provide integrated support throughout graduate students' programs of study. Many writing centers have turned their attention to meeting the specific needs and challenges faced by graduate students (Phillips, 2016). Furthermore, writing center consultants[1] play an important role in providing

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[1] Writing center scholars use several titles interchangeably (e.g., tutor, consultant, advisor), though all are referring to the work of one-to-one conversations about writing that occur in writing centers. The Boise State Writing Center uses the title "consultant" because it typically does not carry the same remedial connotations as "tutor."

non-threatening feedback. In writing center research about verbal and nonverbal communication strategies (Thompson, 2009) and politeness theory (Bell, Arnold, & Haddock, 2009; Mackiewicz & Thomspon, 2013), authors described some of the ways in which writing center consultants and writing center spaces attempt to create non-threatening environments for students. Even so, it can be argued that consultants can be seen as authority figures; however, they have less authority than faculty who assign grades (Healy, 1993). Therefore, students may be more likely to go to a consultant and feel more comfortable sharing their work because the pressure of possible evaluation is not involved. Additionally, Zahl (2015) discovered that the development of an academic community included not only relationships with faculty but with peers as well, and that the interactions with peers were "just as important as interactions with faculty in facilitating doctoral student success" (p. 303), and that the sense of community led to greater rates of persistence toward degree completion among graduate students.

The consultant/student relationship ultimately can help students gain confidence if consultants model writing as a process and provide a safe learning environment (Harris, 1995). Adding to Harris's work, Snively (2008) concluded that writing centers can function as the same type of safe environment for graduate students to try out their ideas as it does for undergraduates. The consultation process also allows graduate students to take a step towards sharing their work with others in an academic setting. Making one's scholarly work public through publication is an essential part of work in the academy, yet publication can seem mysterious and intimidating to graduate students (Norton & Lee, 2003). Further, they often avoid writing for publication entirely because of a conception that only published authors have the knowledge and skill set necessary to be successful (Casanave & Vandrick, 2003). Yet graduate students ultimately need to make the transition from student to scholar-author (Norton & Lee, 2003). We contend that the writing center consultant/student relationship can play a vital role in helping graduate students develop comfort in going public with their work, in part because writing centers are "evaluation-free zones" where students can receive feedback on their work before submitting it for a grade (Sherwood, 1996) and address the affective issues that might be impacting their written work as they move towards developing their new identities as scholars.

Given the myriad of complexities that influence graduate student writing, we designed this study to address the research question: How does a systematic effort to help doctoral students enter a community of writers through writing center collaboration influence doctoral students' (1) proficiency with academic writing, (2) writing apprehension, (3) self-efficacy as writers, and (4) comfort with "going public" with their writing? We, the 7 co-authors, came to this inquiry with different perspectives and goals. Melissa, as a writing center director, wanted to strengthen graduate student support and collaboration between faculty and the writing center. Sara needed a new pedagogical approach to support graduate students' growth as writers since her previous efforts had not addressed her concerns. As graduate students, Amanda B., Jennifer G., Amanda C. and Sabrina S. were interested in learning more about research and writing for publication. Since Audrey was not directly involved in the graduate class or writing center consultations, she brought an outsider's critical perspective to our work. We explain our collaboration further in the methods section that follows.

Thus, we use the term "consultant" even when the literature we cite uses "tutor." For more information on this matter, see McCall (1994).

Methods

To examine how the writing center collaboration influenced doctoral students, we used a collaborative, multi-layered self-study. Influenced by Bullough and Pinnegar (2001), Hamilton, Smith, and Worthington (2008), and LaBoskey (2004), we selected self-study because it offers a research approach that focuses on critical examination of teaching practices that are of interest to the practitioner/researcher and to the greater educational community. Pioneered as a research method for teacher education, Hamilton et al. (2008) explained the relationship between self-study and more widely used approaches: "narrative (a look at a story of self), auto-ethnography (a look at self within a larger context), and self-study (a look at self in action, usually within educational contexts)" (p. 17). Characterized by critical reflection and inquiry into and about one's practice, it is commonly used as a research method for individual practitioners or a team of educators. We use the term multi-layered self-study here because our team included different perspectives or layers: (1) a writing center director (Melissa) and two faculty members (Sara and Audrey), who as practitioners were interested in improving their approach to supporting graduate students' writing, and (2) four graduate students (Amanda B., Jennifer, Sabrina, and Amanda C.), with Amanda C. playing a dual role because as a writing consultant she was both a practitioner and as a graduate student she was also someone in the position to benefit from enhanced attention to her own writing.

