

Masters Level Graduate Student Writing Groups:

Exploring Academic Identity

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Approved March 2012 by the
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May 2012

ABSTRACT

This action research project explores masters level graduate student writing and academic identity during one semester in an interdisciplinary masters program. Informing this study is a two part theoretical framework including the Academic Literacy Model (Lea and Street) and Wenger's concept of identity. The purpose of this exploration was to understand how first semester graduate students experienced academic writing and what characteristics of their academic identity emerged. A mixed-methods approach was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data included results from the Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing (Lavelle and Bushrow, 2007) and the Graduate Student Identity Survey. Qualitative data was collected through researcher observations, student blog entries, writing group transcripts, and individual interviews. The following themes emerge from the data: a) graduate students attribute their successes in writing to previous experiences, b) graduate students experience struggles related primarily to academic quality and faculty expectations, c) graduate students negotiate ways of being in the academy through figuring out expectations of faculty and program, d) work done in the writing group meetings shows evidence of meaning-making for the graduate students, e) the focus of the MA program was critically important to graduate students in the graduate writing project, e) participants' role as graduate students felt most strongly in contexts that include academic activity, and f) students acknowledge change and increasingly identify themselves as writers. Ideas for future cycles of research are discussed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this dissertation is a direct result of many faculty, practitioners, family, and friends. I would like to acknowledge and thank the following individuals for their support throughout this process.

I am deeply thankful for the time invested by my faculty committee. To my committee chair, Dr. Keith Wetzel, who provided a perfect combination of challenge and support; Dr. Ann Ewbank, whose conversations about my research and the process were most helpful; and Dr. Patricia Friedrich who provided constructive critique which expanded my learning.

To my Leader Scholar Community (LSC), for helping me to grow as a practitioner and scholar for the past three years. This model of collaboration has been invaluable to my learning experience.

To the instructor of record and participants in the Graduate Writing Project. Thank you for allowing me into your class, I learned so much from each of you.

To my undergraduate faculty at Saint Mary's College who first made me recognize and believe that this was not only possible, but that it was the right path for me. Specifically, Dr. Susan Alexander, whose support and guidance first helped me to discover the research process.

I also wish to acknowledge the support and guidance that I have received from friends and family throughout this journey. To my friends who helped and encouraged me and understood when too many phone calls, texts, and emails went unanswered. I look forward to reconnecting. To my college roommate, Jill

Rolewicz, who listened to and encouraged me toward this journey before it became a reality.

To my parents, John and Tracey Smith, for the support, guidance, and sacrifices they made while always encouraging me to pursue my academic, personal, and professional goals. To my older brother, Damon Smith, who served as a critical friend and amazing editor. To my brother, Aaron Smith, for hanging out when I couldn't write any more. I also want to thank my extended Ruggles-family for supporting and encouraging me through this process.

My deepest gratitude goes to my husband, Scott Ruggles, for his endless patience and support. Thank you for encouraging me, holding me accountable, and for making me smile when I needed the most. I am grateful for Fitzgerald and Zoe, who kept their tails wagging.

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Chapter 1

Leadership Context and Purpose of the Action

A reflection on writing from a masters level student:

Before graduate school, I had about three years off after completing my undergraduate degree. I consider myself a writer. I write a lot. I journal, I write poetry, I blog. So, I think that I'm a fairly capable writer. Despite this, I was very nervous about graduate level academic writing. Questions like "what if they expect something different than what I did in my undergraduate?" "What if I can't write like this anymore?" "What if I fail at this?" During my first semester I had three classes and each professor had three very different expectations for written assignments. I struggled, but I figured it out. It wasn't about how well I could write, necessarily, it was about whether I am prepared. Did I listen well enough and write something well enough for each of you [professors] in the way that you want it. I was fortunate, I feel like I figured this out and adapted. I'm not sure that all of the students in my classes were able to. (personal communication, February, 12, 2011).

The vignette above is one student's response when asked how she feels about academic writing. Fear of failure (*What if I fail at this?*) and of the challenge of learning to write differently (*It wasn't about how well I could write*) are not uncommon. Although this student experienced some anxiety about graduate level academic writing, she was able to adapt to the culture of the academy and of each classroom to be successful. For some students, anxiety about academic writing is much more personal, as evidenced by the following student response.

For some reason, I think that I am going to be judged by whatever professor it is. Like if I'm not, I don't know how to put it into words. But, if I put my ideas and thoughts down and they say that my writing isn't good enough, I'm afraid that they are going to judge me. Like they are going to judge me as a person.

These accounts represent a few ways in which graduate students describe their academic writing experience. Responses express students' feelings of anxiety toward academic writing and the fear that criticism of their writing could also induce personal judgments. The purpose of this action research project was to explore graduate student identity and academic writing in one master's level program at a large Southwestern research-intensive university. To do this, I implemented the Graduate Writing Project (GWP) which imbedded a peer-led writing group into the graduate curriculum of one master's program.

Role of Researcher

When this project started, I was working as a Program Coordinator, Sr., in the graduate studies office of one liberal arts college at this university. I was responsible for advanced administrative functions, recruitment, retention, graduate event programming, and advising for three masters'-level graduate programs. My initial and continued interest in graduate student services stems from a variety of sources including comments from students about difficulties they face, comments from graduate faculty about students' writing, my own struggles with writing as a graduate student and my belief that graduate education should include participation in an academic community through writing, research, and discussion. When I began to explore the idea of practitioner research in the professional setting, I struggled to find the time and resources to develop student-success programming. Additionally, since my professional experience was limited, I reflected on what type of leadership role I would assume in this setting. In *The Learning Paradigm College*, John Tagg (2003) describes two kinds of

leadership: structural and functional. According to Tagg, structural leaders are individuals who are thought of as leaders simply because they have obtained certain high-level positions within an institution. He describes functional leaders as individuals who take on leadership roles because they feel a sense of mission, but who also need to work with others to accomplish their purpose (p. 338). I identify as a functional leader. I am passionate about the role of higher education and student-success services (my sense of mission), but graduate student success programming is not something I can establish on my own. I must work collaboratively with faculty, program directors, and students within my setting. Identification as a functional leader was crucial to this action research study because it influenced the way in which I conceptualized the research problem and the role I play as practitioner researcher.

Statement of Need

Writing is an integral component of graduate school in any discipline, and it is critical that graduate students continuously develop their academic writing skills (Stevenson, 2006; Thomas, 2005; Wasley, 2008). Scholars also argue that academic writing should not be an activity reserved for selected elite academics but, rather, an activity expected of all graduate students (Mullen, 2006). I began to conceive the proposed action research study when in my daily work it became apparent that faculty and graduate students were concerned about student writing development. The problem manifested itself when I reviewed graduation numbers. At the beginning of each semester, students who expect to graduate at

the end of that semester register for their final course. In the final semester; however, there were many students (30-40%) who did not graduate.

Informal conversations with students and faculty led me to understand that one way of looking at the problem of on-time program completion was with an understanding that our students were unable to perform the academic writing necessary to complete the culminating writing requirement successfully. I received anecdotal information from students who indicated that they struggled with the writing process. Similarly, faculty would simply say that students would have to “write better” or “hire a professional editor” before they would be ready to graduate. Thus it became apparent to me that students were struggling with the expectations of academic writing. When this study began, there was not any formal support structure at the program level to help graduate students develop as academic writers, which is typical since many graduate students nation-wide do not receive any formal instruction to help them write (Mullen, 2006).

Peer-led graduate student writing groups appeared to be an intervention that could improve graduate student writing skills and facilitate the formation of an academic identity in graduate students. Researchers theorize that graduate students procrastinate on writing assignments because they have strong fear of failure and task aversiveness, both of which are associated with high levels of apprehension about writing (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2001). In this study researchers administered the Procrastination Assessment Scale – Students and the Writing Apprehension Test on the first day of class to 135 master’s-level graduate students from several disciplines. They found a statistically significant

relationship between the scores on the Writing Apprehension Test and the Fear of Failure and Task Aversiveness scales of the Procrastination Assessment Scale-Students (p. 561). Researchers Lavelle and Bushrow (2007) developed the Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing to measure writing processes at the graduate level to “help students understand themselves better as writers in terms of their motives and strategies, and raise awareness of writing options” (p.808). Cuthbert and Spark (2008) wanted to understand what role graduate writing groups played in the development of the writing process. They were also interested in understanding if writing groups may be one way to help graduate students publish prior to graduation. All participants’ comments about their participation in the writing group were positive. These research findings support the need for a program-level intervention to help graduate students understand writing expectations and to provide a safe environment in which to practice writing tasks.

I suspected that the difficulties graduate students faced in meeting the writing expectations of their programs might relate to their academic identities. I adopt Goffman’s (1959) view that identity is socially constructed, changeable, and multiple. Graduate students enter this program with identities that align with their personal and professional lives and may view themselves also as graduate students. For example, a student may see himself as a teacher who is also going to graduate school. He may not adopt a new identity as a graduate student within the academy. Since a person’s identity is influenced by the communities (in this case the academic community) that he comes into contact with it is important to

provide an activity, such as the writing group, that will help him to practice and be exposed to the values and practices within the academic community. Corbone and Orellana (2010) discuss academic identity and state, “within the context of the classroom, students may adopt identities that can foster or impede their academic achievement” (p. 294). John Hedgcock (2008) provides a vignette of the enculturation experiences and identity development of graduate students:

I feel that I am closer to “pulling off” my academic voice because the degrees of distance between “me” and “them” is less. As the time passes and I experience more of what it means to be a postgraduate student, the more I become socialized and enculturated into the practices and traditions of my field and department. (p. 83)

When I read a story like this, I am not surprised by his reflection or his reference to learning “what it means to be a postgraduate student” which clearly marks a moment of formation of academic identity. Instead, I am reminded of the students with whom I work each day who seem to be struggling with the socialization in this new environment. The role that the writing group may play is important because identity development has been demonstrated to have an impact on academic achievement (Berzonsky, 1989). Furthermore, Roz Ivanic (1998) writes that “Writing is not some neutral activity in which we just learn like a physical skill, but it implicates every fiber of the writer’s multifaceted being. Who we are affects how we write, whatever we are writing, whether it is a letter to a friend or a dissertation” (p. 182). Literature discussed above highlights the importance of academic writing in graduate school and suggests that all writing, including academic writing, is intricately tied to a student’s sense of self and identity.

