

# Graduate Writing Groups: Helping L2 Writers Navigate the Murky Waters of Academic Writing

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**Abstract:** The present study examines how second language (L2) graduate writers are socialized into the academic discourse practices of a U.S. graduate school via Graduate Writing Groups (GWGs) sponsored by the university writing center. More specifically, it sheds light on how the discourse and interactions within a peer-based GWG affect L2 graduate writers' identities, as well as their socialization into academic disciplines and cross-disciplinary academic conventions. Results of the study revealed that, unlike the simple portrayal of L2 graduate writers as novices and their enculturation into academia as linear and unidirectional, L2 graduate writers have multi-faceted identities as writers, depending on academic task, context, and previous academic literacy experiences. The study suggests that despite the potential challenges inherent in multidisciplinary GWGs, they offer valuable opportunities for L2 graduate writers to enact the identity of disciplinary expert. Furthermore, the peer-based, extracurricular nature of these groups supports graduate writers' socialization into academic discourse communities.

**Keywords:** Graduate Writing Group, Writing Center, Multidisciplinary, Multilingual Writers, Identity, Enculturation, Language Socialization

Usual representations of writing collapse time, isolate persons, and filter activity . . . Actually, writing happens in moments that are richly equipped with tools (material and semiotic) and populated with others (past, present and future). When seen as situated activity, writing does not stand alone as the discreet act of a writer, but emerges as a confluence of many streams of activity: reading, talking, observing, acting, making, thinking, feeling as well as transcribing words on paper. (Prior, 1998, p. xi)

Unlike the common assumption that graduate student writers come to graduate school equipped with the literacy skills needed to succeed, learning how to read

and write in graduate school is a complex and gradual process. “Literacy is learned through use across contexts and over a lifetime” (Michigan State University Writing Center, n.d.), and graduate reading and writing is no exception; graduate writing is an extension of literacy learning that involves enculturation into a new academic community as well as the acquisition of specific academic writing skills.

Golde (1998) characterizes this as “an unusual double socialization” (p. 56) process in which graduate students must simultaneously learn how to be a graduate student as well as become socialized into the academic discipline and profession. Thus, graduate students, according to Golde (1998), are required to accomplish four distinct yet interrelated tasks: “intellectual mastery, learning about the realities of life as a graduate student, learning about the profession, and integrating oneself into the department” (p. 56). And while this may be challenging for all graduate students, it is particularly difficult for second language (L2) writers, as they must cope with what Golde calls “triple socialization” (p. 3). That is, L2 graduate writers carry the additional burden of being socialized into a new language and culture in which their L1 counterparts have most likely been immersed throughout their lives.

In response to these issues, there have been increasing efforts made in recent years to support graduate students as they navigate the murky waters of academic writing. Graduate writing support has received a great amount of attention, especially in the field of second language (L2) writing, where research on graduate writing support has spanned English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses, dissertation writing support, graduate support in writing centers, graduate writing in the disciplines, and advisor and advisee mentoring (e.g., Casanave, 2008; Costley, 2008; Fujioka, 2008; Hedgcock, 2008; Phillips, 2012, 2013, 2016; Rogers, Zawacki, & Baker, 2016; Simpson, 2012, 2016; Tardy, 2005, 2009).

The present study builds upon this growing body of research on graduate writing support. It takes a close look at how L2 graduate writers are socialized into the academic discourse practices of a U.S. graduate school via Graduate Writing Groups (GWGs) sponsored by the writing center. More specifically, the study sheds light on how the discourse and interactions within a peer-based GWG support L2 graduate writers’ socialization into their disciplines and cross-disciplinary academic conventions. The study also uncovers ways in which GWGs afford L2 graduate writers the opportunity to not only learn specific academic writing skills, but to also co-construct and negotiate their academic identities.

## Academic Literacy

Although academic literacy has previously been narrowly defined as having the ability to read and write the various texts assigned in the university setting (Spack, 1997), in this study, we utilize Ferenz’s (2005) expanded definition of academic literacy which

adds that academic literacy within graduate school and for L2 writers of English “encompasses knowledge of the linguistic, textual, social and cultural features of academic written discourse as well as knowledge of English as used by their academic disciplines” (p. 340). That is, this study considers the idea that socialization into academic discourse is not solely dependent on the acquisition of the jargon of the field, but includes mastering a complex matrix of practices surrounding literacy events within the institution. Schneider and Fujishima (1995) confirm this idea in their study which followed one L2 graduate writer’s experiences with entering a graduate professional school in the U.S. Through an analysis of the L2 graduate writer’s journal entries, interviews with instructors, and classroom writing samples, the study revealed how “achieving success at the postsecondary level involves more than control of the English language; it also involves familiarity with the writing conventions of the university culture and disciplinary subcultures in which the second language learner participates” (p. 4). This notion is echoed in a recent study by Wette and Furneaux (2018), who examined international graduate students’ challenges and coping strategies in relation to their socialization into academic discourse communities at English-medium universities. Among the challenges that were reported by international graduate students were “their unfamiliarity with aspects of source-based, critical, and writer-responsible writing” (p. 186). Rather than seeing these as the lack of specific linguistic or writing skills, the authors interpret them as “challenges of establishing an authoritative (but modest) identity in accordance with Anglo-western norms” (p. 191). That is, these challenges stem from the lack of awareness of writing conventions that are affected by specific cultures and disciplinary conventions.

## Language Socialization

The studies discussed above show that the acquisition of academic literacy occurs within an environment consisting of people, institutional settings, and learning materials (Braine, 2002). That is, they view academic literacy as an inherently social practice. Likewise, in the present study, we adopt language socialization as our theoretical framework to examine the ways in which graduate students are socialized into academic discourse communities. Language socialization theory views learners as novice members in a community of practice who, through engagement with and scaffolding of expert members of the community, acquire legitimate practices of the community. In this sense, it is similar to situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), but emphasizes how novice members are socialized into using language through language. Language socialization, however, is not a simple one-way process by which students unproblematically “enter” a discourse community (Prior, 1998). What is often depicted as a simple, linear process of enculturation is, in fact, “conceptualized as experiences that are necessarily partial, diverse, conflicted and fragmentary” (Casanave, 2002, p. xiii).

Prior's (1998) case studies of graduate students' socialization into their academic discourse communities found that, "graduate students are not entering the autonomous social and cognitive spaces of discourse communities, but engaging in active relations with dynamic, open, interpenetrated communities of practice" (p. xxi). Prior's case studies brought to light the idea that graduate students are not simply being enculturated into the practices of graduate school, but that they also have a dynamic relationship with these practices. That is, even as they are inducted into the norms of a community of practice, L2 writers of English, as do all graduate students, retain the right to contest and negotiate the relations of power that are inherent in that community.

