Showcase of Teaching and Learning: May 1, 2019

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School of Rehabilitation Therapy

DEVELOPING A MODEL FOR ACADEMIC WRITING SUPPORT CONSIDERING THE PERSPECTIVES OF DOCTORAL STUDENTS AND THEIR SUPERVISORS AT QUEEN’S UNIVERSITY

Research Team: Jyoti Kotecha, Atul Jaiswal, Susan Korba, Klodiana Kolomitro, Marta Starznicky
MOTIVATION & IDEATION

- Personal experiences and challenges with academic writing in PhD journey
- Experiences related to academic writing from peers and colleagues
- Thesis Bootcamp (Summer 2018)
- Panel Discussion
  Understanding academic writing practices and expectations from students belonging to different disciplines: Implications for teaching and learning
- CTL - Teaching Development Day 2018
PUTTING THE PROJECT IN LARGER CONTEXT

- Statistics Canada report (2016): Between 2005 and 2014, the international student population grew 88% at Canadian universities, as compared with 22% growth rate for Canadian students.

- Figures from Queen’s University: In 2017, international students from 80 different countries across the world comprised 26% of the total graduate student population.
PROJECT TIMELINE

Conception of the idea
March 2018

Stakeholder consultation
May 2018

Grant application and approval
July 2018

Ethics Approval
Nov, 2018

Survey dissemination
Jan-March 2019

FGDs; report writing; and dissemination of study findings
April-June 2019
PURPOSE AND PROCESS

1. Conduct an environmental scan (a review) of academic writing supports available at Queen’s University and other Canadian institutions.

2. Understand writing issues from the perspectives of graduate students to determine knowledge and use of existing services, writing support from supervisors, and desired supports related to academic writing.

3. Determine specific writing issues and areas for support related to academic writing from the perspectives of faculty members with graduate supervision responsibilities and experience.
STAKEHOLDERS

Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL)

Society for Professional and Graduate Students (SGPS)

School of Graduate Studies (SGS)

Queens University International Centre (QUIC)

Student Academic Success Services (SASS)
METHODOLOGY

▪ **Research Approach:** Mixed-method approach

▪ **Participants:** Doctoral students who are non-native English language speakers and in any year of their program; and the faculty members with experience of supervising doctoral students at Queen’s University.

▪ **Data Analysis:** Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) and NVivo

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Data collection</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Environmental Scan</td>
<td>Policy and documents across ten Canadian universities</td>
<td>Review</td>
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<td>2. Quantitative Methods</td>
<td>75 Students and 25 supervisors</td>
<td>Cross-sectional online survey on Qualtrics</td>
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<td>3. Qualitative Methods</td>
<td>Students and faculty members</td>
<td>Focus group discussions (FGDs)</td>
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Universities included

- Dalhousie University, the University of Saskatchewan, University of British Columbia, University of Alberta, McGill University, McMaster University, University of Toronto, Ottawa University, York University, and Queen’s University.

- WE LOOKED AT:
  - Key writing supports
  - Academic writing policies
  - Innovative services
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource/Program/Service</th>
<th>Number of universities providing the support</th>
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<tr>
<td>• A dedicated academic writing center</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>• Online resources for academic writing</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Personal consultation services for academic writing</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Workshops/seminars/other events dedicated to academic writing</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Specific services or resources for graduate students</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Guidelines/policies for students</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Modules/courses for academic writing</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Specific resources for students with English as an additional language</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>• Department/discipline specific academic writing support</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Other handbook or resources for faculty</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Guidelines/policies for faculty members</td>
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AGGREGATE FINDINGS FROM THE SCAN

- Each of the ten universities provides a dedicated academic writing center, and nearly all universities provide online resources for academic writing, personal consultation services for academic writing, and workshops/seminars/other events dedicated to academic writing.

- Only six of the ten universities provide modules or courses for academic writing and specific resources for students with English as an additional language.