Setting and Innovation

In this action research, I worked mostly with first-semester students enrolled in an introductory graduate-level course for an interdisciplinary liberal arts master's degree. This program is one of five programs in the college. In a typical semester there are between 50 and 60 part- and full- time students enrolled in the degree program. Students in this program are diverse in their personal and professional backgrounds. They may be pursuing the degree to advance at a current job, to make a career change, to prepare for doctoral work, or for personal enrichment. I selected this program for several reasons. First, most anecdotal feedback from faculty and students who struggle with their writing references this degree program. Second, this program has been established longer than any other graduate program in the college. Despite this, no student success programs have been implemented specifically for students pursuing this degree. Finally, in the Spring 2010 semester, when I piloted a brief writing group and invited participants from all degree programs, I received inquiry and ultimately participation only from students in this program. Again, this makes their struggle particularly evident.

I implemented the Graduate Writing Project (GWP), which imbedded peer-led, in-class graduate writing groups for graduate students in a master's-level interdisciplinary liberal arts program. The purpose of the semester-long Graduate Writing Project was to provide program administrators information about how graduate students shape their academic identity, participate in the academic setting, and approach graduate writing. The objectives of the Graduate Writing

Project included:

- Creating and maintaining a space where first-semester graduate students feel safe in sharing their writing and strategies to deal with the demands of academic writing at the graduate level.
- Developing writing skills, analysis, and critical reading through multiple peer-review processes.
- Providing specific time to discuss, learn, and practice written communication skills.
- Making graduate students aware of their writing processes and using this information to help them improve their writing practices.

Participants in the Graduate Writing Project participated in writing group meetings throughout the semester. Additionally, they contributed to an online blog and completed two self-reflection writing assignments that explore ideas related to academic identity and interdisciplinarity.

Research Questions

As discussed above, the literature shows identity intricately related to all forms of writing, including academic writing. I wanted to better understand how first-semester graduate students adapt to their new roles within the academy and how experiences with academic writing interact with their identity. Since faculty and students in the program have routinely voiced frustration with the academic writing process, this study also aims to improve graduate student writing. This action research investigates the following research questions:

Research Question 1: To what extent does graduate students' writing processes (measured by an Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing) change during one semester while participating in a writing group?

Research Question 2: What successes and struggles with academic writing do first-semester graduate students experience?

Research Question 3: What characteristics of the academic literacy model emerge during writing group meetings?

Research Question 4: In what ways do participants in the Graduate Writing Project shape their graduate-student academic identity?

Chapter 2

Review of Supporting Scholarship

This chapter briefly reviews existing literature that informs this action research. The purpose of the literature review in action research is to inform the practitioner-turned-researcher in the conceptualization, design, and implementation of the study. For this reason, the following literature review is not comprehensive; however, it provides me (the practitioner-turned-researcher) with the necessary knowledge of literacy, composition, and writing groups to approach this study. This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section briefly discusses the changing definitions of literacy over time and what it currently means in higher education. The second section develops ideas of community-specific discourses and academic literacy. The third section discusses academic identity. The fourth section describes writing groups, the heart of this study, in various settings. Building on the discussion of literacy, this section reviews the development and use of writing groups. The fifth and final section presents literature informing the theoretical framework for this study. The following review of supporting scholarship aims to situate my action research in the existing knowledge of the field, to reference research that has shaped study, and to contribute to the existing conversation about the social dimension of writing groups, specifically the role that graduate writing groups play in the development of academic identity and literacy in master's-level graduate students.

Literacy and Literacy as a Social Practice

Literacy is a central component of writing groups and an integral part of my exploration of graduate-student academic identity. In her book *Writing Groups: History, Theory, and Implications*, Anne Gere (1987) argues that “these groups contribute to the development of literacy, and literacy stands at their center” (p. 113). Historically, literacy was defined as the ability to read and write, and academic writing is just one type of literacy and will be the focus of this research. Most attempts at defining literacy conceptualize it as an attribute obtained by an individual, and in early sources it is described or studied in terms of individual abilities (Scribner, 1988). Definitions of literacy have been redefined and typically literacy was thought of as something that was achieved through a specified number of years of formal education and that could be demonstrated through successful completion of specific tasks (Gere, 1987).

Two preeminent scholars argue against the idea of literacy as a set of skills and advocate for a view of literacy as a social act situated in specific cultures and practices (Gee 1996; Street, 1984). New Literacy Studies (NLS) scholars provide a comprehensive framework for literacy, arguing that it is much more complex than early definitions demonstrate and that literacy refers to much more than acquired skills such as reading and writing (Street, 1995; White & Lowenthal 2011). A critical component of NLS is that literacy practices must be viewed as “embedded within specific social practices” (Gee, 2003, p. 159). Similarly, Stephen L. Fox (1999) defines literacy as “the ability to make meaning with written language in a particular group or community that prizes that ability” (p.

25). Fox goes on to argue that individuals cannot be labeled simply as literate or illiterate, but instead each person may have multiple literacies. Further, he claims that it is the work of college composition teachers to initiate students into a new literacy. I apply this idea to master's-level graduate students who may have varying levels of control over literacies but who must be initiated into a new literacy, one that exists as a central component of the academic culture of graduate education.

Scribner (1988) states, "But the single most compelling fact about literacy is that it is a social achievement; individuals in societies without writing systems do not become literate" (p. 72). The same holds true for literacies understood in Fox's sense: the literacies endemic to the academy are acquired only within that context. In *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Practices*, Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that individuals must both understand the rules of and engage in practices specific to a particular community.

These researchers posit that newcomers (in this case first-year graduate students) must practice using the discourse of the specific community they are trying to enter (academia) and that they will remain at the periphery of that community until they earn legitimacy. White & Lowenthal (2011) suggest, "Knowing how and when to employ specific literacy practices in the different domains of life is, this research shows, a prerequisite for full admittance to and success in communities of practice such as the university" (p. 11). From this point of view, then, it is critical that graduate students understand academic writing—how it is used and how to do it—to become accepted members of the

academic discourse community. In most cases, newcomers will attempt to enter a discourse community slowly from the periphery to the center “as they appropriate and successfully employ the literacy practices privileged within that community” (White & Lowenthal, 2011; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The New Literacy Studies perspective provides a framework for viewing literacy differently depending on specific contexts. Specifically, “different domains of life require specific kinds of literacies” (White & Lowenthal, p.10). Similarly, Gee (1989) states “at any moment we are using language we must say or write the right thing in the right way while playing the right social role and (appearing) to hold the right values, beliefs, and attitudes” (p. 526). Gee refers to this specific combination as a “Discourse” and further provides the following definition: “A Discourse is a sort of ‘identity kit’ which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize” (p. 526). Each person acquires at least one Discourse, a primary Discourse, through early socialization in family life. This primary Discourse is used by individuals to view the world and to make sense of it.

In addition, the primary Discourse guides interactions with others (Gee, 1989). These Discourses are acquired through enculturation into social practices with individuals who have already mastered the Discourse (Gee, 1989; Heath, 1983). Gee’s (1989) definition of literacy is “the mastery of or fluent control over a secondary Discourse” (p. 529) where a secondary Discourse is one acquired in social institutions to which we have access. Using Gee’s ideas as a framework, I

argue that in order for participants in this study to achieve a high level of academic writing (one type of literacy), they must obtain fluent control over a literacy unique to the discourse of the academy. Gee argues that “Discourses are connected with displays of an identity; failing to fully display an identity is tantamount to announcing you don’t have that identity, that at best you’re a pretender or a beginner” (p. 529). Gee goes on to argue that all writing is embedded in some Discourse.

To teach someone how to write must happen within a social practice; in the case of this study I use writing groups as a way to understand graduate student identity within a specific institutional setting. In this research, teaching graduate student writing is embedded in the Discourse of higher education. Specifically, in an environment where writing of an academic quality with the intent to present new ideas from research through writing is highly valued and expected of graduate students. Such teaching occurs in a master/apprentice relationship wherein the student learns to “say, do, value, believe ... within that discourse” (p. 530). The Graduate Writing Project was one forum which provided graduate students with some of the skills necessary to leave the periphery of the academic community and participate more fully. I hope to understand how participants’ identities emerge through this experience. As Gee (2002) states, discourse communities require “distinctive ways of ‘being and doing’ that allow people to enact and/or recognize a specific and distinctive socially-situated identity” (p. 160).

Most important to the study is what literacy means inside the academy. Hyland (2000) states that “‘literacy’ refers to different strategies for conceptualizing, organizing and producing texts; it implies variation in the contexts and communities in which they are written, and the roles of readers and writer that they invoke” (p.146). In NLS, literacy encompasses many different experiences, practices, and ways of knowing that individuals carry to a writing task (p. 55 Street via Hyland). The Graduate Writing Project will provide students with a platform to explore writing as one specific way of being a graduate student and doing a graduate student’s work. This experience will help to shape their academic identity. Building on this definition of literacy as a social practice, the following section will discuss academic literacy and the university as a discourse community.