## Language Socialization and L2 Graduate Writers' Identities

Like Prior (1998), Casanave and Li (2008) also note that socialization into academic disciplines "is not a one-way assimilation through which the dominant social, cultural, and historical forces impose their values and practices on hapless individuals" (p. 6). They point out that the chapters in their collection demonstrate how participants in academic discourse communities simultaneously prompt change by resisting conventions and by bringing their own identities and practices into their academic communities (Casanave & Li, 2008). In this sense, the process of academic socialization is closely intertwined with graduate writers' identities; graduate writers transform their scholarly identities through participation in their disciplinary communities, and these communities are also changed by the diverse experiences and identities brought by graduate writers.

This view of graduate writers' identities is in line with the conceptualization of identity in the fields of applied linguistics and L2 writing in which identity is viewed as a socially-situated, multifaceted, and dynamic construct (Norton, 1995, 1997, 2013; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Racelis & Matsuda, 2015; Varghese, 2004; Wenger, 1998). Previous research in these areas of study show how language learners' various language and literacy backgrounds—as well as their social contexts—affect the way they construct and negotiate their identities within and across communities of practice (e.g., Belcher & Connor, 2001; Matsuda, Snyder, & O'Meara, 2017; McIntosh, Pelaez-Morales, & Silva, 2015). L2 graduate writers are no different in this respect in that they also continuously construct and (re)construct their identities as readers, writers, and scholars within their disciplinary communities as they participate in a range of academic literacy practices.

## GWGs as Graduate Writing Support

In the introduction to their edited collection on writing groups for doctoral educa-

tion, Aitchison and Guerin (2014) situate GWGs among a host of new approaches to doctoral education (e.g., workshops, seminars, conferences, masterclasses, courses) that have sprouted as a response to the changing realities of doctoral education in a competitive global market. While they point out that writing groups have thus far been discussed in relation to academic writing and publications, specific program types, benefits of peer review and learning, development of scholarly identities, and pedagogical practices in writing groups, there is a need to more carefully assess these pedagogical interventions, and that academic scholarship on writing groups is “still fragmented and under-theorised” (p. 6). The following studies illustrate an effort towards bringing together several of the above themes on writing groups by examining how “writing groups explicitly address the questions of knowledge, textual practice and identity in a context of peer relations” (Aitchison & Lee, 2006, p. 266).

Noting that recent literature on writing groups in higher education has focused on institutional efforts to improve writing or assess writing group participants’ satisfaction and productivity, Aitchison (2010) instead focused on the pedagogy of graduate writing groups. Using semi-fictionalized writing group stories based on her research, theory, and practice (Aitchison, 2003, 2009; Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Lee & Aitchison, 2009), she examined how doctoral students learn how to write for publication by working in writing groups and what role the facilitator plays in this process. Through an analysis of her transcripts, Aitchison highlighted how the discourse surrounding graduate writers’ texts played an important role in their socialization, and how “coming to know and the articulation of that knowledge are intimately entwined” (p. 87).

Cuthbert, Spark, and Burke (2009) examined the perceived strengths and weaknesses of multidisciplinary writing groups by analyzing focus group data from four writing groups designed to support graduate student publication. The authors note that the participants were predominantly L1 writers of English with the exception of a few L2 writers. An important theme that emerged from their results was that the GWGs provided an environment in which graduate students were able to develop a professional academic identity and to “‘try out’ the role of disciplinary specialist in a supportive, rather than a competitive, context” (p. 145). They also found that the multidisciplinary nature of the groups provided writers with “a level playing field in which postgraduates may approach the writing process as a shared methodology, encompassing a suite of specialised but generic skills that cross-disciplinary boundaries” (p. 137).

Unlike the writing groups described in the previous studies, Li’s (2014) writing group was specifically designed to support international L2 graduate writers as they wrote their graduate theses at an Australian university. In response to the needs of L2 graduate writers, who are often socially isolated and generally lack confidence in expressing complex ideas in academic English, Li created an ongoing writing group

for L2 graduate writers to meet weekly and discuss short excerpts of their writing. She drew on the process approach to writing, rhetorical genre research, and cultural perspectives on L2 writing to form the central pedagogies for her graduate writing group for L2 writers. As a group, the L2 graduate writers engaged in constant negotiation of meaning by collaboratively restructuring phrases and experimenting with language during the revision process.

Studies like Aitchison (2010), Cuthbert et al. (2009), and Li (2014) are important to the understanding of GWG pedagogy, as they show how, through engaging in discourse surrounding writing, graduate writers “not only develop self-awareness of linguistic forms, but also critical awareness of disciplinary discourses and rhetorical genre knowledge related to their field of study” (Li, 2014, p. 150). In addition, they also demonstrate how participating in graduate writing groups, more specifically, engaging in discourse surrounding texts, has an impact on graduate student writers’ identity construction and socialization into their academic discourse communities.

## Present Study

Building on previous research, the present study closely examines GWGs as an avenue of academic discourse socialization for L2 graduate writers implemented alongside the university curriculum. Research on learning spaces such as GWGs are invaluable in that they could complement our current understanding of more traditional, curricular means of socialization such as writing courses. While GWGs exist in many shapes and forms with varying routines and practices (Haas, 2014), GWGs are often a unique component of the graduate school experience that provides graduate writers with a means to not only gain assistance with writing in academic genres, but to also establish an academic persona and disciplinary orientation in a *peer-based* writing space. In the absence of a true “expert” or “novice” among participants, this peer-based setting complicates the boundaries of socialization and enculturation (Prior, 1998), and may afford graduate student writers opportunities to engage in discourse and interactions that promote socialization into academic discourse communities. In this sense, GWGs are a particularly fitting context within which to explore and challenge the “unidirectional assumptions of learning behind an apprenticeship-style model . . . by documenting the complex interactional nature of participation in academic literacy practices” (Casanave & Li, 2008, p.5).

In addition, while there are several practical resources that provide guidance for GWG facilitators regarding the logistics of running writing groups (e.g., Amaton, 2006; Moss, Highberg, & Nicolas, 2004; Reeves, 2002; Rosenthal, 2003), few of these texts explicitly address what Aitchison (2010) aptly describes as the “less-often-told accounts of the pedagogical practices of writing groups” and “the

real life of writing groups that is frequently flattened out in analysis” (p. 83). Also, the aforementioned resources on GWGs are mostly geared towards supporting L1 graduate writers; few of them focus on L2 graduate writers or the relational dynamics between L1 and L2 writers and how these interactions within the group may affect graduate writers’ language socialization and acquisition of academic discourse.

Thus, the present study explores the following question: How do the discourse and interactions within multidisciplinary Graduate Writing Groups (GWGs) with both L1 and L2 English speakers affect L2 graduate writers’ identities and socialization into academic discourse communities? In exploring this research question, we viewed the communities into which the GWG participants were being socialized as twofold: (1) their specific disciplines, such as Chemical Engineering, Journalism, or Sociology, and (2) the broader context of the academic community which has a shared language across fields and disciplines. While we understand that there may be some overlap between the two contexts, we believe it to be important to distinguish socialization into a specific discipline from socialization into the broader and more universal identity of “graduate student” and “academic.”

