Make It Happen: How Libraries Can Start a Grassroots Campus-Wide Graduate Writing Initiative
Hello!

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1. In the beginning…

It all started with a group of people passionate about improving graduate writing.
What we did

- Researched other programs
- Compiled some options
- Found a backer (School of Graduate Studies) to provide direction – and the $$$
No guessing allowed

We surveyed graduate students and graduate faculty.
Graduate student responses: 537
Graduate faculty responses: 142
Total graduate students: 3,800
Total graduate faculty: 354
14% of graduate students responded.
40% of graduate faculty responded.
Graduate student survey results

**Age**
- 22% - 18-24
- 33% - 25-30
- 23% - 31-39
- 21% - 40+

**National Origin**
- 84% U.S. domestic
- 16% International

**Household Status**
- 55% single
- 45% married/partnered
- 30% have dependents

**Household Size**
- 19% live alone
- 41% live with 1 person
- 33% live with 2-3 people
- 7% live with 4-6 people

**Household Income**
- $0K - $25K: 32%
- $25K - $50K: 22%
- $50K - $75K: 17%
- $75K+: 29%

**Educational Status**
- 88% still in coursework
- 12% matriculating for thesis/dissertation
Graduate students reported using campus library resources on site or from home
# Graduate student survey results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Yes, from campus</th>
<th>Yes, from home</th>
<th>No/not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use campus library resources</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use SGS Thesis/Dissertation workshops</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use the Writing Studio</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
35% have presented at a conference

15% have been authors on a multi-author article

14% have been authors on a single-author article

13% have completed a grant proposal

51% have done none of the above
3. Get them talking

The free-form answers gave students and faculty an opportunity to give specific input.
Reading my classmates’ writing [...] is difficult.

As far as I’m concerned, if you don’t know how to write, you shouldn’t be in graduate school. I’ve read some shockingly bad work since I’ve been at [UMKC].
I need assistance with editing and flow/continuity from someone who can read sections of my thesis and provide feedback, not so much on quality of content but on readability.

...spending 4-8 weeks on APA style and research would be extremely beneficial, especially to those of us who did not use APA in our undergraduate studies.
Departmental support

48% Yes
Students and faculty said their departments offered course-based or one-on-one writing support

52% No
Students and faculty said their departments did not offer course-based or one-on-one writing support

About half of graduate degree programs offer an intensive research, methods, or writing course
What can we do to fill the gap?

Things got really interesting when we compared student and faculty responses.
Students: how likely are you to participate in these initiatives?  
Faculty: what types of initiatives would be most beneficial for your students?
Only 12% of faculty said they previously participated in a program for graduate writing.
Top 3 challenges graduate students face*

- Scheduling time to write (63%)
- Lack of writing confidence (49%)
- Lack of preparation (70%)

* according to their faculty members
Students should be able to write before being admitted.

Some actually don’t learn from repeated corrections of the same mistake!

They arrive ill-prepared – not that they lack preparation, but many do not write well when they arrive.

[It would be most beneficial] in high school; certainly BEFORE they get to graduate school.
Mandatory
Voluntary

At the beginning of coursework
After comprehensive exams

Teaching loads
Costs and funding

Basic writing skills
Reading comprehension
Specific advanced skills

We (faculty) are the problem
We need help with writing ourselves
Focus Groups

**Student Groups**
- International students (1)
- Students writing dissertations (1)
- Beginning doctoral students (1)

**Faculty Groups**
- Graduate faculty/non-advisers (1)
- Graduate faculty advisers (3)
Recommendations

Our roadmap for the quest to a Graduate Writing Initiative
Bring everyone to the table

- Form a Graduate Writing Advisory Committee (GWAC)
- Representatives from all over campus
- Identified 16 parties that could contribute representatives

How has this worked out after 1.5 years? We’re now rethinking committee makeup
- Active members
- Advisory members
Create a one-stop webpage

- On the School of Graduate Studies website
- All information about graduate writing in one place, linking out to other units’ sites
- Looked at other universities as models:
  - University of Maryland
  - Arizona State University
  - University of Kansas
  - University of Minnesota
  - Yale Graduate School of Arts & Sciences
  - Liberty University
Create online tutorials

- Easier said than done
  - Adobe Captivate is a beast
  - Who has the time?