The University as a Discourse Community

In the academy, discussions of writing center on composition and rhetoric or on teaching how to write for specific audiences. When students enter the academy, they must quickly acquire a specific disciplinary knowledge as they encounter a new and dominant literacy (Hyland, 2000). According to Ivancic (1998), “the notion of discourse communities is particularly relevant to the study of writer identity, because each individual takes on an identity in relation to the communities they come into contact with” (p. 83). Elbow (1998) argues that academic success is linked to a student’s ability to master a discourse that is accepted and specific to the university or institutional setting. Hyland (2000) supports this position:

In institutional contexts where a unitary and autonomous model of literacy prevails, such as many university environments, literacy is seen as an independent variable detached from its social consequences. In such circumstances it is easy for teachers and students to see writing difficulties as learners' own weaknesses. (p.146)

Students who are unable to quickly identify these expectations or to adjust their own writing practices are marginalized, and their writing can be seen as failed attempts to mimic the standard and accepted forms of writing (Pardoe, 1999). In *The Hidden Curriculum in Higher Education*, Margolis (2001) discusses how new college students face difficult demands when they enter college and how they must learn and adhere to a hidden set of rules by which the institution functions. These rules are not explicitly identified or taught to students, but it is critical that they learn these rules to be successful. David Bartholomae (1985) argues that power relationships exist within writing and that basic writers must “see themselves within a privileged discourse, one that already includes and excludes some groups of readers” (p. 515). For graduate students to become literate, then, they must learn about ways to write for the academy.

In *Inventing the University*, Bartholomae (1985) discusses how students must learn to write for various audiences through the different disciplines:

Every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion – invent the university, that is, or a branch of it, like History or Anthropology or Economics or English. He has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community. (p. 134)

Like the new college students studied by Margolis, graduate students in this study are being asked to figure out unspoken rules set up within the institution, and to

write in a specific way without explicit education in how to do so. Moreover, graduate students in an interdisciplinary liberal arts program are challenged to find ways to become interdisciplinary scholars in an institutional environment that often still focuses on disciplinary discourses. These students may not have a unified discourse community to assimilate themselves to, so they must be taught conventional writing skills and ways of academic writing to be successful within the academy. Bartholomae (1985) further argues that

The students have to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and they have to do this as though they were easily and comfortably one with their audience, as though they were members of the academy, or historians or anthropologists or economists; they have to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language, finding some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, and the requirements of convention, the history of a discipline. They must learn to speak our language. Or they must dare to speak it, or to carry off the bluff, since speaking and writing will most certainly be required long before the skill is “learned”. (p.135)

Bartholomae (1985) highlights the struggle that students face as they approach academic writing as if they were members of the academic community and had mastered academic literacy, or ways of writing and reading in the institution. This struggle is not reserved for students immersed in an unknown context of academia; the rules that govern the various discourses in the academy are mysterious to professionals as well. Kutz (1998) states that “what we are really asking students to do as they enter the university is not to replace one way of speaking or writing with another, but to add yet another style to their existing repertoire” (p. 85).

White and Lowenthal (2011) advocate providing first-year undergraduates with specific rules for participation in courses. Furthermore, they suggest that academic staff can work with students to identify specific issues related to a student's academic discourse and work with the student to improve it. White and Lowenthal (2011) specifically argue that “providing students with concrete suggestions on ways to improve their academic writing – or better yet using methods common to ‘writer’s workshop’ and the ‘process approach’ to papers – can help students develop stronger academic verbal practices as well” (White & Lowenthal, 2011, p. 35). Although their recommendations are specific to college freshmen, and in particular minority college students, I believe that this same model can be used to approach graduate student writing and identity.

New graduate students, necessarily, must identify as part of the academic community, and without this identity formation they will not be able to participate in or acquire academic literacy skills linked to academic success. In *A Stranger in Strange Lands: A College Student Writing Across the Curriculum*, McCarthy (1987) presents writing as a process of assessing and conforming to requirements established by the unfamiliar academic setting. She relates how one student figured out how to produce appropriate texts for the institutional setting:

As I followed Dave from one classroom writing situation to another, I came to see him, as he made his journey from one discipline to another, as a stranger in strange lands. In each new class Dave believed that the writing he was doing was totally unlike anything he had ever done before. (p. 234)

In a similar way, literacy scholar Mike Rose (1989) recalled his own experience in high-school and college English: “I was encountering a new language – the

language of the academy – and was trying to find my way around in it” (p. 54). McCarthy clearly perceives that there are multiple languages within the academy. This is an important point for this study because I worked with interdisciplinary students who will encounter multiple discourses.

McCarthy’s study was framed using the insight of sociolinguists and ethnographers that language processes must be understood within a specific context. Specifically, McCarthy expressed the following view of writing: “Writing in college is viewed as a process of assessing and adapting to the requirements in unfamiliar academic writing” (p. 234). McCarthy’s study followed one college student over a 21-month period in three different courses during the freshman and sophomore years. Using observation, interviews, composing-aloud protocols, and text analysis, McCarthy approached the study without any hypothesis. She set out to understand why writing was required in the three selected courses and how writing fit into the specific courses.

The finding most relevant to this study is that writing appeared to be context-dependent. McCarthy writes that “in each new classroom community, Dave in many ways resembled a beginning language user” (p. 61). The author suggests that teachers of writing explain the evaluation processes within the university as a way for students, or strangers in this article, to use language successfully in the academic context.

Literacy and Academic Identity

Individuals begin to understand themselves as well as their status within a specific setting through the use of language (Vygotsky, 1987). Furthermore,

Gee's (2005) work argues that changes in the use of language may bring on concurrent changes in identity. Within a social setting, individuals' ability to read and write plays a significant role in how others see them and also how they see themselves (Davies, 1989; Moje & Luke 2009; Street, 1994). In the K-12 setting, Berzonsky & Kuk (2000) correlate academic identity to academic success. Theorists Moje and Luke (2009) state, "In other words, recognizing literacy practices as social has led many theorists to recognize that people's identities mediate and are mediated by the texts that they read, write, and talk about" (p. 416). This notion of identity becomes central to understanding graduate students within an institution because the reading and writing activities required may have an impact in how they are viewed by a peer. It is reasonable to ask if this identity may have an impact on how well they fit in or on their decisions to continue in the program. Moje and Luke (2009) state,

Learning from a social and cultural perspective involves people in participation, interaction, relationships, and contexts, all of which have implications for how people make sense of themselves and others, identify, and are identified. (p. 416)

Because identity is fluid and complex and embarking on graduate school will involve learning, it is important to understand how students make sense of themselves as graduate students and identify as part of the community they are entering as well as how they are identified by faculty and peers.

Writing Groups in the Academy

Writing is an integral part of graduate school, and while program curricula typically provide students with the skills necessary to conduct research, there is

less institutionalized support for writing development (DeLyser, 2003; Mullen 2001; Wasley, 2008). DeLyser, (2003) states that although students are well prepared for carrying out their research, they are “under-prepared in the skills and techniques that will enable them to present their findings and communicate the insights of their research. No one has taught them how to write” (p. 169). It is important to explore issues related to writing and professional development within the field of academic preparation.

DeLyser teaches a seminar course, Social-Science Writing, to graduate students primarily in the disciplines of geography and anthropology. The course meets once per week for three hours and is divided up into three broad sections. These sections consist of readings from a book about writing, readings from a book or journal article, and finally a piece of student writing that was submitted a week before that is read by the group and reviewed in a workshop during class. The students in this class also have smaller writing assignments, most of which are pieces of their thesis or dissertation. DyLyser (2003) states, “...one of the most important benefits of the seminar comes not from any of the parts alone but from the work done together over the course of the semester: it is the creation of a culture of writing in the class, the formation of a group of students who can talk with each other about their writing, who are able to share their work, and help themselves and one another with the writing process” (p.174). The seminar is limited to 14 students so that each week one student’s work can be reviewed.

Additional scholarship supports the observation that graduate students do not receive formal writing instruction and argues that it is the responsibility of

graduate programs to provide this instruction (Mullen, 2001; Rose & McClafferty, 2001). Scholarship shows that face-to-face interaction with peers through seminars, courses, and support groups provides an environment for discussing and developing writing (Ferguson, 2009). In the Ferguson (2009) study, a Thesis Writing Group (TWG) was formed and made available each semester to all students within the social sciences. Each TWG was capped at 10 students but varied in size from three to six students, who were required to meet every two weeks for two hours for a total of five sessions. Over the 2 1/2 year period studied, a total of 25 students had participated. Each session had a specific focus, such as “the writing process, criticism, reflexivity, structure, and style” (p. 288). These sessions were covered through group discussions and supplemented by recommended readings and at-home reflective writing activities. In addition to this structured component of the studio, the TWG incorporated a significant peer review component wherein peers would distribute their own writing, group members would provide feedback to the instructor/facilitator for compilation, and the instructor/facilitator would review comments at the next session. Participating students completed evaluation forms using a five-point Likert-scale, which asked participants to assess the overall usefulness of the writing group and also to evaluate specifically each part of the studio such as readings, discussion, and peer-review activities. Participants also submitted email comments, which described how feedback from the writing group was different from feedback from their specific faculty advisor. Twenty students responded to the evaluation and submitted feedback. The average score for all items was 4 (5 being the highest),

and all responded that they would recommend the session to a friend. Students said they benefited from improving their writing skills, interaction with peers, and working with students in a variety of fields. Students also reported that they benefitted mentally and emotionally. Writing groups emerge from the literature as one way to help graduate students develop writing skills.

In the United States, writing groups, known early on as literary societies, began forming in institutions during the colonial period. Since that time, writing groups have been defined and constructed in a variety of ways and have been referred to as helping studios, collaborative writing, response groups, team writings, writing laboratories, the round table, writing teams, and workshops, to name a few (Gere, 1987). Regardless of the names or structures of such groups, they provide a way for writers to come together and respond to one another's work. Anne Gere (1987) argues:

Perhaps the most significant commonality among writing groups appears in what they contribute to our understanding of what it means to write. Specifically, writing groups highlight the social dimension of writing. They provide tangible evidence that writing involves human interaction as well as solitary inscription (p. 3).

Writing requires that a dialogue exist between the writer and the context and can only be successful when the written product fits into the discourse of a particular community (Gere, 1987). Writing groups provide writers with a forum in which to practice conversation and collaborative learning. Furthermore, Gere (1987) supports the use of writing groups in an academic setting because "quality assessments of writing reflect a continuing negotiation between writers and their

social context” (p.73). This study uses writing groups as one way to explore how graduate students negotiate their place in the academy.