## Methods

### Setting

Research was conducted at Michigan State University, which had an undergraduate population of approximately 36,000 and a graduate student population of approximately 11,000 as of fall 2010 (Michigan State University, 2011). The number of international students in these two groups (undergraduate and graduate students) was 3,341 and 2,166, respectively, in the fall of 2011 (Michigan State University Office for International Students and Scholars, 2011). The significance of this project at this specific institution was that the proportion of international graduate students to the overall graduate student population was much higher than the same proportion for the undergraduate population, yet the group that received the most writing help in the form of ESL writing courses was the undergraduate student population. The graduate student population, while having petitioned for elective courses on English writing, did not have a graduate-level course in writing, and were also not allowed to enroll in an undergraduate writing course. Their other opportunities for help with writing in coursework or one-on-one instructor feedback were also limited according to our interview data.

The Graduate Writing Groups (GWGs) we examined were affiliated with the university’s Writing Center (also see Brooks-Gillies, Garcia, & Manthey, this collection), whose mission is to help support writers in all disciplines and fields across the University. While we recognize that there may be graduate writing groups that



are more organically organized within the university context, we chose to study those organized by the Writing Center, as these groups have the most potential for institutional implementation and change.

## Participants

Interviews were conducted with three current GWG members (Bao, Mahsuri, and Sintia), two former GWG members (Dao-Ming and Jiaqui), and four current and former GWG facilitators (Phil, Sam, Meghan, and Emma).

Our focal participants for the study were Bao, Mahsuri and Sintia, as they were L2 writers of English who had the most diverse experiences. These students were those from whom we were able to obtain the most comprehensive responses about their experiences as L2 writers in a GWG, in that we observed their group sessions and conducted interviews with them.

The three focal participants (Bao, Mahsuri and Sintia), while all L2 writers of English, had varying degrees of experience with English as an L2. In examining their stories, we considered Birla's (2010) imploration to think about the multi-dimensional nature of the study of "others," in this case, L2 graduate student writers. As Birla (2010) writes,

This question of particularity—how to address the particular situation and relations that inform and constitute the basis for any study concerned with culture, political economy, history—is a multidisciplinary problem that structures how the study of "others" is institutionalized in the North American academy. (p. 95)

That is, while we include brief stories of our focal participants below, we understand the complexity of representing individuals and their experiences in short synopses of a few lines, and recognize that these are not the only or primary lives our participants lead.

All names included in the text are pseudonyms with the exception of the first names of the researchers, Shari and Soo. This was done to both protect the anonymity of participants as well as acknowledge our involvement in the GWGs. In Shari's case, this was in the roles of both a facilitator and researcher, and for Soo, this was in the roles of a former facilitator and researcher. As we were simultaneously graduate students and past or present GWG facilitators ourselves at the time of the study, we were not unchanged by the experience nor were we objective observers of the GWGs.

## Focal Participant Profiles

Bao was a member of Shari's GWG and was a participating member of this group from the summer of 2011 to mid-spring of 2012. As Bao indicated in his interview,



he was highly versed in writing in his L1, Vietnamese, as he had written an undergraduate thesis of “more than 100 pages.” However, none of his academic writing prior to beginning his Ph.D. at MSU had been done in English.

Mahsuri, however, had a much more complex relationship with academic writing in English. Mahsuri, who was a third-year Ph.D. student at the time of our interview, was a member of Phil’s GWG. During our interview, Mahsuri stated that her L1 was Tamil, though the official languages of her home country, Malaysia, are English and Malay. Thus, her formal instruction was in Malay and English, and all academic writing she had done was in these two languages.

Sintia, who was from Portugal, was a D.V.M. (doctor of veterinary medicine) who returned to academia to complete a Ph.D. She was a member of Phil’s GWG, and was a fourth-year doctoral student in the Department of Clinical Sciences in the College of Veterinary Medicine. Sintia explained that while her L1 is Portuguese, all of her higher-level academic writing, and more specifically, the form of writing that she had learned to do as a graduate student in the sciences, had been in English.

The L1 writers of English who are included in analyses below are Kathy, a Philosophy major studying the ethics of public health and Shawn, a mathematics educator who had graduated from a master’s program and was interested in large-scale changes to education, including No Child Left Behind. Shawn was applying to doctoral programs in educational policy during the course of this study. Both of these writers were in Shari’s GWG. Also ancillary to most of the analysis but present in some of Sintia’s references was Craig, a member in Phil’s GWG who was in a Public Policy program and was interested in legal issues, including underage drunk driving laws. The composition of both groups changed week-to-week over the course of the study. Shari’s group included, at one point or another over the course of the study: Kathy, Shawn, Bao, Samanya, Kagiso, Ibrahim, Nadya (who only came to one session), and Dan. Phil’s group included, at one point or another over the course of the study, Sintia, Mahsuri, Craig, and Phil, who himself submitted writing to the group at times.

## Procedures

Data for this study was collected via an online survey of past and present GWG members<sup>1</sup> (collaboratively created and shared with Brooks-Gillies, Garcia, & Manthey, this collection), participant observation of group sessions which included

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1 Participants for the study were recruited after receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board at MSU. Information about the study and participants’ rights were presented via email along with a link to the online survey. GWG members who also chose to participate in semi-structured interviews and observations read and signed additional consent forms before data collection.

audio and video recordings of group sessions, and semi-structured interviews with both the GWG facilitators and group members. Potential participants were chosen because they were former or current members of one of the GWGs facilitated by the Writing Center at MSU.

For the survey, participants were asked to fill out a preliminary online survey that asked them for basic background and geographical information, their experiences with GWG(s), their reasons for leaving the group if they were not currently a member, their perspectives on writing, and other questions relating to the GWG experience. Those for whom English was not their first language were asked to answer an additional set of questions about their language learning backgrounds so that we might have a more accurate understanding of the role that GWGs played in language issues or development of their L2. The survey was emailed to the list of current and former GWG members compiled by the Writing Center. This survey generated a total of 28 responses, with 21 of those 28 completing the entire survey. For the purpose of our study, this survey data was used to better inform us of our participants' backgrounds and to form a basis for our semi-structured interview questions.

Group observations were conducted in two GWGs, those facilitated by Phil and Shari, and included observations which were both video and audio recorded. Soo and Shari also took notes on the members' interactions with each other and any other significant aspects of the meeting. Six GWG sessions of Shari's group were recorded, and one session of Phil's was recorded. GWG sessions are generally two hours long, although the sessions we recorded often lasted anywhere from an hour to a little over two hours depending on the amount of discussion generated from the writing that was being reviewed. The group observations were also followed up by semi-structured interviews with the L2 graduate writers during which we asked these writers their perceptions of the writing group and attempted to specifically garner information about their experiences as a GWG member. Further, we conducted these interviews to shed light on significant issues that were brought up in the online survey results. Four approximately hour-long one-on-one interviews were audio recorded. In addition, four hour-long, audio-recorded interviews with present and past facilitators of GWGs (Phil, Sam, Meghan, and Emma) were conducted in order to complement data collected from observations of and interviews from GWG members. The interviews with GWG facilitators elicited their understanding of how L2 writers of English and L1 writers of English interacted in the group space. These interviews were also conducted to understand the contributions of facilitators to L2 writers' interactions and socialization in the peer space of GWGs.