- Department or discipline specific academic writing support: Only half of the universities providing this type of support.
Innovative Services

- **Online tutoring for academic writing** that allows students who may not be able to attend in-person tutoring to receive feedback on their writing electronically; offered by four of the studied universities, and students receive feedback typically within less than 48 hours. (York, Alberta)

- **Faculty scholarly writing retreats** (Saskatchewan)

- University of Toronto:
  - English Language Development Centre, which includes “Reading eWriting”, an online, eight-day non-credit course in Intensive Academic English specifically geared towards multilingual students.
  - Personalized academic Reading and Writing through Email (RWE) and the Academic English Health Check

- **Support in group environments** such as writing groups, writing retreats, writing boot camps and writing labs.
Student demographic representation

- **Age**
  - Mean age: *31 years (born in 1988)*; Range: 23 to 51 years of age (birth years ranging from 1968 to 1996).

- **Gender**
  - 42% males; 55% females; 3% did not disclose

- **3 Most commonly indicated racial/ethnic background:**
  - Asian, White, Chinese

- **4 Most commonly represented native languages** of the participants:
  - Arabic, Farsi, Mandarin, Spanish (>30 different languages listed)

- **5 Most commonly represented departments:**
  - Arts and social sciences; Sciences; Engineering; Smith School of Business; Faculty of Education
STUDENT REPRESENTATION

Year of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>16.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upper year</td>
<td>15.8</td>
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Stage of PhD

- Commencing: 26%
- Mid-candidature: 44%
- Completing: 30%
ACADEMIC WRITING PERCEPTIONS

• 89.5% of students felt that they do need to improve on their academic writing skills.

• 46.5% of respondents indicated that a university supervisor or faculty has at some point indicated that they need to work on improving their academic writing skills.

• 41.2% believed that their English writing ability has improved greatly during their time at Queen’s

• 41.2% believed their English writing ability has improved slightly during their time at Queen’s
Areas of Difficulty and Resources Sought

Top 5 areas of difficulty
- Writing process (24.5%)
- Content/ideas (23.6%)
- Grammar (15.7%)
- Vocabulary (12.2%)
- Organization of sentences or paragraphs (10.5%)

Top 4 writing supports sought
- University workshops (29.8%)
- Online resources (22.8%)
- University Writing Centre (SASS) (21%)
- QUIC (17.5%)

50% responded that they had not sought out any writing development support.
SUPPORT PREFERENCES

Top 3 writing supports to help improve their written English language skills

- Personal feedback on writing tasks (56%)
- PhD thesis writing workshops (41.2%)
- Working one-on-one with language experts to check writing regularly (41.2%)

Best way for their supervisors to give them feedback

- Circling or highlighting the errors and informing the student of the type of error (56.4%)
- Circle or highlight errors, but not correcting the error for the student (24.5%)
- Only correcting the most serious errors (10%)
FACULTY SURVEY RESPONSES (N=31)

Most common areas of academic writing difficulties

- Grammar (parts of speech, sentence, etc.) (87.1%)
- Logical organization (64.5%)
- Vocabulary (61.3%)

Top 3 ways to support students

- One-to-one or group guidance from someone in a similar area of study (58.1%)
- Editing services / proof reading / grammar check tools (54.8%)
- Sitting one by one with language expert to check writing regularly (51.6%)
“Students need more training, more individualized attention, more access to editing services. Queen's can and should devote more resources to writing training”.

“They [students] should enroll in a writing program from the beginning to avoid last minute issues when they actually write their thesis.”

“Students should have more time with instructors and supervisors.”

“We [faculty] should be helping them improve in the technical areas of their specific field”

“Students need one on one meetings plus practice writing”
ANTICIPATED CONCLUSION

- Preliminary findings suggest that academic writing should be integrated into the formal training of graduate students right from the beginning.

- Rigorous support and discipline specific training is required.

- It can be provided in the form of online resources, better support from faculty supervisors, and more feedback from English language experts.
THANK YOU

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

▪ Centre for Teaching and Learning
  ▪ School of Graduate Studies
  ▪ Society of Graduate and Professional Students