Stephen L. Fox (1999) goes further to state that understanding collaborative learning and academic learning is a starting point. He proposes further research to provide an in-depth look at what actually occurs in student writing groups and to show how such groups ultimately impact the development of academic literacy (p. 40). This action research study attempted to do this. Greene and Smith (1999) explore how undergraduate students shape their roles as authors in a beginning composition class and how this role is negotiated by culture and context. After reviewing 180 pages of transcripts of collaborative writing sessions, they suggest that students do not naturally acquire an authorship discourse. Collaborative planning can help writers increase their awareness of their own thinking and planning processes (Flower et al., 1993; Greene & Smith, 1999). This collaborative planning approach requires students to play the role either of a writer or of a supporter. Supporters can help writers identify a purpose, their readers, and their key claims. Greene and Smith (1999) conclude, “Our analysis of collaborative planning, limited to a single writing group, leaves us with an increased understanding that learning a new discourse is a dynamic process, one that is not only marked by growth but by conflict as well” (p.169). They go on to say that “the talk about writing that collaborative planning facilitates is talk about how to author texts that become part of the process of making knowledge within a given community, not simply the process of transmitting the extant knowledge of that community” (p. 171). Although this

study specifically looks at a group of undergraduate students, I believe that much of what was learned in the Greene and Smith (1999) study can be useful to understanding this study. Specifically, the use of the Model of Collaborative Planning.

The Planner's Blackboard can help writers focus on the relationship between saying something about a specific topic and to do something to advance a rhetorical purpose. This model asks supporters to pose questions such as: (a) what is your main point/purpose? (b) how will your reader react to this point? And (c) how does your statement here relate to and/or clarify what you say here? (Greene & Smith, 1999, p. 154). Peter Elbow (1981) supports writing groups as a primary way of improving writing, and specifically talks about the positive benefits of feedback from writing groups. In a self-reflection he states:

I suddenly thought about how I don't have the kind of fear of the unknown I used to have when it comes to writing words down or reacting to words. I know very clearly what has caused this change. It's because I have engaged in feedback workshops over the last few years: getting feedback, giving feedback, hearing others give feedback different from mine; having discussions where the goal was not to agree with each other or figure out what is right, but to see the words through the other person's eyes; constant practice in experiencing and re-experiencing what a set of words can do. (Elbow, 1981, p. 272)

In preparation for the peer-led graduate writing group project, students will be asked to read and review comments by Peter Elbow on how to structure writing group feedback.

Most of the limited research on writing groups focuses on how writing groups can help faculty to publish. In 2008, Cuthbert and Spark set out to expand this line of research to see if writing groups could help develop the research and

publication potential of university graduates. In 2005, the GriP (Graduate Researchers in Print) program was initiated “with the aim of supporting higher degree research candidates in the Arts faculty to commence and develop scholarly publications” (p. 80). Participants consisted of 27 students who were divided into four groups of six to nine individuals who met once each month for 10 months for about 2 hours per session. Twenty-five of the twenty-seven participants were completing a research master’s or Ph.D. in the arts and did not have prior research experience. In the GriP program, peer review was structured so that a participant would submit work for review to the facilitator and include a list of questions so reviewers could focus specifically on particular issues. The facilitators distributed this form, and other members were required to read it before the meeting and bring comments. The author was asked to listen to all comments at the next meeting without responding. Once readers’ comments had ceased, the author could ask questions and address comments. Data collection consisted of four 20-40 minute focus groups conducted by the GriP facilitator. Participants were asked to respond to questions about the themes of writing for publication, how much the GriP helped toward writing for publication. Questions such as how participants felt about publication before and after GriP participation were asked.

Additionally, questions about program review such as what was the most helpful and what challenges they found in the peer-review process were asked. All participants expressed positive experiences about the peer review process, and there were no notably negative comments. This study reported that:

GriP participants reported other benefits or ‘soft outcomes’ (Morss & Murray, 2001, p. 35), including: a sense of being ‘supported’ instead of ‘pressured’ to publish; confidence that they knew how to get published; a sense of community with other postgraduates, and increased awareness about what makes a good article (p. 83).

Participants in this program specifically commented that it “highlighted the relationship between learning about other group members’ struggles with writing and their own developing confidence” (p. 84). In another study, *Becoming and Being Writers: The Experience of Doctoral Students in Writing Groups*, written by graduate students who participated in a writing group, Maher et al. (2008) state, “Writing groups have been a powerful way for us to learn about writing and to learn how to write, with and from each other, as well as from experienced writers” (p.264). Peer learning and peer review are part of the framework for participants’ discussion in this study.

Maher et al. (2008) write, “We were not just learning how to write our dissertations; we were learning how to become writers, both doctoral writers and scholarly writers” (p. 266). The authors state, “We explored how our text work was also identity work. The social and emotional dimensions of this experience were critical to how the groups worked for us” (p. 266). The authors are six students in the final stages of their dissertation work. They participated in two different writing groups and wrote the article after documenting what they learned from participation in writing groups. The authors suggest that writing groups should form early in the process of doctoral education so that the students can form working relationships. Also, participants reported that skills and confidence grew and that they came to see themselves as more authoritative.

Theoretical Framework

To frame this action research study, I rely on research and theory in identity and academic literacy studies. Below, I will discuss each of these components in separate sections although they are deeply connected. In the concluding section, I will tie these two areas of research and theory together and discuss how the resulting entity specifically lends itself to this study.

Academic literacies. In this study, I understand graduate student writing as a social practice. This is a central component of the academic literacies model that I will adopt for this study, one that is provided by Lea and Street (1998).

They support a practices approach to research and argue that

Viewing literacy from a cultural and social practice approach, rather than in the terms of educational judgments about good and bad writing, and approaching meanings as contested can give us insights into the nature of academic literacy in particular and academic learning in general. (Lea and Street, 1998, p.33)

The academic literacies model borrowed here was developed from the area of New Literacy Studies (NLS), which considers the nature of literacy as a social practice instead of focusing on skill development (Street, 2003). Lea and Street (1998) argue that there are three primary ways in which to think about student writing and literacy: (1) study skills, (2) academic socialization, and (3) academic literacies. These three perspectives are not mutually exclusive, and they build upon each other. See Figure 1.

The first model, study skills, focuses on technical writing skills such as grammar and punctuation (Lea & Street, 1998). Academic socialization, the second model, incorporates the focus of technical writing skills but considers

these skills in context of acculturating students into the academy (Lea & Street, 1998). Finally, the third part of the model, academic literacies, includes components from study skills and academic socialization models but views literacies as social practices, as ways of knowing and of identity instead of simply as acquisition of skills or acculturation (Lea & Street, 1998). Lea (2004) comments on the strength of the academic literacies approach because, “it does not assume that students are merely acculturated unproblematically into the academic culture” (p.171). Instead, students must have more training and cannot simply acquire necessary knowledge and skills by only working with faculty.

Study skills

Student deficit

- ‘fix it’ : atomized skills; surface language, grammar, spelling
- Sources: behavioral and experimental psychology; programmed learning

Student writing as technical and instrumental skill

Academic socialization

Acculturation of students into academic discourse

- Inculcating students into new ‘culture’; focus on student orientation to learning and interpretation of learning task, e.g. ‘deep’, ‘surface’, ‘strategic’ learning; homogenous ‘culture’; lack of focus on institutional practices, change and power
- Sources: social psychology; anthropology; constructivism

Student writing as transparent medium of representation

Academic literacies

Students’ negotiation of conflicting literacy practices

- Literacies as social practices; at level of epistemology and identities; institutions as sites of/constituted in discourses and power; variety of communicative repertoire, e.g. genres fields, disciplines; switching with respect to linguistic practices, social meanings and identities.
- Sources: ‘new literacy studies’ ; critical discourse analysis; systematic functional linguistics; cultural anthropology

Student writing as meaning making and contested

Note. From Lea, M., & Street, B. V. (1998). Student writing and staff feedback in higher education: An academic literacies approach. *Studies in Higher Education* 23(2),157-72.

Figure 1. Models of Student Writing In Higher Education

She goes on to comment, “That is, students are active participants in the process of meaning-making in the academy, and central to this process are issues

concerned with language, identity, and the contested nature of knowledge” (p. 742). An academic literacies approach informs my understanding of literacy practices and shapes my use of writing groups as a way to understand graduate student writing and identity. Specifically, social spaces (peer-led writing groups) provide students with a semi-structured setting in which they can engage with issues of writing and reflection of meaning.

Identity. Concepts of identity also contribute to the theoretical framework of the present action research study. In the previous review of scholarship, I discussed several studies that explored literacy and identity. Several discussions of identity are found in academic literature. Specifically, to define my theoretical framework, I narrow my focus toward and consider issues of identity presented by both Gee (2000) and Wenger (1998). In *Identity as an Analytical Lens for Research in Education*, Gee (2000) presents four ways of identity: a) Nature-identity, b) Institution-identity, c) Discourse-identity, and d) Affinity-identity. Gee considers Nature-identity to be the result of genetics and Institutional-identity to be related to a position within a particular institution. This identity is not natural; however, exists as a result of institutional structure. The latter two perspectives presented by Gee may be the most important to consider for this study. Gee defines Discourse-identity as an individual trait; however, this trait does not exist without the discourse of other people. The example that Gee provides is the personality characteristic, charismatic. A person can only be charismatic if others see him or her in this way. Finally, an Affinity-identity is defined by a person’s experiences and participation in a unique group.

Gee states that, “What people in the group share, and must share to constitute an affinity group, is allegiance to, access to, and participation in specific practices that provide each of the group’s members the requisite experiences” (p. 105). Gee goes on to argue that in these affinity spaces groups of people “create and sustain group affiliations” through specific practices” (p. 105). Examples found in Gee’s work are most often discussing virtual communities as affinity spaces. There are specific sets of rules within these spaces that individuals must follow and newcomers recognize and follow to create this community. In the case of this research study; however, I do not adopt these views as a primary lens because classrooms do not usually reflect affinity spaces. Specifically, the classroom in which I conducted this action research did not have traits of affinity-spaces.