The interview data were then transcribed for qualitative analysis during which the transcripts were examined for recurring themes that emerged. This cyclical process involved conducting multiple rounds of content analysis and building upon and/or merging the initial themes that were identified. While we did not adopt an a priori scheme of analysis in this process, the central concepts we discussed

in our theoretical framework (e.g., legitimate peripheral participation, language socialization, identity) did inform our analysis and discussion. The transcripts from the GWG observations were also analyzed in a similar manner, and results from all sources of data were compared to examine possible convergences or divergences.

## Results and Discussion

### Potential Challenges in the Inherent Complexity of GWGs

Here, we introduce the major themes that emerged from this study by contemplating the following survey response from a previous GWG participant; it reflects the two most frequently cited challenges of implementing and participating in diverse graduate writing groups:

. . . no one showed up to my group after the first week so [the writing group] was canceled, which was fine because everyone was a non-native English speaker in a field that was not science so I didn't think they could help much anyway.

As noted here, the GWGs in this study involved members from diverse disciplinary and linguistic backgrounds. Each group member brought with them unique literacy histories and professional experiences. Also added to this mosaic of experiences were the complexities that came from each member's perceptions of self and others, as well as the unique group dynamics that developed among the members of each group.

While there is no doubt that the complexity that arises from the diversity of these groups can be difficult to navigate, we argue that it is this complexity and diversity that creates a fertile environment for graduate socialization and learning to take place within GWGs. Unlike the negative perceptions reflected in the survey response, diverse GWGs can make a wealth of experiences and expertise available to their members when their potential is harnessed into productive group dynamics. As Aitchison (2010) notes, writing groups composed of members with diverse disciplinary orientations and language backgrounds have the potential to be "one of the most useful pedagogical triggers" (p. 97) for graduate learning and socialization.

In the following section of this chapter, we discuss the major themes that emerged from our study: (1) the interaction and discourse surrounding writing that occurs in GWGs contribute to graduate students' language socialization, and (2) the multidisciplinary, multilevel composition of peer-based GWGs enable L2 graduate writers to explore and enact different identities as writers which, in turn, helps with socialization into the academic literacy practices of graduate school.

## Graduate Writer Identity

The L2 graduate writers we meet through our extant research literature are often depicted as struggling to simultaneously improve their English proficiency while also trying to socialize themselves into the culture of graduate school (e.g., Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Cadman, 1997, 2000; Cotterall, 2011; Ryan & Zuber-Skerritt, 1999; Tang, 2012; Wang & Li, 2008). The challenges that these L2 graduate writers face range from adjusting to a different set of academic writing conventions than that with which they are familiar, clearly expressing complex content in academic English, maintaining confidence and a positive self-image regarding their academic performance, seeking academic support and interacting with advisors and peers, and lacking a sense of community in their social lives (Li, 2014). Interviews and transcripts from our study showed that while, to a certain extent, these portrayals of L2 graduate writers were true, they did not provide the whole picture. The L2 graduate writers in our study constructed complex and dynamic identities as writers, graduate students, and learners/users of English.

For example, Bao, who was in Shari's writing group, commented that he preferred having both L1 and L2 speakers of English in the GWGs due to his identity as an L2 writer:

Actually I prefer both (native and non-native speakers in the group). Because Natasha [another L2 writer] is also very helpful and I think in the class some . . . I need someone who is the same with me because if I only one Vietnamese guy and uh ((laughs)) and all other guys speak English, I become so, so bad. (Bao, semi-structured interview)

Yet, Bao had also cultivated different identities as writers in his L1 and L2. When asked about how he perceived himself as a writer, he first responded that his "writing is very bad." But then, he clarified, saying, "Um actually, [when] I write in my—in my own language . . . I believe I'm very good in writing in my own language" (Bao, semi-structured interview).

His writerly identities also differed depending on the genre of writing in which he engaged. He was confident about doing informal types of writing; he was a prolific writer in his L1 who published blog posts online and maintained a journal in which he regularly wrote. He felt he was a good writer in this context because he felt he could express exactly what he intended. When it came to academic writing, his beliefs about what constitutes good writing in his L1 seemed to transfer to his academic writing in English. As an undergraduate student in Vietnam, he had written an undergraduate thesis which he had been confident about because, "when you write something you need to have something to write. I mean, for example, when you write thesis, it is based on some results you already conduct, and if you

have good knowledge and if the result is really good, it is a basement for writing something really good” (Bao, semi-structured interview).

However, Bao learned that this approach to writing did not seem to work for academic writing in English. He spoke about his first experience writing an academic paper in his graduate program at MSU, which was five months prior to the time of the interview. Bao commented that initially he had been confident writing the analysis paper. Explaining that, at the time, he didn’t “clearly understand how to write a really good paper,” he said he wrote a long analysis “with lots of reference” and was met with negative feedback from his advisor: “Your writing is so bad!” (Bao, semi-structured interview). This became the catalyst for him to visit the Writing Center for one-on-one sessions and to participate in the GWGs to improve his writing.

Meanwhile, our interview with Sintia painted a distinctively different picture of L2 graduate writers in the U.S. academy. During our interview, Sintia explained how English had become her “academic first language”:

Oh, even in Portuguese, I have difficulty to write at this point, I mean—because I haven’t—Now, only time I do speak Portuguese is when I call home, and I read news in Portuguese; that’s it. But English, I think it’s easier for me to write my th- work in English because all the vocabulary, all the terms, it’s just—I read in English, so it’s easier. (Sintia, Semi-structured interview)

She went on to say that if she were to try to explain her research in Portuguese, she wouldn’t have the vocabulary necessary to succeed: “If you ask me about my research in Portuguese I don’t know all the words.” She felt that “neither Portuguese nor English is perfect at this point,” and even though she recognized that, in general, it is more difficult to write in a second language, she had come to associate English with her academic work and identity.

Bao and Sintia’s descriptions of their academic and language backgrounds are significant in that they disrupt the notion of L2 writers of English having a fixed and linear relationship with English as their second language. While, like Bao, some L2 graduate student writers may begin writing in English academically once they start their graduate programs, others, like Sintia, may only know how to write for academic audiences in English. This complicates the notion of who L2 graduate writers are and their relationship with academic discourse in a U.S. graduate school environment as well as their experience with disciplinary vocabulary and jargon. Through Sintia’s example, we can see that L2 writers embody a far more complex population than the simplistic label *L2 writer* would suggest, such that it would be difficult to make sweeping generalizations about them. In Sintia’s case, the simplistic picture of L2 writers as novice writers struggling to acquire the linguistic competency and disciplinary conventions of academic writing would be misleading.

