Writing Across the Graduate Curriculum:   
A Multi-Institutional Study

# 1. Title: Writing Across the Graduate Curriculum: A Multi-Institutional Study

**Abstract:** This project launches a large-scale, multi-institutional study of graduate student writing development, responding to the increased presence of underrepresented domestic and international students on US campuses.

Using mixed-methods research across multiple institutions, we aim to provide a high-level view of student writing experiences in graduate school to answer the following questions: How do graduate students learn to write, and what kinds of writing assignments do they encounter in coursework? What affective experiences do they report? What resources do they use to support their writing? How do multilingual and BIPOC students navigate programs where racist linguistic ideologies continue to hold sway?

At Watson, our project group will collaborate to hone these research questions, identify methodological approaches best suited to those questions, and plan for future presentations and publications. At the conclusion of the conference, we will deliver a synthesis of our conversations and share our proposed study.

# 2. Facilitator information:

*Enrique Paz* (he/him) is an assistant professor of rhetoric and composition in the School of Literature, Writing, and Digital Humanities and the director of the writing center at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. His research interests include writing center theory and practice, writing program administration, WAC/WID, conceptions of writing, and writing development. His projects deploy qualitative methodologies and collection of textual artifacts, particularly teaching materials. His other large-scale project, the First-year Writing Syllabus Project, collects first-year writing syllabi to develop a more comprehensive understanding of first-year writing curricula nationally.

*Tom McNamara* (he/him) is an assistant professor of English Studies and directs the Writing Center at Lewis University. His research interests include writing center studies, writing placement, international students, basic writing, and race in higher ed. In addition to his publications on Chinese international undergraduates, his recent work examines how directed self placement surveys can circumvent the long history of BIPOC students being overrepresented in basic writing programs. Both of these projects draw on qualitative survey and interview methodologies.

*Jasmine Castillo* (she/her) teaches First-Year Writing and is the assistant director of the Writing Center at Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois. In her role as an instructor, she primarily works with multilingual international undergraduate students. Her research and teaching interests include multilingual writing, rhetoric and composition, first-year writing instruction, and writing center studies.

# 3. Primary Contact:

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# 4. Description (please include a Works Cited):

At the 2024 Watson Conference, we intend to launch a multi-institutional, empirical study of graduate student writing development. This project aims to collect a large-scale, triangulated dataset drawn from mixed-methods research across multiple institutions, providing a high-level view of student experiences learning to write in graduate school. We believe that a project of this sort is only possible with a diverse group of collaborators from various institutions and that the 2024 Watson conference makes this work possible.

We locate this work at the intersections of WAC/WID, writing center, and writing development research. Unlike many undergraduate courses of study that include mandatory writing courses and writing-intensive or WAC requirements, graduate programs rarely include intentional writing instruction or curricula. As such, graduate students often find the most support in writing centers, while individual graduate faculty may work with WAC/WID programs on course-specific interventions (Lawrence & Zawacki 2018; Glotfelter, Martin, Olejnik,  2022). This project would thus appeal to audiences in writing program administration, WAC/WID programs, and writing centers but also has implications more broadly for graduate programs, their administrators, and graduate instructors across the university.

This project is motivated by the present moment of demographic and linguistic change in many graduate programs. The growing presence of international students and faculty means that entire graduate programs and research teams may be majority multilingual (Rozycki & Johnson). Underrepresented domestic students are also becoming an increasing presence in many programs (Kent), and many institutions are now expanding graduate programs in pursuit of revenue-generating international enrollment. At one of our institutions, for instance, administrators have seen international demand for graduate programs in computer science and business as a fiscal antidote to the looming drop in college-aged students in the midwest.