Since the definitions of identity presented by Gee were not the best lens for this study, I adopted a community of practice approach. Wenger’s (1998) idea of Communities of Practice is very much centered on the master-apprentice model. In this situation, the faculty person is a master and the students must learn to be like him. This is not so that they can specifically move forward in higher education to become faculty, but so that they can write in a way that is acceptable to the ‘master’ and be successful in graduate school. The students in the Graduate Writing Project did not show signs of competition or allegiance to a specific set of practices within the classroom (Affinity-identity), instead they were working to master a practice that was accepted by faculty. For this reason, I adopted Wenger’s definition of identity.

Concepts of identity used in this action research are influenced by Wenger (1998), who discusses socially defined identities:

An identity, then, is a layering of events of participation and reification by which our experience and its social interpretations inform each other. As we encounter our effects on the world and develop our relations with others, these layers build upon each other to produce our identity as a very complex interweaving of participative experience and reification projections. Bringing the two together through the negotiation of meaning, we construct who we are. (p. 151)

Graduate student identity, then, is constructed in the classroom or other contexts such as the Graduate Writing Project. Wenger argues, that “Developing a practice requires the formation of a community whose members can engage with one another and thus acknowledge each other as participants” (p. 149). Graduate students who engage with each other in writing groups will negotiate their identity, or ways of being in the academic context. Identity, in the sense that Wenger discusses it, is not simply a negotiated or changing self-image or reflection of how others view someone. Critically for this discussion, identity is defined “also because it is produced as a lived experience of participation in specific communities” (p. 151). Informed by Wenger, I view the writing groups as a practice and a space in which a community will form and identities will be negotiated through activities that are an integral part of the academy. If I were researching the development of students in a traditional research based program structured to produce faculty members, the application of identity definitions may be different.

Conclusion. In this action research, I relate Wenger’s (1998) definition of a socially constructed identity to Lea and Street’s (1998) proposed model of

academic literacy. In the academic literacy approach, literacy is embedded within a social practice (writing groups for this study), and within these social practices identity is constantly being negotiated as graduate students rely on their experiences and interactions to build identity. Graduate students are being asked to write in new ways (within a new social context), and their identity is shaped by how they see themselves fitting in and by their ability to be successful and contribute to the knowledge in their field.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this action research was to use in-class peer-led writing groups as a way of understanding graduate-student identity and academic writing. According to Stringer (2007), action research provides, “a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives. . . action research focuses on specific situations and localized solutions” (p. 1). Furthermore, the Center for Collaborative Action Research states, “Action research as a method is scientific in which the effects of an action are observed through a systematic process of examining the evidence. The results of this type of research are practical, relevant, and can inform theory” (Riel, 2010, para.1). Action research was an appropriate model for this study since the purpose was to inform the graduate program leaders about how graduate students in the program shape their academic identity and develop academic writing skills. The actions outlined in this study were designed to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: To what extent does graduate students’ writing processes (measured by an Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing) change during one semester while participating in a writing group?

Research Question 2: What successes and struggles with academic writing do first-semester graduate students experience?

Research Question 3: What characteristics of the academic literacy model emerge during writing group meetings?

Research Question 4: In what ways do participants in the Graduate Writing Project shape their graduate-student academic identity?

Description of the Graduate Writing Project Innovation

The Graduate Writing Project (GWP) occurred during the Fall 2011 academic term (August 18, 2011 – December 8, 2011) and was embedded in an introductory course, which I refer to as GWP 500: An Interdisciplinary Introduction. The GWP provided graduate students with in-class time to discuss, review, and revise their course writing in a supportive, non-threatening environment.

Setting. This action research study took place at one suburban campus of a multi-campus, research-intensive university in the Southwestern United States. This campus is composed of three colleges serving approximately 9,000 undergraduate and graduate students: a college of education, a business college, and a liberal arts college.

GWP 500 was a required seminar-style course for students in one Master of Arts program in the liberal arts college. Students were required to do readings each week and come to class prepared to discuss concepts of interdisciplinarity. Class met each Thursday evening from 6:05 to 8:55 pm. Writing groups met for approximately 45 minutes near the beginning or, more frequently, near the end of the class.

Sampling. This was a purposeful-convenience sample (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009; Nardi, 2003). The liberal arts college currently enrolls 180 graduate students in four master's-level programs. Due to time constraints, it was

not possible to study graduate students in every program. I selected this program for the following reasons: (a) established in 2001, it is the most mature masters program in the college; (b) faculty and students in this program expressed a need for writing support; and (c) academic interests among the students in this program were more diverse than in the other programs.

Furthermore, I was interested in understanding academic identity and writing at the beginning of a graduate program, and a majority of enrolled students in GWP 500 were expected to be in their first or second semester of graduate study. When I selected this sample, I had no reason to believe that students enrolled in the course during the Fall 2011 would differ from students enrolled in previous semesters, since the number of applications remained steady, requirements for admission had not changed, and there were no new recruitment efforts targeting specific populations of students.

Participants. Participants for this study included graduate students enrolled in GWP 500: An Interdisciplinary Introduction. There were a total of 21 students enrolled in this course on the first night of class (August 18, 2011) and a total of 19 who attended the first class meeting. Four students dropped the course, and there were a total of 15 students who completed the course. Of those 15 students, 14 students agreed to have all or part of their coursework analyzed as a part of this study. One student opted out completely. For the purposes of this study, students enrolled in the course were randomly assigned to four different writing groups. Three groups had four members and one group had three members. The writing groups would meet in the normally assigned classroom;

however, groups often selected to meet in the lounge and hall areas outside of the room to provide them with a quieter atmosphere to work in.

Demographics and Educational Background. Four of the fourteen students who completed the course were males and ten of the students were females. Of the fourteen participants, eight students (57%) were under the age of thirty-five and two students (13%) were over the age of fifty. Eight students (57%) enrolled in GWP 500 had not taken any previous graduate-level coursework, and four students (29%) had taken nine or fewer credit hours. Two students had taken more than fifteen credit hours prior to completing this course; they had also received masters degrees.

During the Fall 2011 semester, most participants (79%) were enrolled in only one or two courses in addition to GWP 500. Two students (14%) were enrolled in four courses and one student was enrolled in just the GWP 500 course. Graduate students who participated in this study reported that they were pursuing the degree for various reasons. Most students (57%) reported that the degree was for personal development and 36% of the students were using this degree as a stepping-stone toward further schooling. Another 50% were using this degree either to advance or change their careers.

Graduate students in this action research study reported diverse undergraduate backgrounds including English, Art, Psychology, Biology, Management, Biology, Journalism, Education, and Political Science. As graduate students, they were also interested in diverse fields of study, including History,

English Literature, Integrative Health, Digital Media, Cultural Studies, Visual Culture, Sociology, Policy, Religion, and Gender Studies.

Action Plan. Data was collected during the Fall 2011 academic term (August 18, 2011 – December 8, 2011). Below, I provide a detailed description of the researcher action taken each week. The weeks listed below correspond to each of the 16 weeks spanned by the study. To view data collected each week, see Appendix B.

Preparation. To answer my research questions, it was necessary to maintain participant confidentiality and be able to link each data tool and observation to a specific participant. On the morning before the first GWP 500 class meeting, I accessed the most up-to-date roster online. I assigned each student with a participant ID composed of a combination of their first name, last name, and position on the roster. I then placed this participant ID on each of the following documents: the Study Cover Letter, the Graduate Student Identity Survey, and the Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing.

Week One (August 18, 2011). This was the first GWP 500 class meeting of the semester. At the beginning of the course, the instructor walked the students through the course syllabus. The Graduate Writing Project was embedded in the course and included in each week of the syllabus. After reviewing the syllabus with the class, the instructor introduced me to the class. I provided a brief introduction to the GWP and my basis for wanting to do this research. I have included a copy of the presentation in Appendix C. Additionally, I distributed the participant consent forms (Appendix D). After distributing the consent forms, I

distributed two surveys: Inventory for Graduate Processes in Writing (Appendix E) and the Graduate Student Identity Survey (Appendix F). It took students approximately 20 minutes to complete the consent form and both surveys. Students turned them in to me immediately after completing them.

Week Two (August 25, 2011). This was the second week of the semester and students had their first self-reflection paper due. From the literature, I knew that it was important for the groups to have time to discuss how they would want their writing group to function and also give participants an opportunity to reflect on writing and the role it has played in their academic, professional, and personal life. I had a limited amount of time, so instead of reviewing their first self-reflection paper I chose to have each group complete activities that would facilitate discussion.

First, I did a brief 10 minute presentation based on information presented in Peter Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers* which provided students with ideas on how they might go about arranging their writing group (see Appendix G). Topics included the suggestion of using a moderator, timer, and arranging how work would be submitted to group members. Then, I provided each group with a handout to work out some of this information. Additionally, I had students do a brief timeline reflection activity. Participants were given a blank timeline and asked to write positive writing experiences on the top of the line and negative writing experiences below the line. Participants were then given about 15 minutes to complete this. After they wrote their experiences on the timeline, they were asked to choose one experience listed and free-write about it. After they did

this, they had time to share with their group members about their writing experience.

I did not have enough time to complete these activities in the way that I would have liked. I needed between 30 and 40 more minutes in order to have had enough time for the participants to really work through their group practices and give each person an opportunity to share his or her experiences.

Week Three (September 1, 2011). Participants had their first blog entry due this week. On Monday I uploaded three blog prompts (see Appendix H) and sent an announcement via Blackboard to have students complete them. There were a total of 16 students enrolled in the course at this time and I received 100% participation.