Participants and Design

Sara taught a qualitative research methods class for students pursuing a doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction. The ten students in Sara's course were given the opportunity to participate in a Writing Center option: to participate in at least four writing center consultations and write four one-page reflective pieces about their experiences. This option was in lieu of writing a final 10-page paper. Four out of 10 students selected this option, and three are co-authors for this article. The fourth student declined the opportunity because she accepted a demanding new position after completing the course and was unable to invest the time in analyzing the data and writing. Consistent with self-study, these three students, along with the other co-authors, are our participants/authors.

Sara encouraged Amanda B., Jennifer, and Sabrina to schedule consultations with the *same* consultant on a regular basis throughout the semester. She provided a suggested timetable of what in-progress writing to bring based on the deadlines in the syllabus. For example, during the third and fourth weeks of the semester, Sara suggested bringing a draft of a 3-5 page reflection the students wrote early in the semester. Because this assignment was short and fairly low-stakes in terms of how heavily it was weighted in their semester grade, it provided an opportunity for the doctoral students, Amanda B., Jennifer, and Sabrina, to develop rapport with a consultant and increase their comfort with going public. All three agreed that there were additional barriers to going to the writing center in addition to discomfort with sharing their writing. They used this assignment as a way to move past the temporal barriers to accessing the writing center – which in this case meant making it a priority when scheduling their time. Knowing that some students perceive writing center staff as lacking disciplinary specific expertise, Melissa identified consultants – herself included - in advance who she thought would be particularly effective with graduate students. As the semester progressed, Sara recommended focusing the consultations on drafts of the major assignment for the semester: the 20-30 page pilot research study. Weighted as 50% of the semester grade, the pilot study was a high-stakes assignment for the course.

Amanda C. is the fourth graduate student participant/author, and as a consultant at the Boise State Writing Center, she worked with Jennifer, a doctoral student, on her writing

throughout the data-collection semester. Melissa, the writing center director, consulted with doctoral student Amanda B. during this time period. Sabrina, also a doctoral student, worked with two undergraduate consultants. Unlike the other two doctoral students, Sabrina was a full-time middle school teacher during the study. Because her schedule was less consistent than the others, she met with two consultants during the semester.

All consultants at the Writing Center undergo extensive training through a semester-long theory course in writing pedagogy that prepares consultants to respond to a multitude of writers' needs, abilities, and rhetorical situations. While there were no doctoral students on the consultant staff at the time of this study, it is routine practice in writing centers to pair consultants—regardless of academic standing—with writers of all abilities from all disciplines, including doctoral students. Jennifer and Sabrina did not see meeting with consultants working towards a less-advanced degree than they sought as problematic. The goal was to have a consistent consultant with whom they could develop rapport and receive feedback on how they expressed ideas—not their research design. The pairings were a result of shared availability. Had the doctoral students felt uncomfortable with their initial writing consultant, they would have been encouraged to meet with another consultant.

Data Collection and Analysis

We collected three sets of data. The first consists of graduate student writing samples from the beginning, middle, and end of the semester, specifically a researcher autobiography, "practice" research findings, and a qualitative pilot study. Once the course was complete, Sara analyzed these writings using two of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2013) approaches, data displays and contact summary sheets, to determine if the students' writing increased in proficiency through the semester. The contact summary sheets were used to describe each student's growth as demonstrated by each assignment. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña described the importance of a contact summary in field research, where researchers may have taken copious field notes and will benefit from reflecting the most salient points from the experience. At its essence, the approach allows the researcher to record new questions and big ideas in a condensed way that can be easily shared with other members of a research team. Sara used the approach successfully in previous field research (e.g., Fry, 2015), and modified it to serve as an analytical step for the present study, treating reading each piece of student writing as the equivalent of a field visit.

Sara took the concept of a contact summary form further than its original intent by using Ondrusek's (2012) "Core Competencies of Advanced Writing" as a framework for this early analysis. Sara looked for evidence of the following competencies: organization, argument/evidence/logic, audience/voice, content, mechanics/grammar, and sources. She kept anecdotal notes about strengths and areas for improvement for each individual student's writing in these competencies. Comparing contact summary sheets, specifically for each competency from the three papers written early, mid, and late in the semester allowed Sara to identify specific ways in which the students' writing improved during the semester. Sara finds the simplicity of paper and pen analysis superior to data analysis software for this work because she was able to literally spread the students' assignments and contact summary sheets out on the floor and identify differences and similarities in how the students were growing as writers. This served as a preliminary data display, another Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013) strategy for analysis, because of how it facilitated Sara being able to see the data. Analysis continued when the larger research team collaborated to layer the contact summary sheets with preliminary findings from the other two data sources.