## Multi-Disciplinary, Peer-Based GWGs and L2 Graduate Student Identity

Earlier, we discussed how language socialization does not occur as an unproblematic one-way process by which students enter and then follow in a linear progression from novice to expert within a discourse community (Casanave & Li, 2008; Prior, 1998). Instead, L2 graduate writers negotiate their own identities as they take part in their communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This was made possible within the GWGs in this study, in part, due to the “flattened hierarchy” within the group members and to a certain extent, the GWG facilitators. Phil refers to this aspect of the group when he states,

And I think—I think there is something valuable in in having—in being a part of the group that you coordinate . . . I like being able to share my writing and get the same questions. I think it gives you an additional investment in the group as well, which is nice. And there’s the whole thing about no one’s perfect and everyone’s kinda—you know, you get to—you get to flatten the hierarchy of you as the authority figure and that you are just a part of the group as well. (Phil, GWG facilitator, semi-structured interview)

Phil’s sentiments here about the flattened hierarchies within multidisciplinary GWGs are shared by Aitchison (2010) as well, who stated that “[t]he student-teacher and peer relationships are horizontalized [sic] (Boud & Lee, 2005) and power and responsibilities are diffused, resulting in a more fluid and responsive curriculum and pedagogy” (p. 97).

In addition to this peer-to-peer dynamic, analysis of the transcripts of GWG sessions and interviews with L2 writers in this study suggests that the multidisciplinary nature of GWGs improve L2 graduate student writers’ sense of agency within GWGs, as L2 writers in these contexts are considered experts in their field, bringing their disciplinary knowledge into the groups. It places the L2 writer in the position of “expert” and therefore mitigates power relationships which could potentially exist based on a native speaker/non-native speaker divide. Kathy, with regard to Bao, the only L2 graduate writer participating in Shari’s group, observed,

There was the potential for there to be a dynamic [with Bao] . . . and . . . for us to perceive that as an inequality, but I think that the fact that he was constantly teaching us about his research methodology constantly undermined that.

We could see how this played out among the members in Phil’s GWG as well. The following excerpts come from transcripts of a GWG observation during which

Craig and Sintia take turns sharing their work with the rest of the group members. There was one other group member, Mahsuri, who was present, as well as the GWG facilitator, Phil. The first excerpt comes from an exchange that emerged from Craig's choice to use the word "bias" to report on his study results.

Sintia: And should [it] be "a gender bias" or should [it] be "modified by gender"? Because bias is something—it's giving—you know what I mean? When I say "bias" [it means] something like there is error and you cannot control for that error in your study.

Craig: Yeah, I try to be-

Sintia: So just—is it just a type of opinion, is it a gender effect, a gender association? You know there is that difference among males and females, so it's like—

Craig: Right, gender effect too. Oh, yeah . . .

Sintia: "Effect modifier" or "interaction," or "effect," or "the risk is modified by gender." Something like that words.

Craig: By using the word "bias," I was just trying to be a little cute.

All members: ((laugh))

Sintia: Mmhm. But bias is—when you say something . . . "there is a bias," "their study has a bias," it seems like, oh, we know there is error associated to gender, not that there is an effect associated to gender.

Craig: Right.

Phil: Ok, so you—I see. So it makes it sound—I see—like an error instead of the phenomenon.

After spending some time discussing the nuances of the word "bias" in Craig's paper, the group comes to a consensus that in the context of Craig's paper, "gender" should be a "mediating factor" or a "modifier." Subsequently, Phil leads the group in a discussion considering the importance of word choices such as these in disciplinary writing at the graduate level.

Phil: I would—I would never think about that, so that's interesting. But I can see your point. Absolutely.

Sintia: It's just uh terminology. Well—

Phil: Yeah, it is. 'Cause I don't think of bias in that way. But I can see from the scientific field that bias would be considered (an error) . . .



Craig: Well, sometimes—like—I mean especially if you're a statistician, and you see the word significant. I mean, well, you know, you always think of it as statistically significant, whereas . . . just important to that study.

Phil: Right! Yes! Yes!

Craig: Yeah. "This is very significant," and it's like—then you go back to the tables and look at- No, this wasn't significant; what are they talking about.

As seen in the above excerpt of Phil's GWG session, the power dynamics in GWGs are shifted in that there is no true "novice" in this peer-to-peer interaction. The expertise in the group was based on discipline-specific knowledge, unlike in spaces where the power dynamic is often evident, such as classroom spaces or a consultant-client interaction. That is, "participants are positioned as the primary 'content' experts, further disrupting traditional . . . hierarchies" (Aitchison, 2010, p. 98). We see this play out in the excerpt above, where Sintia is an L2 writer of English, but she is much more versed in the norms of her scientific academic community and is therefore implicitly socializing the other members of the group into her mode of academic discourse.

According to Sintia, the multidisciplinary nature of the groups made it easier for L2 writers to "question [other GWG members about] their research." That is, because writers in these groups are from different fields, it was easier for an L2 graduate writer to question—or contest—another graduate student's structure, methodology, or writing. This, in turn, allows for a space for L2 writers to explore, test, and enact identities other than "the L2 writer." They are given the opportunity to question the work of L1 writers and engage in discussions focused on language-specific issues if they please, or they may decide to abstain from the focus on language altogether and read for organization and meaning instead. Sam, a former GWG facilitator, notes,

Just . . . like—for non-native speakers—they feel confident, more confident in their own field. Right? Because they have that professional knowledge; they have that professional language; they are more used to, you know, communicating, talking about something in their field. (Sam, former GWG facilitator, semi-structured interview)

Interestingly, we found that not all GWG discussions concluded with a satisfactory answer or plan for revisions. Similar to what Li (2014) found in her study, sometimes the collaborative revision process in the GWGs required group members to experiment with language as they restructured or reworded words and sentences. For example, another discussion occurs when Phil's GWG engages in collaborative wordsmithing of a sentence in Sintia's research article. Sintia reported that she was

having trouble finding the right word to describe her research results in which there were a small number of cells present in each experimental group. The group members suggest, contest, and explore alternatives for the word “sparse,” provide metalinguistic explanations of the word’s usage (e.g., its part of speech), explore referential and inferential meanings of alternative words, and discuss possible perceptions and nuances of words from a disciplinary (hard science) perspective. As a result, the group comes up with alternatives such as *paucity*, *thin*, *very little data*, *not many*, *thinly scattered*, *thinly distributed*, *scattered data*, *dearth*, *sporadic*, *all over the place*, and *lack of consistency*. After a great deal of back and forth, the group comes to the conclusion that it would be best for Sintia to present the research results graphically. Others also suggest checking with her advisor or other members of her disciplinary community, to find the most disciplinary-specific word that accurately conveys the complex ideas of Sintia’s research results.

Comments from the GWG members toward the end of the session reveal that failure to come up with a satisfactory alternative to the word, “sparse,” does not necessarily have to be seen as a failure of the GWG’s goal or mission. As the GWG session slowly wraps up, Sintia states to the group,

Well, my experience was . . . because English is my second language, so I thought I had the double problems. I have that . . . struggling a lot, and I imagined an English speaker will not struggle as much, but I realize, actually, that all of us struggle . . . different way, kind of, to express ideas. And not just because of English. Well, it’s a requirement, but . . . writing is . . . just hard.