Week Four (September 8, 2011). Participants had their second writing group meeting and the first opportunity to review their first Response to Reading assignment. During this week, I audio taped group one and attempted to rotate between the other groups to take notes.

Week Five (September 15, 2011). Participants had their second blog entry due this week. On Monday I uploaded three blog prompts and sent an announcement via Blackboard to have students complete them. There were a total of 15 students enrolled in the course at this time and I received 92% participation.

Week Six (September 22, 2011). Per the GWP 500 syllabus, there was no scheduled activity for the Graduate Writing Project during this week.

Week Seven (September 29, 2011). Participants had their third writing group meeting with their second opportunity to review peer writing. Students were given a handout to help them formulate questions during the writing groups so as to focus on areas of improvement that were most important. I observed Group 2 this week with only two members present. Additionally, Group 3 was audio taped. Participants had received their first round of faculty feedback on an assignment, so reviewing their work in this context was the primary focus.

Week eight (October 6, 2011). Per the GWP 500 syllabus, there was no scheduled activity for the Graduate Writing Project during this week.

Week nine (October 13, 2011). Participants had their third blog entry due this week. On Monday, I uploaded three blog prompts and sent an announcement via Blackboard to have students complete them. There was 100% participation.

Week ten (October 20, 2011). Participants met in their fourth writing group meeting and had the third opportunity to review writing. This week, students focused on Response Paper #2. Group 2 was audio taped and chose to work outside of the classroom to focus better. I observed Group 3.

Week eleven (October 27, 2011). Per the GWP 500 syllabus, there was no scheduled activity for the Graduate Writing Project during this week.

Week twelve (November 3, 2011). Per the GWP 500 syllabus, there was no scheduled activity for the Graduate Writing Project during this week.

Week thirteen (November 10, 2011). There were several students absent during this class session. As a result, students merged into new self-selected writing groups. This session primarily served as a planning session for students

who were beginning to write a portion of their final assignment, a Literature Review. In addition to the small group meetings, the instructor had brief one-on-one meetings with students in the course.

Week fourteen (November 17, 2011). Per the GWP 500 syllabus, there was no scheduled activity for the Graduate Writing Project during this week.

Week fifteen (November 24, 2011). Per the GWP 500 syllabus, there was no scheduled activity for the Graduate Writing Project during this week.

Week sixteen (December 1, 2011). This was the final class meeting of the semester. In class, I handed out the post copy of GSIS and IGPW and a demographics sheet (Appendix J). The surveys were loaded with the same participant ID's, and the demographic sheet was collected anonymously.

Week seventeen (December 8, 2011). Participants had their final blog entry due this week. On Monday, I uploaded three blog prompts and sent an announcement via Blackboard to have students complete them. There were a total of 15 students enrolled in the course at this time and I received 85% participation.

Mixed-Method Research Design

I used a mixed-methods approach to address the research questions. Greene and Caracelli (2003) propose four reasons to use a mixed-method research design. Two of these reasons, being pragmatic and putting substantive understanding first, are particularly applicable to this study. The pragmatic approach allowed me, the researcher, to consider the context when designing and carrying out the inquiry. Additionally, the research process was not made to align

with certain paradigms, but instead, to enhance understanding of issues of writing and identity, that are important to my context of interest (Greene & Caracelli, 2003). Pragmatism, as a research approach, allowed me to select the research methods and analysis techniques that were best suited to answer my research questions.

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) list several general characteristics of pragmatism and here I discuss three that are most applicable to this research study: (1) Pragmatism views current truth, meaning, and knowledge as tentative and changing over time. What we obtain on a daily basis in research should be viewed as provisional truths, (2) Pragmatism endorses practical theory (theory that informs effective practice, praxis), and (3) Pragmatism has high regard for the reality and influence of the inner world of human experience in action.

The purpose of using a mixed-methods design was complementarity, which “seeks broader, deeper, and more comprehensive social understandings by using methods that tap into different facets or dimensions of the same complex phenomenon,” (Greene, 2007, p. 101). With this purpose in mind, I followed an across-stage mixed-model design by which I collected quantitative and qualitative data throughout the stages of the research process (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The data-collection tool was carefully selected in order to best answer each research question.

I created a complementarity table (Appendix K) which provides a detailed description of the data type, collection tool, and specific construct used to answer each question. Research Questions 1 is informed only by quantitative data.

Multiple qualitative tools inform research Questions 2 and 3. Research Question 4 is informed by a quantitative survey instrument and multiple qualitative tools. Qualitative data were collected through researcher field notes, writing group transcriptions, participant blogs, student writing samples and interviews. The purpose of collecting these specific data was to provide information on ordinary events in a natural setting. The data collected allowed me to explore the meaning that people give to their experiences in the social world (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data Sources

Table 1 provides a summary of the data instruments collected, type of data, related research question, and general collection time-frame, and how they are applicable to my research questions.

Each data source was purposefully selected to provide understanding of complex issues of academic writing and identity. The complementarity table summarizes how components of specific research tools complement one another to best answer one or more of the research questions.

Table 1

Data Informing Research Questions

Research Question	Pre and Post Measures			During		Post
	Quantitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative
	IPGW	GSIS	Perspectives Paper	Blog Responses	Writing Group Meetings	Interviews
1. To what extent do writing of graduate students (measured by an Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing) change during one semester while participating in a writing group?	X					
2. What successes and struggles with academic writing do first-semester graduate students experience?				X	X	X
3. What characteristics of the academic literacy model emerge during writing group meetings?				X	X	X
4. In what ways to participants in the GWP shape their graduate-student academic identity?		X	X	X	X	X

Note. IPGW = Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing; GSIS = Graduate Student Identity Survey

Inventory of processes in graduate writing (IPGW). To answer Research Question 3 [*To what extent do graduate students' writing processes (measured by an Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing) change during one semester while participating in a writing group?*] I administered the Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing developed and validated by Lavelle and Bushrow (2007). This 67-item forced response inventory uses the following four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The inventory has the following seven factor areas:

- Factor 1: Elaborative – describes students who have a deep personal attachment to writing.
- Factor 2: Low-Self Efficacy – describes students who do not have confidence in writing and do not expect to be successful in writing tasks.
- Factor 3: No Revision – describes students who are resistant to revision processes.
- Factor 4: Intuitive – describes students who visualize what they are writing about.
- Factor 5: Scientist – describes students who have a well formulated argument before approaching any writing task.
- Factor 6: Task Oriented – describes students who do not use much self-expression in writing, but instead follows the rules.
- Factor 7: Sculptor – describes students who get all of their content out and then go back to refine it.

I selected this instrument because it can “help students to understand themselves better as writers in terms of their motives and strategies, and raise awareness of writing options” (Lavelle & Bushrow, 2007, p. 807). The Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing was developed from another instrument designed for undergraduate populations, the Inventory of Processes in College Composition (IPIC). Although I was unable to find literature using the IPGW as a pre- and posttest, studies have used the IPIC as a pre and post instrument (Biggs et al., 1999). Additionally, in the discussion of the IPGW development article, Lavelle and Bushrow (2007) recommend that future studies be done using the IPGW as a measure of effectiveness for writing interventions.

Reliability of instrument. During development, Lavelle and Bushrow (2007) computed a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of reliability. This is a commonly used measure of reliability and captures in quantitative form the extent to which particular items in a survey measure a specified construct (Christman & Van Aelst, 2006). Typically, a .7 is considered acceptable (Nunnally, 1978). Other research provides the following cut-off rules for Cronbach’s alpha “ $\alpha > .9$ – Excellent, $\alpha > .8$ – Good, $\alpha > .7$ – Acceptable, $\alpha > .6$ – Questionable, $\alpha > .5$ – Poor, and $\alpha < .5$ – Unacceptable” (George and Mallery, 2003, p. 231). Reliability of each item in the IPGW ranged from .42 to .82, with only Factor 5: Scientist, Factor 6: Task Oriented, and Factor 7: Sculptor falling below a .6. In the Spring 2010 I piloted the IPGW with graduate students in the M.A. in Interdisciplinary Studies program (N=5). I found similar results, with reliability of each item

ranging from .53 - .78 with Factor 5 and Factor 7 falling below .6. The results of my Cronbach's alpha may be affected by the small sample size.

Data collection. The Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing was collected two different times during the Fall 2011 semester. The pre-assessment was collected during the first GWP 500 class meeting on August 18, 2011. I administered a hard copy of the assessment to each student. The instructor provided participants with time in class to complete the inventories. I collected them after they were completed. After collecting the assessment, I realized that item number 67 had been left off of the copy of the instrument. To correct this error, I sent an email to the class with the item question and the answers and received 100% of responses back. The post assessment was collected on the last GWP class meeting on December 1, 2011. The instructor provided participants with time in class to complete the inventory. I collected them after they were complete.

Graduate student identity survey (GSIS). To answer Research Question 4 (*In what ways do participants in the Graduate Writing Project shape their graduate-student academic identity?*) I administered the Graduate Student Identity Survey that I developed and piloted during the Spring 2011 semester. The Graduate Student Identity Survey consists of 16 questions arranged in the following three constructs: Role as Graduate Student (questions 1-6), Academic Writing and Identity (questions 7-11), and Non-Academic Characteristics and Identity (questions 12-16). The survey uses the following four-point Likert-type scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Survey questions

were modeled on the Development and Validation of the Self-Identity Inventory (SII): A Multicultural Identity Development Instrument (Sevig, Highlen, & Adams, 2000) and the Guide to Constructing Self Efficacy-Scales (Bandura, 2005).

I selected this survey to be one data source that can yield information about graduate students' perceptions of their role as a graduate student, relationship to academic work, and non-academic characteristics that may impact identity. The purpose of this instrument was to have participants think about a few areas or characteristics that are part of or may influence their perceptions of academic identity. For example, the first construct, Role as Graduate Student, includes six questions related to the participants' perception of their role as a graduate student. Items such as, "Overall, being a graduate student has very little to do with how I feel about myself," will help provide one quantitative source of information to help develop a broad picture of how participants connect to this graduate-student social role. The second construct includes five questions that explore students' academic writing and identity. Items such as, "When I write an academic paper, the choices I make are deliberate and reflect who I am," may inform me of how strongly students perceive writing as a part of their identity. Finally, the third construct includes six questions that explore students' non-academic characteristics. Items such as, "I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge," may inform how personal qualities like resilience may be related to students' ability to adapt to academic challenges experienced during graduate school.