The second data source was reflections the graduate students wrote after each writing center consultation. Our final data source came from interviews with the graduate student

writers (Amanda B., Jennifer, and Sabrina) and consultants (Amanda C. and Melissa). We conducted these interviews with one another one month after the course was completed. Melissa, the Writing Center director, took the lead on analyzing post-consultation reflections to identify the students' perceptions of their proficiency, writing apprehension, writing-specific self-efficacy, and their comfort level with taking their work public. Initial analysis consisted of reading and re-reading the reflections and highlighting "significant quotes that provided an understanding of how participants experienced" (Creswell, 2007, p. 61) their consultations at the Writing Center. This process allowed her to develop grounded codes to describe these significant ideas in the data (Gibbs & Taylor, 2005). The codes, and later themes, emerged from the participants' experiences rather than through a priori expectations. Additionally, Melissa traced the focus of each consultation and how the students' perceptions of the Writing Center changed over the course of this collaboration.

Audrey, the second faculty member, served as a critical friend (Costa & Kallick, 1993) throughout the process. Audrey was both an insider who was familiar with addressing graduate student writing within the demands of a doctoral-level research class and an outsider who was not directly involved in data collection, given that she was on the faculty at another university. This insider/outsider role allowed Audrey to ask provocative questions about the emerging findings and serve as what Costa and Kallick (1993) termed a critical friend. For example, when reading an early draft of the findings, she pointed out that too often writing centers are viewed by faculty as a last-stop editorial stop for graduate students with problematic editorial issues in their thesis/dissertations. She pushed the other six authors to keep these questions in mind: "How do we use writing centers to help craft a writing project rather than editorial last-stop check? Isn't that part of the bigger picture/goal of developing as writers anyway?" Her questions helped us move beyond our data set and keep the overarching goals of writing centers in mind. Because the authors of this study are also the participants, our names are all included. Efforts to preserve confidentiality create confusion in a self-study, as author's voices would be lost or unclear. As is typical in self-study, all participants helped write this manuscript. In order to reduce the chance that the doctoral students might feel pressured to participate because of their status, they were invited to be part of the self-study after Sara recorded final grades for the qualitative research course. Because this research was conducted in an established educational setting and used a normal educational practice to examine the effectiveness of an instructional technique, the study qualified as exempt from Human Subjects review. We present the results of our analysis in the Findings section that follows.

Findings

The findings that follow represent the most salient themes that emerged from our analysis. In "Moving from 'Good Enough' towards 'Excellent,'" we present the ways in which the doctoral students grew as writers, both in terms of improved proficiency with academic writing and heightened awareness of the high expectations for writing at the doctoral level. In "Moving Beyond Fear and Discovering the 'Magic' of Writing," we explore how the writing consultation process supported students in developing a stronger sense of writing efficacy in tandem with decreasing their apprehension about sharing their writing. We conclude with "Facing Fear and Uncertainty about Going Public," a finding that includes direct insights on the students' writing center experience.

Moving from "Good Enough" towards "Excellent"

The doctoral students involved in this study had many strengths as writers when the study began. None were in need of remedial support, yet each believed their writing could use

improvement, and each of them had some writing weaknesses. For example, Jennifer recognized that she had developed bad habits as a writer as a result of what she described as "coasting" through with good grades as an undergraduate. She explained,

> I developed the habit of never really editing my work. This has served me fairly well up until now, but I realize I am at a crossroads and now have to develop the thick skin necessary to face critiques and revisions.

Jennifer alludes to insufficient rigor in earlier assessments of her writing, which made the transition to higher-level expectations in graduate school. Amanda B. had similar feelings, noting that she had been able to produce work that was "good enough" to get a high grade in the past, with relatively little effort. Amanda B. recognized her doctoral program would demand "excellent" work at some point.

All three students also agreed that even though they understood that the expectations for their work would be greater in their doctoral program, they were unable to define what those increased expectations were. For example, Sabrina explained, "I was anxious about academic writing at the graduate level not because I could not state my opinion in writing, but because I did not have a good feel for the audience and the formal style of writing." The writing center collaborations contributed to their learning to move from getting by with sub-par work that earned good grades prior to the doctoral level to identifying ways to move towards excellent work.

The interviews and writing center reflections indicated that the students themselves believed that their writing proficiency increased due to engaging in consultations. Jennifer noted that through her consultations she made a breakthrough in organization and finding her voice. Earlier on she recognized, "One of my weaknesses is being able to weave a complex thought or analysis throughout a paper. I have a difficult time interweaving my ideas in a meaningful way – it's like I get lost in the complexity." Her self-analysis of improvement in voice was corroborated by Sara's evaluation of her writing.