Beyond responding to such demographic trends, our project will also make a critical intervention in research about graduate writing instruction. Work in this area has tended to include localized accounts of writing programs, narratives of students’ experiences, or research conducted in a single institutional context. Recent collections on graduate student writing, including *Re/Writing the Center* (Lawrence & Zawacki, 2018) and *Learning from the Lived Experiences of Graduate Student Writers* (Madden et al. 2020), feature rich description of student and professional experiences with writing instruction and support at the graduate level, but they remain focused on personal reflections, case studies of individual students, or the impact of a localized program. This is also the case in a newer body of scholarship addressing issues of equity and linguistic diversity. For instance, even as a 2016 special issue of *Praxis* centered racial and linguistic justice, that issue—and other publications since—have largely described graduate writing initiatives at individual centers (e.g. Alvarez et al. 2016, Bell & Hewerdine 2016, Reardon et al. 2016, Kinney et al. 2019, Radke 2018) or drawn on data collection at single institutions (e.g. Burrows 2016, Hixson et al. 2016, Kranek & Carvajal Regidor 2021, Martinez 2016, Phillips 2017). To date, the only cross-institutional study of graduate writing surveyed writing center directors and not graduate writers themselves (Summers 2019).

Following the example of large-scale, multi-institutional projects like the Citation Project (Serviss & Jamieson 2017), the Meaningful Writing Project (Geller et al. 2017), and Dan Melzer’s *Assignments Across the Curriculum* (2014), this project will provide a data-supported portrait of today’s graduate writers and how they navigate institutions long dominated by white linguistic and cultural norms. This project deploys several mixed-method approaches to data collection to create a robust and triangulated dataset that captures graduate student writing experiences from a variety of perspectives. To gather this data, we take our initial methodological inspiration from the studies referenced above–namely the Meaningful Writing Project’s cross-institutional qualitative study of student writers and Dan Melzer’s collection of documents like syllabi, assignment sheets, and student writing. While we anticipate that our research questions and data collection instruments will change as a result of our collaboration at Watson 2024, the research questions we intend to pursue through data collection include the following:

* How do graduate students learn to write, and how is that writing supported?
* What kinds of writing assignments do graduate students encounter in all stages of their coursework?
* What affective experiences do graduate students report related to writing in their programs?
* What resources do graduate students use to support their writing? And what has been the impact of those resources?
* How do graduate students—and in particular multilingual writers and BIPOC students—navigate programs and campuses where racist linguistic ideologies continue to hold sway?

Our time at Watson will be used to refine these questions and data collection instruments, all with the goal of drafting an IRB application immediately following the conference and beginning data collection once approval is granted. Ultimately, we aim for our data collection to culminate in an edited collection with the team assembled at Watson 2024, one that revises the field’s imaginary of graduate writers and the types of support offered in writing centers. Additionally, we intend for any publication and presentation drawing on this data to offer a careful account of methods of data collection and analysis, not only so that other scholars can refine and replicate our study (Serviss 2017) but also so that writing center researchers can engage in ongoing data collection on graduate writers. In this way, we can ensure our responsiveness to future demographic and institutional shifts related to the graduate writers we serve.

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# 5. Annotated schedule:

The work sessions will feature a mix of whole-group discussions and breakout-group inquiry/exploration sessions. The whole-group discussions will coordinate the efforts of the breakout groups and provide direction for deliverables at the end of the conference. The breakout groups will use conversation and activities to develop research questions and exigencies related to their assigned inquiry area on graduate student writing.

## DAY 1: Thursday, March 7

11:15 a.m.-1:00 p.m. EST: Work session (includes breaks)

11:15 - 12:00 - Group introductions, Project description and discussion.

* The group will learn about one another, including their backgrounds, expertises, and interest areas as related to graduate student writing.
* Facilitators will then introduce the vision behind the project, including the starting point for research questions, proposed data collection strategies, and intentions for an edited collection, as well as intentions for a deliverable for the conference. The whole group will discuss these plans, explore new perspectives and possibilities, and develop a tentative vision for the conference and project shared by the whole group.

12:00 - 12:15 - BREAK

12:15 - 1:00 - Inquiry Areas Development and Assignment

* This whole-group discussion will aim to identify 3-5 areas for deeper inquiry related to graduate student writing. The facilitators will introduce some starting directions based on extant scholarship and the assigned project readings. From there, the whole group will articulate possibilities for other areas and/or refine the concepts of the proposed areas. At the end of this session, participants will express interest in a particular area, and facilitators will assign participants to groups based on those interests. Ideally, each group would have 4-6 people.

2:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m. EST: Work (includes breaks)

2:00 - 4:00 - Inquiry Area Breakout groups

* During this time, the breakout groups will engage in brainstorming, writing, research, reading, and discussion to further develop their inquiry area. Over the course of the conference, each group is tasked with generating insights from scholarship, statements of need for research in this area, research questions related to the area that can be studied empirically, methodological considerations related to study of this area, and a focus for impact on students from underrepresented communities. Groups will be individually responsible for determining their approach to developing these outcomes.

## DAY 2: Friday, March 8

9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. EST: Breakfast & work session (includes breaks)

9:00 - 11:15 - Inquiry Area Breakout

* Inquiry Area Breakout groups will continue their activity from the previous day. Groups will have flexibility to take a break whenever is productive for their process during this session.

11:15 - 12:00 - Whole Group Check-ins

* Facilitators will reconvene the whole group to hear a short report from each group about their current progress and ongoing explorations. During this time, the breakout groups might also seek additional perspective from the whole group.

1:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m. EST: Work session (includes breaks)

1:00 - 3:00: Inquiry Area Breakout + Outcomes Drafting

* Inquiry Area Breakout groups will continue their activity. In this session, groups will have the goal to distill their exploration into specific insight statements that can motivate, support, and provide direction for an inclusively-minded empirical research study of graduate student writing development in their area. Groups will have flexibility to take a break whenever is productive for their process during this session.

3:00 - 4:00: Group Reporting and Group Deliverable Revision

* In this session, each group will briefly share their drafted outcomes from their collaborative work time and take a few questions and responses. Facilitators will use these conversations and shared documents from each group to develop a draft of the deliverable for Saturday.

## DAY 3: Saturday, March 9

9:00 a.m.-10:30 a.m. EST: Breakfast & work session (includes breaks)

9:00 - 10:30: Project Discussion and Revision

* Based on yesterday’s discussions and insight, the whole group will collectively discuss the plan for a large-scale empirical study of graduate student writing development. That conversation will yield a revised vision statement for the project, revised research questions, and revised data collection strategies.
* Following this, the facilitators will introduce the draft of the deliverable presentation: an overview of the project, its exigency, and a summary of insights developed by each inquiry area group. The whole group will work to revise and polish the presentation, elect members from each inquiry area group to speak, and include the revised plan for empirical study.

# 6. Modality:

*Our preference is for the in-person collaborative session.*

# 7. Number of participants:

*We hope to recruit 15-20 people to participate in this project.*

# 8. Participant background:

Are you looking for participants with certain kinds of skills (e.g., language, artistic, technical skills), roles, backgrounds, interests, or identities?

We hope to recruit a diverse group of collaborators that bring needful perspective and skills to this study. We are particularly interested in participants

* who have expertise in quantitative research methods and data analysis, in addition to other qualitative researchers who can complement our own experience.
* with international backgrounds who can inform our research design and recruitment of future research participants.
* who represent a variety of institutional types where graduate study is happening. We recognize graduate programs are increasingly located outside of research-intensive universities and seek to consider and capture those perspectives.
* who work in writing-across-the-curriculum programs, centers for writing excellence, writing centers, and other writing support programs that function broadly across curricula and disciplines.
* whose experiences as multilingual and BIPOC graduate students, researchers, writing instructors, and/or WPAs will bring important lived experience to our project’s anti-racist commitments.

# 9. Preparation:

Would participants need to read, do, and/or bring anything in advance? (As the Timeline for Facilitators indicates, they would be informed of their group a little over a month in advance of the conference’s start.)

Participants will be asked to complete a short reading list prior to attending the conference. This reading list would function to provide all participants a common base of reference for current and emerging knowledge on graduate student writing and writing development research. Key texts on this list include readings from *Assignments across the Curriculum* by Dan Melzer, *Graduate Writing Across the Curriculum: Identifying, Teaching, and Supporting* by Marilee Brooks-Gillies, Elena G. Garcia, Soo Hyon Kim, Katie Manthey, and Trixie G. Smith, and *Learning from the Lived Experiences of Graduate Student Writers* by Shannon Madden, Michele Eodice, Kirsten T. Edwards, and Alexandria Lockett.