In response, the group members comment on how writing is a humbling process for both L1 and L2 writers, and how focused discussions around language issues in writing can be beneficial because they require GWG members to practice explaining the concepts in their field to those in other disciplines. As Li (2014) explains, “the specific questions raised in the writing group become the starting point of learning that further engages the research students beyond the writing group, and within the disciplinary context of their research” (p. 150). In other words, by engaging in discourse surrounding disciplinary writing within a multi-disciplinary GWG setting, the graduate writers were able to raise their awareness of expectations of their immediate audience (i.e., the GWG members) as well as their disciplinary discourse communities.

## Multi-Level GWGs and L2 Graduate Student Identity

Another feature of the GWGs that added a layer of complexity was that the graduate writers in the group were at different stages in their academic careers. Some

members had just gotten started in their programs, others were in the process of writing their dissertation prospectus, and still others were finishing up their dissertations, working on publications, and/or preparing to go on the academic job market.

When asked about his perceptions about working with GWG members at different stages in their studies, Bao responded positively, saying,

I prefer something diversity. Because it uh help to improve some weak points, strong points . . . And I think it's very useful for example, for people who prepare for dissertation who—they have their own problem, but we could see the problem in the future. I mean . . . maybe in the next several years, when I write thesis, I could see my same problem again. (Bao, semi-structured interview)

While it was evident that Bao appreciated the opportunity to anticipate potential challenges he might face in the writing of his own dissertation in the future, he was also aware how the multi-level composition of the GWG offered him the opportunity to make solid contributions to the group as well. During the first observation of Shari's session, Shawn had brought in a statement of purpose he was drafting for his application to a Ph.D. program in Education. Among the group members present during that GWG session, Karen was furthest along, having completed her dissertation, and Shari and Shawn were the most novice members in that they were preparing to apply for doctoral programs. During this session, Bao noticeably took a stronger leadership role, more frequently offering comments and suggestions, and often referring back to his own experiences writing statements for doctoral programs. When asked to describe his perceptions of the interactions that occurred during that GWG session in a post-session interview, he commented,

Shawn, he prepare for Ph.D. program, and I see his problem is the same as I- my problem one years ago when I prepare for statement of purpose, and . . . so we could learn and we could share. I think it's useful. (Bao, semi-structured interview)

This theme came up again during a second interview with Bao when asked to describe his greatest strengths and contributions to the GWG as a group member:

I think knowledge . . . I have knowledge something about Ph.D. life like . . . recently in our second class, I bring some good idea about how to prepare for a statement of purpose. Because I already apply for graduate school and I have some experiment in academic life, academic writing. (Bao, semi-structured interview)

Bao's interview revealed that in addition to disciplinary expertise, the multi-level

nature of the GWGs also served to complicate the potentially uneven power dynamics between L1 and L2 writers in the group. It seemed that L2 graduate writers who had gained more experience in the academy and acquired general knowledge on “how to be a graduate student” felt that they had more to contribute to the group. Sam, a former GWG facilitator, also spoke about how this intangible graduate student knowledge played a role in the multi-level GWGs:

You can see some people were more clear about what they want to accomplish, and they know what the process that is coming forward and some people are like still not sure. But that set up a good example for those people who have no idea what is going to happen. (Sam, former GWG facilitator, semi-structured interview)

When asked about the multi-level composition of the GWGs, several GWG facilitators noted that depending on the task at hand during a particular GWG session, the members that were further along in their studies would naturally take the lead in the interaction: “I think if they’re further along, they’re more ready to perform expert roles” (Phil, GWG facilitator, semi-structured interview). Another former GWG facilitator concurred that graduate students at more advanced stages in their degree “see themselves as more of a resource” (Meghan, former GWG facilitator, semi-structured interview).

And while the scaffolding that the more “expert” members perform can generally be helpful for the other more “novice” members, GWG facilitators acknowledged that the facilitators in the group had an important role in moderating the interactions at times, so that the novice members of the groups also felt encouraged and equipped with discursive strategies to contribute to the group discussions. Speaking about his group, in which two members were in more advanced stages of their studies, Phil noted,

It just so happens that the two people are in the dissertation-type stage. I feel like the level of conversation is very different, and on the days when the early people—the people who are in their first year—share, there’s way more advice given by everybody. Whereas when the folks that are further along, the folks that are early on are like, “I like it.” And so trying to, like, pull them out.

Sam also talked about helping GWG members at different stages in their studies bring out their greatest strengths in the writing group setting:

And so some people know, have more experience writing paper, managing time and setting goal, and accomplish, and they know the process. Some people are less experienced. So, you—that’s

something you want to pull out of your member, you know, what kind of strengths, what kind of, they can bring in to this group. (Sam, former GWG facilitator, semi-structured interview)

As an example, Sam shared how he previously worked with a GWG member named Yvonne, who was an L2 graduate writer and who had joined Sam's GWG right at the beginning of starting her degree program. Yvonne seemed reluctant to offer feedback on other members' writing.

. . . if you are communicating in English with these professional people in different field, it's intimidating. And I think you need to do extra work to make sure, to kind of, that she's valuable to this group. And people can definitely benefit from her comment, her feedback. (Sam, former GWG facilitator, semi-structure interview)

Noticing this reluctance to actively participate, Sam took some time during his GWG to discuss reader response questions, and how these questions were valuable in helping authors to reconsider how their writing was coming across to the reader, especially in the academy, where it is likely that your writing may have to be comprehended by a general but well-educated audience. He found that Yvonne was gradually able to incorporate reader response comments and questions into her repertoire and use them effectively during GWG meetings, even when the piece of writing being discussed would be from more-experienced members of the group:

She [Yvonne] was able to provide reader's comment, and when she's not sure, she asks. I mean, that's something she can do and that's something that you can reinforce. "Okay, that's a good question. Okay, yeah I have the same kind of question, too," and you have the writer respond. (Sam, former GWG facilitator, semi-structured interview)

In sum, what we found in our study was that GWGs composed of graduate writers at different stages in their academic trajectories can create an environment in which newer, peripheral members of the academic discourse community can participate (Aitchison, 2010).

## Role of GWGs in Graduate Academic Literacy Acquisition

Acquiring academic literacy (Ferenz, 2005) at the graduate level involves not only the development of academic reading and writing skills but also the cultivation of

an identity as a graduate student and scholar. Thus, graduate socialization encompasses both the cognitive and affective aspects of acquiring academic literacy (e.g., learning the disciplinary conventions of research writing vs. learning how to engage with critical feedback from reviewers). This process of graduate socialization often occurs within an intricate web of people, resources, and settings, within which we found GWGs also play an invaluable role by complementing more traditional sources of graduate writing support and providing a sense of community and emotional support.