Amanda B. noted that she was able to compose future writing pieces with more proficiency based on her consultations. She explained, "I thought of specific feedback I received through my consultations. When I was editing my work, it became easier for me to spot redundancies and cut them out. I became better at revising trouble spots without getting help first." Melissa, the consultant she worked with, observed this incorporation of learning as she worked with Amanda throughout the semester, specifically noticing an improvement in her development and structure of paragraphs and introductions. Melissa observed, "Often times our work in the Center consists of one-shot appointments with students, so we do not always get the opportunity to see how our feedback makes its way into the writer's revisions and future work." Given our focus on improving graduate student writing, it was helpful for Sara and Melissa to identify ways in which feedback contributes to that process. She described Amanda B.'s progress over the course of the semester:

> In our first meeting I was identifying disconnects in her work, and in our second meeting she was already doing that on her own, and I was there to acknowledge that, yes, she was on the right track with her thinking. By our third meeting she was working on a new project and had already incorporated the strategies we discussed during our previous meetings, so her introduction required little discussion in that meeting.

While originally believing their visits to the Writing Center would focus solely on the technical features of writing (like American Psychological Association [APA] formatting), they later

reported that the consultations they believed to be the most beneficial were those that dealt with development and content. And while Jennifer, Amanda B., and Sabrina did gain proficiency in academic writing in terms of structure, voice, and clarity of thought, the lack of attention to APA style in their consultations allowed APA errors to remain.

Sara's analysis of student writing offered additional insights as to how the doctoral students developed as writers over the course of the semester. Using Ondrusek's (2012) framework for the analysis, Sara identified that all three graduate students began the semester with strengths in terms of how they organized their writing, built an argument, wrote appropriately for the audience, and developed content effectively. She used their early-semester writing of a research autobiography for this analysis. However, all three students had APA style errors regarding source integration, and Jennifer and Sabrina demonstrated mechanical and grammar errors in their early assignments. Mid-semester the students submitted a second writing assignment: research findings based on a practice observation and interview conducted prior to starting the summative pilot study. The graduate students all improved in mechanics for their mid-semester assignment. However, all lacked a consistent voice—namely, their writing was too formal, lacked researcher presence, and used passive voice. The latter was a contrast to their successful early-semester assignment when they wrote appropriately for the audience, and underscored the impetus for this research project: the graduate students, who could write proficiently for reflective papers, struggled to write for an academic audience.

All three self-identified voice as areas where they needed improvement and sought out assistance from their writing center consultants for their final writing assignment. In their final papers, all three graduate students wrote effectively with regard to the following competencies (Ondrusek, 2012): argument/evidence/logic, audience/voice, content, and mechanics/grammar. The main opportunities for improvement were with APA style and citation errors, as well as organization of the literature reviews.

The latter was common among the seven other students who were in the class but not part of this study: only one student had a literature review that was well-organized with a clear focus and development of points that supported their research question. The rest needed improvement in organization. Additionally, all but one student had APA citation errors. It is worth noting that the three doctoral students who participated in writing center consultations prepared final papers that earned three of the four highest grades in the class. Sara was one of two evaluators of the final paper. The second evaluator taught a different doctoral course, and he and Sara came to consensus when evaluating each student's paper. Although this co-evaluation was done for pedagogical purposes and not to support this research, it supports credibility of the analysis because, unlike Sara, the second evaluator had no vested interest in the students' improvement.

Over the course of the semester, the graduate students made a transition from being content to submit writing that was good enough to self-identifying ways to improve their writing and proactively seeking support in areas like voice that were challenging. The journey towards excellent was one with tangible results, the most specific being the improvement in voice from their mid-semester to end-of-semester writing. In the next section, we describe the intangible metacognitive results that reflected their proactive efforts to work through their writing apprehension and move beyond the fears they felt about sharing their writing.

Moving Beyond the Fears and Discovering the "Magic" of Writing

All three doctoral students experienced or demonstrated apprehension toward the writing process at varying levels. This apprehension resulted in some type of inhibition toward the writing process, whether it was a reluctance to write or a reluctance to seek out feedback to improve their writing, and early in the semester all three students exhibited apprehension about

receiving criticism of their writing. All three students also expressed a feeling that their undergraduate work had not prepared them for the rigors of graduate writing, and that the graduate program had not yet clarified the expectations of what constituted "good" graduate writing. In her interview, Jennifer expressed that "doctoral writing seemed magical in that I couldn't define it and therefore couldn't pin it down enough to write in the new advanced way."