# 10. Final-day deliverable:

Through the conference collaborations, each of our Inquiry Area Groups will ultimately develop the following regarding graduate student writing and their assigned area of focus:

* A summary of key insights drawn from present scholarship and their collaborative conversation.
* A summary of impact of this area on diverse and underrepresented graduate student writers.
* A summary of ongoing research needs and gaps in this area.
* Research questions that a multi-institutional study of graduate student writing might pursue and that address the above research needs.
* Methods for responding to those research questions.
* Limitations for those methods and challenges for study in this area generally.

Each group will share these outcomes with our project team before the conference ends.The facilitators will synthesize these outcomes into a draft presentation. On Saturday morning, the project team will collaborate to revise this presentation to represent a collaborative vision for a multi-institutional research study of graduate student writing development, our research questions, research design, and future goals. We will share this collaborative vision and proposed study as our deliverable**.** Immediately following the conference, this material will be used by the project leaders to draft an IRB application and begin data collection upon approval.

# 12. What happens after the conference?

***(We have intentionally flipped the order of 11 & 12 for ease of understanding.)***

The collaboration will continue! The collaboration at the Watson Conference will be the launching point of a multi-institutional research project with intentions to produce an edited collection based on the study.

All participants in our conference working group will be invited to continue their participation in two ways: as researchers, collecting data according to the recommendations of the working group and as contributors to the edited collection. Researchers will collect data at their home institutions as well as solicit contributions from targeted institutions. Once the data collection phase is complete, participants will engage in data analysis according to their expertise and their interest in particular research questions. Participants would be welcome to propose (collaborative) chapters for an edited collection based on this research.

# 11. How will participants get credit?

We intend to develop an edited collection based on the research project that emerges from our collaboration. Participants may contribute to this collection to develop CV credit. Following development of the edited collection, participants may continue to use the data set to develop further publications.

# 13. Working and learning environment:

What strategies might you use to foster an inclusive, accessible, “post-White” (Croom, 2022) environment founded in collective accountability and radical care (Johnston et al., 2022)? Feel free to make use of the [2021 Watson Conference Commitments](https://louisville.edu/conference/watson/history-and-conference-archive/conference-archive/past-conferences/2021-watson-conference/2021-watson-conference-commitments) in your planning. (We will revise them slightly for 2024.)

During our time at Watson, we will recursively seek to foster inclusivity and access: That is, we will offer daily check-ins in a variety of modes that allow participants to share feedback about the community we are forming at Watson and the power dynamics of our collaboration. For instance, we will use daily, anonymous end-of-day reflections submitted through Google Forms that invite participants to reflect on whose voices are most recognized and validated through each day’s conversations—and to offer feedback about how our collaboration can be more inclusive of a diversity of perspectives. Additionally, participants will be able to anonymously contribute to this form, which will be monitored throughout the day, giving them opportunities to highlight moments of microaggression that the group should pause and unpack. Given that microaggression requires a rhetorical intervention (Diab et al. 2019), pausing to grapple with such moments will allow us to consider the rhetorical contexts that enable microaggression and hopefully create more productive communicative situations moving forward. This work is important in any professional environment but is even more so for a project like ours, which seeks to document the writing experiences of graduate students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Additionally, we will strive to create an environment in which participants with diverse communication preferences and needs will be able to participate. For instance, we will have a Slack that is moderated throughout the day for those more comfortable contributing through writing. We will also provide a detailed daily agenda with discussion questions and directions for small group time. Our hope is that this will not only provide clear direction for our daily collaborations but, more importantly, avoid the pitfall of only providing verbal instructions that may not be accessible for all.

# 14. (IN-PERSON PROPOSALS ONLY) Space and material needs:

Are there any particular requirements you have for space or materials that the conference planning team might be able to help you with?

*Our collaboration design requires enough space to effectively have whole-group and breakout group discussions. We will also benefit from a space that has a presentation set-up available and plugs to support participants using their laptops. Regarding materials, we will need items to facilitate collaborative thinking and writing, such as paper, pens, post-it easel paper, markers, etc.*