A prominent theme that emerged during participant interviews was that GWGs complemented some of the more conventional means of graduate writing support and mentorship. We found that the mentorship and advising that GWG members received in their disciplinary programs was predominantly centered around the one-on-one advising relationships that graduate students had with their research/academic advisors. In fact, at the time of the study, several of the participants (Sintia, Bao, Craig) were co-writing manuscripts for publication with their advisors, and when discussing these manuscripts during GWG sessions, frequent references were made to the interactions with and feedback from their advisors. Interestingly, GWG members seemed to view their research advisors as a source of helpful feedback on the content of their research and rarely expected to get detailed feedback on the writing of a manuscript. Sintia, for example, commented,

My advisor, she was really happy that I joined this group, and she can see the difference. So now she is part of the committee Ph.D., my friend that's from Costa Rica, and she says I'm going to advise her to join the group too ((laughs)). (Sintia, GWG group observation)

Thus, one of the most common reasons that GWG members initially joined the writing group was because they wanted to receive feedback on their writing from others before sending it to their advisor for further input. As Craig explained, “My advisor’s very busy and I would like—you know, I’d like to maybe cut out some of those things—find it and then send it to her” (Craig, GWG group observation).

Meanwhile, the GWGs also served as a space for graduate writers to gain a sense of community in a collaborative and supportive environment from peers outside of their disciplines, away from the traditional—and often competitive/stressful—confines of their own disciplinary programs. When asked about different resources available to obtain writing feedback, Bao discounted feedback from peers in his program because he felt uncomfortable taking time away from them:

It’s really hard to get help from the person in the same class or something because actually they are very useful—I mean they are very busy. And it’s so—it’s so shame to ask them, hi, could

you please read my writing and fix the—I don't wanna take their time in detail to fix my problems. (Bao, semi-structured interview)

He indicated that he felt more comfortable soliciting feedback from peers in the GWG setting because

. . . all of us want to improve writing. And uh we are ready to say, ready to share experience with each other, so I could learn a lot from them and each people could learn from other people. (Bao, semi-structured interview)

However, it was not only this shared goal and commitment to helping improve each other's writing that encouraged Bao to participate in the GWG. He also noted that being among other graduate students from different disciplines who are more or less grappling with similar challenges with graduate writing provided a sense of camaraderie, because, in Bao's words: "We're the same." This idea came up during an observation of Phil's GWG session as well. Throughout the session, members often shared their insecurities as novice researchers, to which other members offered words of reassurance and validation such as "That's not too unusual, though" (Craig, observation) or "That is like every graduate student ever" (Phil, observation). Towards the end of the session, Phil offered some encouragement, saying,

I think that on some level, one thing that I see more is that—pretty much to a T—every member that we've had here has said, 'Man, I don't feel like I'm a good writer,' and then everyone else, when the first time they see their writing has been, 'Man, you're a really good writer!' Every time. And that's a good thing. To think of the encouragement is really nice. I mean, you know, we comment on Sintia and her science amazing craziness, and Craig has organization, and you [Mahsuri] have beautiful writing yourself, and so we're able to have this kind of motivation and encouragement that's pretty awesome.

In many ways, the GWG had become "much more than just the writing group" (Phil, observation). It became a social activity where members could talk about their work in a more informal and relaxing environment, enjoy each other's company, and help them keep momentum in their writing. According to Phil's GWG members, this helped with the loneliness that often comes with conducting research and writing in graduate school (see, for example, Aitchison, 2010; Ferenz, 2005; Li, 2014), especially at advanced stages when graduate students have completed coursework and have little interaction with their peers. In other words, the GWGs became a space in which members cultivate "a sense of connectedness and



belonging to an academic community” (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014, p. 12) as they develop and nurture their scholarly identities.

Phil’s GWG session ended with a cheer when Craig stated, “And the last paper—I haven’t published it yet; it’s to be published—I acknowledged the Wednesday MSU M—Wednesday writing group” (Craig, observation). The GWG had given its members a collaborative space to give and receive writing feedback, but perhaps more importantly, fill a void in terms of the affective and emotional support that graduate students need to not merely become socialized into graduate school practices, but to thrive.

Multidisciplinary, multi-level GWGs, however, are not without potential challenges. While the benefits abound, as described above, it is uncertain whether the format and implementation of these groups is the most *efficient* method for graduate writers’ acquisition of specific disciplinary knowledge and genres. Having the opportunity to explain and clarify disciplinary conventions to an audience, thus, raising one’s own awareness of these disciplinary conventions, is undoubtedly one of the greatest benefits of multidisciplinary GWGs. Interactions from Shari and Phil’s GWG in this study, as well as those in previous literature (e.g., Aitchison, 2010; Cuthbert et al., 2009; Li, 2014), show that when “peers test and extend . . . [each other’s] conceptual knowledge as well as their capacity to communicate this knowledge through writing,” (p. 87) to a broader audience, they are more likely to develop the necessary skills to effectively communicate with both those within and outside their own disciplinary discourse communities.

However, not all features of academic writing easily cross disciplinary boundaries, resulting in occasions in which GWG members are forced to spend valuable time justifying language choices that are widely accepted in their specific area of study. The following quote by Sintia illustrates this issue:

It’s good to explain your research when someone is not in your field, but uh, sometimes their approach will be things that I know that [those in my field] will not question . . . I feel like—sometimes (I spend) my time explain things I will not have explain to someone in my field. (Sintia, semi-structured interview)

She went on to explain that she and the other GWG members would often engage in conversations about what audience expectations might be in terms of the organization of her writing or what may or may not be considered common knowledge and unnecessary to explicitly explain in their papers. This may be perceived as a disadvantage, as providing these explanations to group members outside of one’s discipline may take away valuable meeting time. It was also found that, due to the stark differences in disciplinary knowledge and conventions, sometimes members were unsure about what they would be able to contribute through feedback (see also, Boud & Lee, 1999; Brooks-Gillies et al., this collection; Cuthbert et al., 2009).

## Conclusion

Our study shows that multidisciplinary, multi-level GWGs may present potential challenges in their implementation; however, they are also invaluable for the language socialization and identity development of graduate writers, especially L2 graduate writers. The flattened hierarchies and diversity inherent in GWGs' extracurricular, peer-based space give these L2 graduate writers the opportunity to explore and enact identities that are not limited to their language proficiency. Rather, they are invited to perform roles of disciplinary expert, fellow academic, peer reviewer, and support group. We call for further research to be conducted on questions that are crucial to understanding the complex interactional dynamics in multidisciplinary, multi-level peer groups such as GWGs. Some questions that we find essential to a more thorough understanding of these spaces are:

- Do disciplinary (as opposed to multidisciplinary) spaces have an equally leveled hierarchy in member interactions?
- How do disciplinary GWGs contribute to the identities of L2 graduate writers?
- What additional improvements to the organization and implementation of GWGs would be most beneficial for both L1 and L2 graduate student writers' identity development and socialization?

Considering how graduate student writers are socialized into their academic disciplines is timely, as shifts in the population of L2 writers, particularly L2 graduate writers, have garnered much interest from language researchers and teachers in terms of the best ways to serve these students. As part of this effort, we have explored in this chapter ways in which GWGs assist in the socialization of L2 writers into the larger academic discourse community. We found that the simple portrayal of all L2 graduate student writers as novices and their enculturation into academia as linear and uni-directional can be limiting to our understanding of L2 writers' socialization into academia and also to the ways in which we can facilitate this process. Based on these findings, we call for a reexamination of how graduate student writers' identities vary and also change across time and contexts. We also suggest that the complexity inherent in mixed groups of L1 and L2 graduate writers from different disciplines and at different stages in their academic career can create a favorable environment for socialization into graduate writing discourse communities. Our hopes are that further research efforts that expand the inquiries in this study will help to identify the ways in which educational institutions are serving the academic needs of L2 graduate student writers and contributing to the multifaceted socialization that occurs within the academic community context.