The graduate student interview data and post-consultation reflections revealed that all three students felt decreased writing apprehension and an increased sense of self-efficacy in writing over the course of the semester. In the beginning, they conveyed a lack of confidence by apologizing for their lack of ability, fear of sharing their work, and statements of feeling unprepared for graduate writing. Looking back on the experiences during her interview, Jennifer, remembered feeling "nervous about another person reading my writing. I was afraid that the consultant would think it was poor writing, and I would feel unsophisticated and stupid." In her interview, Melissa, the Writing Center director who served as Amanda B.'s consultant, explained that that Amanda B. began her first consultation by apologizing "for her writing, even though the writing itself wasn't full of deficiencies." As the semester unfolded, Amanda moved past her apologetic stance, and like Jennifer and Sabrina, began taking ownership of her consultation process:

> I try to hold back on the apologies and just let me writing stand in hopes of getting honest and helpful feedback from people I share my writing with. I also find that I am more willing to specify to readers what I would like them to look for when reading my work so that I can get help on areas that I need help with most.

Essential to Sabrina, Jennifer, and Amanda B.'s growth as writers was their ability to identify and reflect on their own improvement.

As the semester went on, they gained confidence as they saw evidence of improvement in their writing. Their consultations moved beyond fulfilling a requirement and became worthwhile on their own right. During this time, Jennifer described a "big shift" where she began "using writing as a learning process itself, not just an expression of what [she had] already learned." The following explanation of areas where her writing merited improvement earlier in the semester demonstrates metacognition about her improvement:

> My writing was formulaic. It always got the job done, and I received good grades, but it wasn't anything special…. One of my weaknesses is being able to weave a complex thought or analysis throughout a paper. I have a difficult time interweaving my ideas in a meaningful way—it's like I get lost in the complexity.

Jennifer was also able to identify specific ways her consultant helped her:

> [My consultant] helped me see the organization pattern I had used. As she reflected my pattern back to me, I began to see that I had not integrated my analysis throughout the paper, but had instead summed the book up, then talked about it. This was my strongest fear that I wouldn't be able to integrate my thoughts and present a deep analysis. During our session, she helped me take a point of analysis first, then refer to the book and other references in support of my point. This was a totally different way of putting the paper together—and just what I needed! She helped me see the pattern to use at that level of writing.

One key feature that led to that improvement was the specificity of the feedback they received from their Writing Center consultants.

Like Jennifer, Sabrina appreciated the feedback and felt it helped her see her writing with more objectivity. She began to come to consultations with a specific agenda—for example, for her second session she wanted to focus on the introduction and conclusion because she could tell they needed revision. Sabrina also came to value "bouncing ideas off the consultant." Sabrina, along with Jennifer and Amanda B., found the ongoing relationship with a consultant a powerful component of their moving beyond their fears and anxiety associated with sharing writing.

The Power of a Positive Relationship with a Writing Consultant

A key characteristic of the consultations was, as Healy (1993) argued, that the consultants were not in positions of authority over these students. This became an important point as it allowed the doctoral students to engage with the writing process without the risk of appearing unknowledgeable in front of their professor. Working with the consultant as equals was key for Jennifer as it lowered her apprehension about going to the Writing Center, making it easier for her to discuss her writing and learn from the process. Jennifer specifically addressed the benefits of working with the consultant as equals: "I appreciated the struggle with [the consultant] as we tried to define graduate writing together because it made me feel like I hadn't done something wrong, but this was just something hard."

Meeting with the consultants multiple times throughout the semester also became important to the graduate students' success, as it allowed them to build relationships. Each participant in this study met with a consultant four times throughout the semester. Amanda B. and Jennifer met with the same consultant for all four meetings, and Sabrina met with two different consultants. Amanda B. and Jennifer both described building a relationship with their consultant, which lowered their apprehension about visiting the Writing Center and sharing their writing. Melissa recalled Amanda B's hesitancy about working with her at the beginning of the semester but stated that "by our final appointments she clearly had become more comfortable with me, our space in the Writing Center, and where she was going with her work." In her interview, Amanda B. commented that although she still found it difficult to share writing, "feedback [is] helpful in improving my work. [I am] more willing to share my writing and less apologetic about it. More willing to ask readers for specific feedback on my work. My consultations helped boost my confidence as an academic writer." She reported another shift: that while she might get a strong grade on a paper, it might have met *her* standards for a strong paper.

Jennifer grew more confident than Amanda with regards to sharing her work, observing in her interview that "[I] now [have] the courage to take a chance and put my work out there." Jennifer also noted that she "enjoyed figuring things out with the consultant, rather than being in a position where the consultant knew all of the answers already." The consultations helped her to realize that her writing was not as bad as she thought it was. Amanda C., her consultant, also noted that "the more times we (Jennifer and Amanda C.) met, the more confident she became."