Reliability of instrument. During the spring of 2011, I piloted this instrument (N=21) and computed a Cronbach's alpha test of reliability for each of the three constructs. The Cronbach's alpha for each of the three constructs ranged from .78 - .86 which are acceptable coefficients (Nunnally, 1978; George & Mallery, 2003). I also conducted a Cronbach's alpha test of reliability for each survey item. No item was below .65 and although it is below the accepted .70, this may be result of the small sample size (Nunnally, 1978).

Data collection. The Graduate Student Identity Survey was collected two different times during the Fall 2011 semester. The preassessment was collected during the first GWP class meeting on August 18, 2011. I administered a hard copy of the assessment to each student. The instructor provided participants with time in class to complete the inventory. I collected them after they were completed. The postassessment was collected on the last GWP class meeting on December 1, 2011. The instructor provided participants with time in class to complete the inventory. I collected them after they were completed.

Self-Reflective Writing Sample. To answer research question (*In what ways do participants in the Graduate Writing Project shape their graduate-student academic identity?*) students in GWP were required to write two essays during the Fall 2011 semester. The first essay was assigned with the following explanation:

“My Interdisciplinary Perspective” should describe your disciplinary background, including the level of competency that you possess in a given discipline or disciplines (or other knowledge formations). It should go on to state what interests, motives, or questions bring you to interdisciplinary studies, as well the kinds of research problems that you might pursue in

the MAIS program. The essay should conclude with your working definition of interdisciplinarity. (GWP 500: Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies Syllabus)

The second essay was assigned with the following explanation:

“My Interdisciplinary Perspective Now” should describe the key insights about the nature of interdisciplinary studies that you have acquired during the course of the semester, with particular attention to those insights that bear on the kinds of research problems you might pursue in the MAIS program. Of course, the essay should conclude with your revised definition of interdisciplinarity, based on the knowledge you have garnered. (GWP 500: Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies Syllabus)

One purpose of collecting these pre- and postwriting samples was to evaluate them based on a rubric to look at the development of conventional writing skills over the period of one semester. The ability to write and the development of necessary writing skills may influence the development of a student’s academic identity. In addition to material for assessment of conventional writing skills, these writing samples provided a qualitative data source that reflected graduate students’ perceptions of their academic identity at two points in the semester.

Data collection. Each self-reflective essay was assigned in the GWP 500 syllabus and submitted by students directly to the instructor of the course. I then worked with the instructor and individual students to receive copies of each essay in electronic format. The first essay was due during week two, on August 25th, 2011. The second essay was due during the final week of the semester on December 12th, 2011.

Participant Reflection Blog. To answer Research Question 1, (*What successes and struggles with academic writing do first-semester graduate students experience?*), participants were asked to keep a reflection journal in the

form of an online blog. These writing samples were a qualitative data source. Responses to the blog prompts reflected graduate students' experiences with academic writing over the course of the semester. Additionally, responses also helped to reflect participants' perceptions of their experience as a graduate student.

Data collection. The blogs were set up in the Blackboard course environment. Blog entries were submitted during week 3, week 5, week 8 and week 15. I posted one to three prompts and sent out an announcement via the Blackboard Announcement system. Blogs were completed outside of class on weeks where there were not in-class writing group meetings scheduled. The blogs were not assigned points for the class; however, they were listed as required in the syllabus and there was a 100% response rate on Blog 1, a 92% response rate on Blog 2 and 3 and an 85% response rate on Blog 4.

Researcher Observations. To answer Research Question 3 (*What characteristics of the academic literacy model emerge during writing group meetings?*) I conducted observations of writing group meetings. Participant observation is a qualitative research method, "whose objective is to help researchers learn the perspectives held by study populations" (Mack et al., 2005, p. 13). Completed participant observation field notes were one data source that informed a broad understanding of the academic context in which the participants lived. Mack et al. (2005) state that, "observing and participating are integral to understanding the breadth and complexities of the human experience" (p. 14). Field notes from participant observations were used to check against other data

sources and what participants reported in the interviews (discussed later). Additionally, participant observation fulfilled another purpose of this action research study – to explore and explain the experience of graduate students who participated in a peer-led writing group. The interaction of these data helped provide information from different dimensions, fulfilling a key component of complementarity mixed-method design.

Data collection. Participant observations occurred throughout the study. Each week that writing groups met, I audio recorded the entire group meeting of one specific group. According to Mack et al. (2005), participant observation is inherently subjective and relies heavily on the memory of the researcher. I used the audio recording to minimize the reliance on my memory. During the first week that writing groups met, I attempted to rotate among the three groups that were not being taped. After reflecting on this, and reviewing my notes from the first week, I felt that this was disruptive since I had to rotate often. In subsequent weeks, I continued to audiotape just one group but instead I sat with a separate group and made notes about that group for the remainder of the writing group meeting. There were times that I could overhear notable conversation in groups that were not being observed or recorded. When this occurred, I did make notations of that as well. I was not sure what to expect from the writing groups, so I approached my observation with little format and simply attempted to watch and make note of the types of conversations and interactions that seemed significant. Some things that I collected information on were: (a) key conversation points, (b) types of peer-review comments, (c) responses to peer-review.

Threat to validity. Furthermore, Smith and Glass (1987) identify the Hawthorne Effect as one threat to internal validity, or the truth about inferences and causal relationships (Trochim, 2006, para. 1). This effect refers to when participants in a study act differently when they know they are under study. To minimize this, I tried to remain unobtrusive during my observations. Typically, I would sit just slightly outside of the group and only offer opinion when directly spoken too. From my observations, I do not feel that this was a significant factor in this study. Each group (those being observed and not) seemed to act in much the same way. Additionally, there was evidence on the audio transcriptions of groups commenting that their tape must be boring because they weren't talking (instead used some time to silently review papers). So, I feel that they were limited on time and approached their work in much the same way that they would have if not under observation.

Interviews. To answer Research Questions 2 and 5, I conducted four interviews (26% of the sample) which “provide opportunities for participants to describe the situation in their own terms” (Stringer, 2007, p. 69). The entire GWP 500 class was invited to participate. Interviewing participants provided me the opportunity to explore details of their experiences, but also served as a way for participants to legitimate their experiences (Stringer, 2007). Interviews were a supplemental data source to confirm observations and learn about experiences from the study. As the interviewer, I avoided having discussion with the participants and allowed them maximum opportunity to express their own opinions. Additionally, I was very flexible with the schedule and location of the

interview, allowing students to select time and place where they felt comfortable. Three interviews occurred on campus and one interview was conducted at a nearby Starbucks. The interview protocol asked four sets of questions grouped in the following constructs: (a) student experiences, (b) external experiences, (c) writing, (d) identity (see Appendix L).

To ensure that my understanding and collection of information is accurate, I conducted member checks during my analysis of interview transcripts and upon final write-up of the results. This validation strategy allowed me to report back a brief summary of findings to participants. The purpose is to collect feedback to ensure the accuracy of the findings and increase credibility of results. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Bryman & Burgess, 2003).

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Findings

Chapter 3 provided a description of each data source and information related to the organization, collection, and validity of each instrument. In this chapter I provide a detailed description of the data analysis techniques used to explore graduate student identity and academic writing, as well as the findings of this analysis. In Chapter 5 I will discuss the complementarity methodology used to answer my four research questions and present the answers themselves.

I used both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques to gain an understanding of graduate student identity and academic writing during multiple in-class writing group meetings. The first section, Quantitative Data, contains the analysis and findings of the Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing (IPGW) and the Graduate Student Identity Survey (GSIS). The second section, Qualitative Data, contains the analysis and findings of the graduate student blog entries, writing group-meeting transcriptions, interview transcriptions, interdisciplinarity perspective papers, and researcher field notes.

Quantitative Data

To analyze the quantitative data collected from the two pre- and postinstruments (Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing and Graduate Student Identity Survey), I input data into a statistical software package, SPSS 19. Each instrument followed the same Likert scale responses, encoded as follows: Strongly Agree was recorded as “4”, Agree as “3”, Disagree as “2”, and Strongly Disagree as “1”. When questions were worded negatively, the responses were

encoded thus: Strongly Agree was recorded as “1”, Agree as “2”, Disagree as “3” and Strongly Disagree as “4”. When a participant did not respond to an item on the inventory, I calculated the average response of all respondents for that question and used this score to fill in the missing answer. When participants responded by circling two responses, or the space between two responses, I averaged the numerical value. For example, if a respondent circled the space between Strongly Agree “4” and Agree “3”, I calculated a “3.5” for that response.

Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing. To address Research Question 1, [*To what extent do writing processes of graduate students (measured by an Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing) change during one semester while participating in a writing group?*], the IPGW was analyzed to determine the reliability of the seven subscales using SPSS 19. Cronbach’s alpha values were determined for each of the subscales based on pre-test responses of the participants. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for this study are presented in Table 2 along with the number of items and Lavelle and Bushrow’s (2007) alpha values.

After running the test of reliability, a Repeated Measures Multivariate Analysis of Variance (RM ANOVA) was conducted to analyze the means from the Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing. The RM ANOVA of the time of testing variable (pre- or post- test) was not significant, multivariate $F(7, 7) = 2.72, p \leq .11$. Thus, there was no difference in the pre- and posttest means across the seven variables. See Table 3.