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## Appendix A: Intake Survey

In this security-enabled survey, participants will provide information about their interest and/or participation in the MSU Writing Center's Graduate Writing Groups. They will also provide information about their motivation for joining the groups, satisfaction with the writing groups, familiarity with writing instruction, access to writing assistance and resources, and self perceptions of their writing ability. The responses will help us get a sense of what motivates students to access writing assistance such as the MSU Writing Center's Graduate Writing Groups. This survey will be distributed to all students who have shown interest in joining a graduate writing group as well as current graduate writing group members. The survey should take around 15 minutes to complete.

### Demographic Information

1. Name:
2. Gender:
3. Department/program and year of study:
4. First language:
5. If you are fluent in any other languages, please list them here:
6. Please add any comments you may have about your language use: (explanation box)
7. How long have you been at MSU?
8. (For doctoral students) Have you advanced to candidacy in your program? (yes/no)

9. Have you begun working on your doctoral dissertation/master's thesis? (yes/no)
10. If so, where are you in the process? Check all that apply.
  - Brainstorming
  - Literature review
  - Data collection
  - Data analysis
  - Write-up
  - Revision
  - Formatting
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Graduate Writing Group Interest

11. How did you learn about the Writing Center's Graduate Writing Groups (GWGs)? (explanation box)
12. When did you express interest in the Writing Center's Graduate Writing Groups? (month/year)
13. Did you join a Graduate Writing Group? (Check yes or no)
14. If so, when did you join a Graduate Writing Group? (month/year)
15. If not, why did you decide not to join a Graduate Writing Group? (explanation box)
16. Why did you/did you want to join a Graduate Writing Group? (explanation box)

### Self-Perception of Writing Ability

17. Do you feel prepared to write in the academic genres your program expects of you? (yes/no/other)
18. Do you enjoy academic writing? (yes/sometimes/rarely/never/other)
19. I consider myself a/an \_\_\_\_\_ academic writer. (excellent/good/satisfactory/poor/other)
20. Do you enjoy non-academic writing (e.g., creative writing, blog writing, etc.)? (yes/sometimes/rarely/never/other)
21. What are your writing strengths? (comment box)
22. What are your writing limitations? (comment box)
23. How comfortable are you going to your advisor/chair for assistance with your writing? (extremely/mostly/sort of/not/other)
24. How available is your advisor to assist you with your writing? (extremely/mostly/sort of/not/other)



25. Describe the assistance and guidance your advisor provides.
26. How comfortable are you going to another committee/faculty member for assistance with your writing? (extremely/mostly/sort of/not/other)
27. How available are your committee members to assist you with your writing? (extremely/mostly/sort of/not/other)
28. Describe the assistance and guidance your committee members provide.
29. How comfortable are you going to peers within your program for assistance with your writing? (extremely/mostly/sort of/not/other)
30. How available are your peers to assist you with your writing? (extremely/mostly/sort of/not/other)
31. Describe the assistance and guidance your peers provide.
32. Describe the assistance and guidance your graduate writing group provides.
33. How does your experience in the graduate writing group differ from your experiences with other forms of writing assistance?

### **Familiarity with Writing Instruction and the Writing Center**

34. Have you had any explicit writing instruction? If so, in what context? (Select All that Apply)
  - Composition class at Michigan State University
  - Composition class at another institution
  - Workshop or short-term seminar on writing
  - Individual instruction from a tutor
  - Individual instruction from faculty member
  - Other: (please explain)
35. How did you learn about the Writing Center?
36. What Writing Center experiences have you had besides Graduate Writing Groups? (Select all that apply)
  - Classroom workshops as faculty
  - Classroom workshops as student
  - Navigating the Ph.D.
  - One-to-one consulting
  - Other (Please describe): \_\_\_\_\_
37. If so, did this experience occur before or after you joined a Graduate Writing Group?
38. Have you ever been part of a writing group that was not organized by the MSU Writing Center?
  - a) no

b) yes, please indicate the type:

- informal disciplinary group
- class-based writing group
- group developed by faculty
- other (please describe):

39. If yes, was the other writing group something you took part in before or after your participation in the writing center graduate writing group? (explanation box)

### Access to Writing Resources

40. What writing resources have you used/do you use in addition to participating in a Graduate Writing Group? Check all that apply and explain in the space provided below.

- People (an advisor, colleagues in your department) (comment box)
- Texts (writing handbook, research articles, websites, etc.) (comment box)
- Coursework (comment box)
- Workshops (comment box)
- Other: (comment box)

41. What makes these writing resources helpful for you? (Please explain):

42. What writing resources have you used/do you use in your Graduate Writing Group? Check all that apply.

- People (guest speakers, etc.)
- Texts
- Activities/exercises
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

43. What writing resources are made available by your graduate program? Check all that apply.

- Advisor office hours/appointments (comment box)
- Texts (for example, handbooks) (comment box)
- Workshops (comment box)
- Other (comment box)

44. Would you be willing to participate in an individual interview about your graduate writing group experiences?

45. Would you be willing to participate in a focus group about graduate writing groups?

46. If you are willing to participate, please provide a way for us to contact you (email, phone, etc.) (comment box)

## Appendix B: Interview Questions for GWG Members and Writing Consultants

### Interview Questions for GWG Members

1. For ESL students: What is your L1? Your L2? Any other languages?
  - How do you feel about writing in each of these languages?
  - What is your greatest concern with regard to your L2 writing?
2. How important do you think is the role of writing in your academic field?
3. What kind of assistance does your GWG provide?
4. Describe the interactions between L1 and L2 writers in your Graduate Writing Group.
  - Can you tell us about the specific types of feedback that you give and receive?
  - Do you feel more comfortable with certain types of feedback than others?
  - What is the most frequent form of feedback in your Graduate Writing Group?
  - Do you tend to value comments from certain members more than others? Why? (e.g., similarity in disciplines, L1 vs L2 speakers)
5. What do you think can be your greatest contribution to the group? What aspects of writing do you feel most comfortable helping others with?
6. How does your experience in the GWG differ from your experience with getting writing assistance from advisor/committee member/peer/WC/other? (several different questions)

### Interview Questions for Writing Consultants

1. What were your expectations when you signed up to facilitate Graduate Writing Groups at Michigan State University?
  - Did you expect to work with L2 writers of English?
  - How do you feel about facilitating a Graduate Writing Group which is composed of L2 writers of English?
2. What was the most difficult or challenging thing to you about facilitating a Graduate Writing Group at MSU?
3. What is your perception of the interaction between the writers whose first language is not English and the native English writers in your Graduate Writing Group?