Because of the demands of her schedule as a public school teacher, Sabrina met with two different consultants. While Sabrina found that working with two different consultants less effective than the experience Amanda B. and Jennifer had working with one consistent consultant, the differing viewpoints did highlight other aspects of her writing that made her see it from a positive angle. It is clear that having this additional support system eased the solitude of writing. Sabrina expressed this when she explained her happiness at finding the Writing

Center and its consultants, so she could "use them to help with my dissertation, mainly so I will not feel so alone while writing."

The more times the students met with their consultants, the more comfortable, open, and confident the students became, and this increase in comfort prompted them to take ownership of their consultations. Early in the semester the consultants led the discussions, but by the end of the semester, the students were bringing specific questions and concerns about their drafts that they wanted addressed. Amanda B. expressed the greatest reservations about writing and sharing her work, and while she still had some degree of apprehension about her work, she became able and willing to specify what she wanted feedback about. This uncertainty about going public with her work, even in the relative comfort of a writing center consultation, is another theme that emerged in the data.

Facing Fear and Uncertainty about Going Public

Of the three graduate students, only Jennifer saw sharing and publishing her writing as a necessary challenge of participating at the doctoral level. Despite her initial resistance to sharing her writing, she saw her visits to the Writing Center as a way to face that fear:

> I allowed myself to be vulnerable academically for the first time in a long time.
> I was always scared to publish my work before, […] but I'm now involved in
> three major writing projects that are outside of my doctoral class load. I now
> have the courage to take a chance and put my work out there.

Like Jennifer, Amanda B. had fears about the process. She began to take control over her sessions over time and quit apologizing for her work. She began to predict the feedback she would receive and to help herself without criticism. For Amanda B., she saw improvement in her work across drafts: "I could see how my ideas were more clear from my first to my third one, but then I don't feel like I can do that on my own. I don't know how to get to that clarified stage without help." Through their meetings, each of the writers was able to develop new strategies for crafting their work and for re-seeing it. They each plan to visit the Writing Center again for help with writing projects, particularly their dissertations.

While each of the three graduate students found their visits to the Writing Center to be useful to their writing process and to the quality of their final work, it was not so clear that their visits helped all of them to necessarily understand the importance of going public with their work. What is clear is that each of them is now willing to continue visiting the Writing Center for challenging projects, as all are planning to schedule regular appointments for their dissertations. Each demonstrated control over the sharing of their work, learning to ask for specific feedback, and finding confidence in portions of their work that they had previously addressed.

Jennifer, in particular, seemed to understand prior to her experience in the Writing Center what going public would mean, and why it would be so important to her career. It was only because she could recognize both this important academic move and her own fear of sharing her writing that she was able to see her visits to the Writing Center as an opportunity to move forward, to overcome her apprehension, and to be successful in her discipline. Specifically, she saw sharing her writing as an integral part of participating at the doctoral level. While Amanda B. and Sabrina began their consultations by asking questions specific to their writing assignments, only Jennifer opened her first consultation by asking whether or not her writing was truly "graduate-level work." After a couple of sessions with the same consultant, she gained both new writing strategies and confidence that her writing was on par. The mindset that Jennifer brought to her consultations seems crucial to her outcomes. It was only because

she was able to identify that expectations for graduate student writing are often murky or undefined that she was able to use her consultations as opportunities for both individualized feedback and affirmation that an instructor cannot always provide. Once she had addressed that, she was able to shift the focus of her consultations to more specific, project-centered feedback.

It seems notable that Amanda B. shared similar concerns about her own writing throughout the process. She continued to believe that her work was not as strong as she'd like, despite her instructor and consultant's observations that her work in no way reflected her insecurities. For example, in an early-semester assignment she wrote:

> I learned about the writing center on campus towards the end of Spring semester. I wanted to go and get help, but I did not. I am really excited about going this semester. I need help and I hope that through consultations at the writing center I can improve my writing. Minimally, I need to improve my confidence so that I feel more capable of writing quality papers. This semester, I plan to seek help with my writing and apply the suggestions and advice I am given to help me become a more confident and competent writer. As a graduate assistant I have been told I will have the opportunity to co-author papers for publication. That scares me! My writing is not publishable-level quality. Thus, this goal will help me as a student in classes and in my work as a graduate assistant.

Sara's feedback to Amanda B. included:

> You describe writing apprehension, and ironically (?) your fears are described quite eloquently in writing! It is interesting how we can also be our own worst critics—you self-assessed your paper as earning a "meets expectations" while I rated it as "exceeds"—and we both used the same criteria for our evaluations.

Amanda B. revealed her fear that she would be asked to "co-author papers for publication. That scares me! My writing is not publishable-level quality." The writing consultation experience offered her a supportive way to begin building confidence for scholarly writing.