- Using YouTube and LibGuides in the interim
  - Literature reviews guide
  - Technical writing guide

Where are we on this after 1.5 years?
Tutorials are still on the docket, but we are also recording our in-person workshops and putting them online for self-paced viewing.
Create designated writing spaces

- Neutral territory
- Focus groups helped identify furnishing, availability needs
- Crowdfunded for technology needs (through Scalefunder)

The library is planning for graduate student workspace in upcoming renovations.

Thomas Ferrel, Director of the UMKC Writing Studio, and Kara Bollinger, Graduate Writing Specialist at the UMKC Writing Studio, standing near the Graduate Workstations in the Writing Studio’s main location in the Atterbury Student Success Center.
Offer workshops (in-person and online)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshop Title</th>
<th>Taught by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis &amp; Dissertation Formatting</td>
<td>School of Graduate Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing in the Humanities</td>
<td>English Faculty (GWAC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing in the Sciences</td>
<td>Physics Faculty (GWAC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant Funding Opportunities &amp; Grant Writing</td>
<td>Office of Research Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read Like a Writer</td>
<td>Writing Studio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proofreading Tips &amp; Techniques</td>
<td>Writing Studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hidden Web: Searching for Articles Google Scholar Can’t Find</td>
<td>University Libraries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing with Scholarly Integrity</td>
<td>University Libraries/ Writing Studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tech Tools for Writing</td>
<td>University Libraries/ Writing Studio</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Other recommendations (yet to do)

Expand workshop offerings
Live online through Blackboard, perhaps in the evenings

Offer writing retreat/write-in
When in the semester to do this? Maybe in the summer?

Develop orientation materials for incoming students and faculty
So no one can say they didn’t know.

Develop and propose for-credit courses
Who will teach these courses? Must be graduate faculty.

Designate a faculty “writing consultant” in each department
Compensation/course relief or count us out.

Implement in-person and online writing groups
Self-organized groups didn’t work.
The library is a key player.

How are libraries poised to start (and remain part of) a graduate writing initiative?
Dedicate and designate

People

Time

Resources
Start the conversation

- You can’t do it alone
- It doesn’t have to be big
- It doesn’t have to be a top-down directive
- Work as a team; agree to set institutional politics aside

All it takes is a small group of passionate people to make the case and drive a campus-wide effort.
Activate library powers!

- Seek grant-funding opportunities
- Enlist help from other librarians
- Use outreach tools to spread the word

Use the library as an avenue for promoting graduate writing initiative efforts. Embed it in instruction, reference interviews, etc.
Put it on your webpages
Create a dedicated graduate student services page and link out to other campus resources.
Start a **newsletter**

- Embed the sign-up code on your website
- Bring manual sign-up sheets to graduate student orientations
- To date, no one has ever unsubscribed!

Retraction Watch

We all know that we shouldn’t believe everything we read on the internet, but what about everything we read in scholarly, peer-reviewed journals?

We tend to trust the researchers who write and review the content to ensure the science is sound and the data are interpreted correctly. Yet, sometimes scholarly articles are retracted, or withdrawn from the scholarly record, because they contain minor errors that are later corrected. Other times the articles are outright fraudulent or plagiarized. In fact, some of the literature that you have
Talk to your faculty

They will, in turn, tell their students.
(Free marketing!)
When your campus partners see your contributions and effort, they will step up their game.
Since we started, I’ve had...

- More individual consultations
- More instruction requests
- More orientation and event invitations
Faculty members asking for stacks of my cards

Students recognizing me walking around campus

Invitations to serve on other campus committees
The library is a key player.

We’re valued on campus more than ever before. (Yessss!)
Thanks!

Any questions?

You can find me on Instagram @jenmylibrarian
Credits

Special thanks to all the people who made and released these awesome resources for free:

- Surveys conducted using SurveyMonkey
- Newsletter produced using MailChimp
- Presentation template by SlidesCarnival
- Photographs by Death to the Stock Photo