While the doctoral students' early consultations focused on technical aspects (e.g. APA formatting and citations) and general questions about structure, the second and third meetings indicated a shift in focus that concentrated more on content, clarity, and academic voice. The consultations in which this shift occurred were labeled as the most productive by the students. This is illustrated in Amanda B.'s reflection of her first consultation with Melissa when she explained that her consultant "discussed the ideas in my paper in a way I did not expect. We really engaged in the content, not just the writing." The data also illustrated how the second and third consultations progressed from instructional to reinforcement; the students would apply strategies learned from prior consultations to their current drafts, and the conversations then would focus on reinforcing the concepts. This progression was accompanied by the students taking more ownership of their consultations by bringing specific questions and concerns they wanted addressed. This ultimately led the consultants to shift in their roles, as Jennifer described, from "advisors" to "readers."

None of the student researcher/participants had been to the Writing Center prior to this assignment. They indicated that they either didn't know what services it provided, whether or not it was available to doctoral students, or they held the common misconception that writing centers were for struggling students only. While at the beginning of the semester, the students tended to view their consultants as some form of expert (specifically about the technical aspects

of writing), that image later shifted to that of a person who could assist them in uncovering their own answers. This coincided with the students being initially surprised about the consultants' focus on content over technical issues.

Jennifer's experience reflects this transition—she attended her first consultation nervous about the impending criticism she expected, yet discovered that many of her conversations reinforced the strengths in her writing. All of the students indicated that the focus on what they were doing well was beneficial. The students also indicated a change in the way they felt about their consultations; even though they began the semester as nervous or indifferent about the Writing Center, by the second session they were looking forward to their appointments, with one student, Amanda B., even recounting how she began to "crave" this feedback. By the end of the semester, all students were referencing their time with their consultants as "relationships" and showed an interest in developing a long-term relationship with a consultant, especially in regards to their upcoming dissertations. In summary, as the students became less apprehensive about sharing their writing and became leaders who directed their consultations, the time became more valuable because they addressed writing issues in more depth. We explore the implications of this and the other findings in the discussion section that follows.

Discussion

When we review the findings from this study, we can come to two very different conclusions. On one hand we can happily conclude that the results of this collaboration were successful. The non-evaluative nature of the consultations and specificity of feedback seemed to support their growth, which was consistent with Mascle's (2013) scholarship. These students grew as writers, increased in confidence with sharing their writing, and were thoughtful and metacognitive about their experience. Additionally, they have made an important step on the journey to going public with scholarly writing. Amanda B., Jennifer, and Sabrina were ready for an event that critically changed the way they view writing. We can joyfully encourage other graduate faculty members who share concerns about graduate student writing to create an incentive for students to work with their writing centers in ways that work within the structure of their courses.

We can also review the findings from this study and conclude that the overall *intent* of the collaboration was not met because six out of 10 students did not pursue the Writing Center option. Included in those six were Sara's students who most needed support with the entire writing process, much less the more advanced concept of going public as scholars. When Sara asked these six students why they did not choose this option, they indicated logistical issues of scheduling appointments as the main barrier. Amanda B., Jennifer, and Sabrina faced those same challenges, but they made the time for consultations because, as Amanda B. said, "I realized I could write one more paper at the end of the semester or make time for something that would benefit me in the long term." In terms of the total amount of time required, all three graduate students agreed that they spent less time total on the consultation and reflection process than they would have spent writing another paper, yet the net gain was more. The challenge for teachers who care about supporting student writing is how to get more students to recognize the long-term benefits of making time for writing center consultations.

Ultimately, the two possible conclusions have the same implication: there is value to supporting graduate students' writing. In the sections that follow, we discussion the implications of these two conclusions with regards to creating an asset-centric, cohesive programmatic model: specific consultation goals, and building writing center collaborations.

Building Writing Center Collaborations

We suggest graduate faculty consider how a writing center collaboration can be embedded into their course's curriculum. Faculty can coordinate with writing center staff to require or incentivize visits. Or, like Sara, they can offer an option that would allow students to exchange an assignment for writing center consultations. It was relatively easy for Sara to do this because her students could "opt out" of a summative assignment that was metacognitive in nature, and the writing center consultation process required similar thinking. The students in this study all described a lack of time and attention to the full writing process, leading them to usually submit drafts to their professors that had not been properly revised—there just wasn't time for that sophisticated work. Our study suggests, though, that having an incentive to work with a writing center allowed them to prioritize the full process of writing.

To do this, we suggest faculty consider the following question: Is there a moderate-length paper or project in your course that can be replaced by a semester-long commitment for writing center consultations and short reflections about the experience? It is always a challenge to "let go" of an assignment because everything we ask of our students is purposeful. Giving students an incentive to "replace" a paper or project with writing center consultations means being comfortable as a teacher that the value of that experience is of equal merit with whatever assignment they do not complete.

Creating an Asset-Centric, Cohesive Programmatic Model

Although our findings support earlier studies (Boquet et al., 2015; Mannon, 2016; Phillips, 2016) that identified the reciprocity between decreased writing anxiety and increased writing self-efficacy, as well as how evaluation-free writing centers can contribute to student growth, a lingering issue that merits future study is how can faculty get more students to turn to writing centers? For example, six out of Sara's 10 graduate students did *not* choose the Writing Center consultation option. Perhaps this was because they, like the doctoral students Wellington (2010) described, feared feedback on writing.

We recommend that future collaborative models enlist the support of all faculty who teach and advise in a graduate program to have conversations about the importance of seeking external feedback through writing centers or other venues. A consistent message might lead more graduate students to pursue writing support to help take their writing to the next level. None of the three graduate students had been to the Writing Center before Sara offered this opportunity. In the interviews Amanda B. clarified that they had "heard about it but didn't know enough about it to make any desire to go over," and Jennifer stated, "It never would have occurred to me that I could get help as a doctoral student." Sabrina expressed that what the graduate students needed was "just exposure, just getting the word out" about the Writing Center.

Consistent with our earlier recommendations for future collaborative models, we recommend that faculty provide graduate students with information early on in their programs about the benefits of seeking external writing feedback through writing centers. It is important that faculty be open with students about how initial visits might feel intimidating, but a long-term commitment to seeking feedback and developing a relationship with a consultant can play a transformative role in helping them navigate the greater expectations of graduate-level writing. To support effective collaborative models, we suggest that students receive an explanation early on in their graduate program about the role that going public with their work has in helping them to create a scholarly identity. With this, more students might approach their writing center visits with the understanding that what they are experiencing is more than just feedback on their work; they are in fact moving toward sharing their writing with others in a

safe, supportive environment, and that even though sharing writing is difficult, it is a necessary move in their academic careers.

In addition to being cohesive and programmatic, we encourage an asset-centric approach to supporting graduate student writing. In her interview, Melissa described the philosophy of the Writing Center that was part of this study:

> We describe it as asset-based writing instruction. And so we focus on what's going well in a piece as a way of acknowledging it. So this isn't a tear down, nothing's ever going to be a tear down. If you recognize what's working well in a piece and build from there, that helps to build confidence.

This approach is no doubt strategic, as giving feedback that focuses on performance gains and what is already working—instead of performance deficiencies—increases efficiency, productivity, and self-efficacy in that area (Bandura, 2012; Pajares & Johnson, 1994).

Jennifer and Amanda B. were the most apprehensive about sharing their work, but by the end of the semester they demonstrated a desire for increased feedback and a new-found appreciation for feedback about what was successful in their work. Identifying the strengths of their work allowed them to replicate the strategies that led to those successful components of their writing. In addition to collaborating with writing center staff to develop a cohesive consultation plan, faculty can collaborate with writing center staff to develop shared asset-focused ways of offering feedback. We recommend future studies explore how consistent feedback, aligned with assessment, impacts graduate students' growth as writers.

Specific Consultation Goals

We recommend that graduate faculty and writing center staff collaborate to identify specific consultation goals to help structure initial visit as it may be that other graduate students, like Jennifer, Sabrina, and Amanda B., will grow in confidence over time and benefit from more guidance early.

A starting point may be organizing a literature review, which remained an area for improvement for all three doctoral students. Upon further review of the focus of the consultations, we discovered that only Jennifer used one consultation to concentrate on the literature review, while Amanda B. and Sabrina brought in different sections of the pilot study (methods, findings, and discussion). Because Sara identified the literature review as a common weakness in her past students, this finding suggests the students would have benefited from more direction as to the importance of taking that particular section of the pilot study to the Writing Center. The consultants, in turn, would also benefit from having a strong sample literature review that they could refer to in their discussions with the students. Increased coordination between the professor and writing center staff could potentially catch gaps like these. Furthermore, scaffolding graduate student writing of the literature review, which can be complex, clearly merits further attention.

In closing, we note that while the ultimate choice to make a commitment to be metacognitive, to seek out feedback, and to put in the extra effort rests with graduate students, faculty have opportunities to push the going-public mindset through their course design. When a graduate writing assignment is read and assessed only by a professor, the experience is scholastic rather than scholarly. However, faculty can create space for peer review, which may create a community of writers within their courses. Faculty can also consider options like having incentives or requirements for their students to work with their writing center. The benefit of a support system outside of the class, though, is that it can travel with the students to other courses and beyond, notably the thesis or dissertation.

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