Table 2

Cronbach's alpha Coefficient of Reliability on the Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing

Factor Subscale	# of Items Represented in Factor Subscale	Cronbach's alpha Coefficient of Reliability	
		Lavelle and Bushrow	Current Research (Pre/Post)
Elaborative	12	.82	.900
Low-Self Efficacy	11	.63	.417
No Revision	9	.80	.904
Intuitive	12	.77	.601
Scientist	9	.43	.622
Task-Oriented	8	.56	.458
Sculptor	6	.42	.623

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviation for Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing

Variable	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Elaborative	2.91	.46	3.00	.37
Low-Self Efficacy	2.87	.46	2.93	.34
No Revision	2.87	.29	2.74	.48
Intuitive	3.06	.29	2.98	.31
Scientist	2.93	.33	2.92	.32
Task-Oriented	2.75	.31	2.68	.27
Sculptor	2.69	.39	2.75	.32

Although there were no statistically significant differences, the means were examined. The difference between pre- and posttest Low Self-Efficacy variable was the only one that indicated some level of difference between the means. A brief discussion of this finding and directions for future research will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Graduate Student Identity Survey. To answer Research Question 4, [*In what way do participants in the Graduate Writing Project (GWP) shape their*

graduate student academic identity?], the Graduate Student Identity Survey (GSIS) was analyzed to determine the reliability of the subscales using SPSS 19. Cronbach's alpha values were determined for each of the three subscales, Role as Graduate Student, Academic Writing and Identity, and Non-Academic Characteristics of Identity, based on pretest responses of the participants. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient values are .79, .84, and .77 respectively.

After running the test of reliability, a Repeated Measures Multivariate Analysis of Variance (RM ANOVA) was conducted to analyze the means from the Graduate Student Identity Survey. The RM ANOVA of the time of testing variable (pre- or posttest) was not significant, multivariate $F(3, 11) = 1.52, p \leq .27$. Thus, there was no difference in the pre- and posttest means across the three variables. See Table 4.

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviation for Graduate Student Identity Survey

Variable	Pretest		Posttest	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Role as Graduate Student	2.85	.46	2.92	.48
Academic Writing and Identity	3.02	.51	3.24	.40
Non-Academic Characteristics of Identity	3.26	.41	3.37	.39

Although there were no statistically significant differences, the means were examined. The difference between pre- and posttest Academic Writing and Identity variable was the only one that indicated some level of difference between the means; however, it was not statistically significant. Although there was no change reported between the pre- and posttest Graduate Student Identity Survey, I

use the reported mean response to each factor category to answer Research Question 3 and Research Question 4.

Table 5

Mean Response on Graduate Student Identity Survey

Category	Mean Pre (N=14)	Mean Post (N=14)
Role as Graduate Student		
Overall, being a graduate student has very little to do with how I feel about myself.	2.71	3.00
In general, being a graduate student is an important part of my self-image.	3.07	3.00
Being a graduate student is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am.	3.00	3.14
I have a strong sense of belonging to an academic community.	3.00	3.14
Being a graduate student is an important reflection of who I am.	3.07	3.14
Being a graduate student is a major factor in my social relationships.	2.21	2.07
Academic Writing and Identity		
I feel comfortable sharing my academic writing with peers.	2.80	3.29
I feel comfortable sharing my academic writing with faculty.	3.07	3.50
I am confident in my ability to express my ideas in writing.	3.14	3.29
When I write an academic paper, the choices I make are deliberate and reflect who I am.	3.14	3.07
Academic writing is disconnected from who I feel that I am.	2.00	1.86
Non-Academic Characteristics of Identity		
I am successful in my job.	3.35	3.36
I am satisfied with my life.	3.21	3.36
I have achieved a goal that took many years.	3.14	3.29
I feel like I am making progress toward my long-term goals	3.28	3.43
I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge	3.35	3.43
I am comfortable taking on leadership roles in my life.	3.21	3.36

A brief discussion of this finding and directions for future research will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Qualitative Data

To analyze each qualitative data source (graduate student blog entries, writing group-meeting transcriptions, interview transcriptions, interdisciplinarity

perspective papers, and researcher field notes), I applied a combination of grounded theory and *a priori* (Weber, 1990) coding to discover and describe concepts related to my research questions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory is the discovery of theory from data that is systematically obtained and analyzed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The purpose was to establish theory that can be useful in explanation, interpretation, and application.

For each data source, I engaged in multiple stages of coding. During the first stage I used a form of inductive coding described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Specifically, data were collected and imported into qualitative analysis software, HyperResearch. I then reviewed each data source paragraph-by-paragraph and line-by-line to look for initial codes during this open coding stage. For each data source, I followed this process three to five times. Open coding allowed me to label discrete instances from the data and assign any initial code that I felt was applicable and to revise the codes on subsequent readings (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This initial open coding was important because, “to uncover, name, and develop concepts, we must open up the text and expose the thoughts, ideas, and meanings contained therein” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 102). After the open coding stage was complete, I reviewed each qualitative data source, looking specifically to create categories and discover themes from the open codes that would be particularly relevant to answering and discussing my research questions. In the following sections, I present the themes that emerged and provide specific information about the *a priori* codes with which I approached the data. Table 6 summarizes this information.

Table 6

Themes: Graduate Student Identity and Academic Writing

Theme	Codes	Data Source*	Research Question
1. Graduate students attribute their successes in writing to previous experiences.	Success in Writing; Professional Experience in Writing; Previous Academic Experience; Personal Experiences; Professional Experience.	1; 5	2
2. Graduate students experience struggles related primarily to academic quality and faculty expectations.	Struggles in Writing; Grammar; Succinct and Expression of Ideas; Cohesion of Ideas in Writing; Appropriateness to Graduate Level	1; 5	2
3. Graduate students negotiate ways of being in the academy through figuring out expectations of faculty and program.	Expectations of Faculty; Expectations of Program; Expectations of Assignments.	1; 2; 5	3, 4
4. Work done in the writing group meetings shows evidence of meaning-making for the graduate students.	Change in Perspectives; Construction of Knowledge; Formation of Ideas; Shaping Definition of Interdisciplinarity.	1; 2; 5	3
5. The interdisciplinary focus of the M.A program was critically important to graduate students in the GWP.	Personal Impact; Choice of Program.	3; 4	3, 4
6. Participants' role as graduate students felt most strongly in contexts that include academic activity.	Role as Graduate Student; Location; Relationships with Faculty; Relationships with Students; Leadership Role; Engagement.	1	3, 4
7. Students acknowledge change and increasingly identify themselves as writers.	Change in Perspectives, Sense of Self, Voice in Writing	1; 2; 5	3, 4

*participant logs = 1; writing group discussions = 2; interview transcripts = 3; interdisciplinary perspective papers = 4; research field notes = 5

Writing Experiences. I was interested in understanding how first-semester graduate students experienced academic writing. One way in which I tried to understand academic writing was by exploring to what participants attributed their successes and struggles in writing. Data on writing experiences were primarily collected from participant blogs. In the blog entry for week 1, students were asked to reflect on their experience in writing the first short paper, “My Perspective on Interdisciplinary Studies”. Later in the semester, students were asked to reflect on either one success or one struggle related to their academic writing. After the initial rounds of open coding described earlier in this chapter, I began to organize the codes into two distinct categories: experiences of success and experiences of struggles.

Theme 1: Graduate students attribute their success in writing to previous experiences. Statements from participants’ blog entries indicate that previous experiences, both academic and personal, are a primary factor contributing to feelings of success in academic writing. Specifically, 50% (n=7) of Graduate Writing Project (GWP) participants indicated that their personal or professional experiences and prior academic knowledge were an important factor in their success with writing.

One student’s blog entry indicated that she felt successful because the paper topic allowed her to incorporate personal experiences and subject area content that she was interested in, “The success I had in writing last week’s paper was that I had no shortage of ideas or content to write about. Because it was about my experience and areas of interest” (personal communication, September 1,

2011). Similarly, another student's blog entry indicated that he felt successful because he was familiar with the disciplinary topics he selected to write about:

When I set out to write my first profile paper, one success that comes to mind is that I knew my topics, disciplines. I was able to include the three disciplines that I am most interested in, Gender Studies, Media, and Counseling. My interest made it easy for me to elaborate on each topic because they were relevant to my undergraduate work but also to my personal life. I engage with these topics almost on a daily basis. Having academic knowledge and experience to draw upon made my thoughts flow easier. (personal communication, September 1, 2011)

Another student's blog response indicated that she felt successful because the writing experience caused her to reflect on previously learned academic knowledge and apply it to the assignment, "While writing the paper I came across forgotten experiences. Therefore, by recalling the past, I was able to reflect upon the lessons learned and think about how to apply the skills in the future" (personal communication, September 1, 2011).

This theme is strengthened by blog responses from week 5. Students were asked to reflect on either a memorable success or struggle in their academic writing. Of the students who chose to focus on successful writing experiences (n=3) 66% of them referenced prior academic knowledge as a reason for their success.

Although the responses primarily pointed to academic and personal experiences, other students' reflections related their writing success to professional endeavors. One student indicates that her feeling of success was specifically related to her professional writing:

I write quite a bit for my primary employment position, effectively every day. My current projects include curriculum applications for the Arizona State Board of Private Postsecondary Education and our national accrediting body, ACCSC. So far, nothing has been sent back. So, clearly, I would consider my writing a success. (personal communication, September 15, 2011)

The selected examples indicate that students felt successful in writing when experiences provided them intimate knowledge of their content area. For many students, personal and academic experiences allowed them to write productively. For another student, professional experience was proof of successful writing.

Theme 2: Graduate students experience struggles related primarily to academic quality and faculty expectations. Participants indicated that they experienced struggles when they were concerned with producing writing of an academic quality, specifically relating to academic style and clear expression of ideas. For a majority of participants (57%), it was difficult to express their ideas in a succinct and clear way within the two-page limit of the assignment. One student's comment during a writing group meeting demonstrates her struggle with concise academic writing:

The difficult part for me was vocabulary. I could not use words precisely in expression and I needed to consult a dictionary. However, I spent a lot of time composing sentences and thinking about how to make my writing coherent. (personal communication, September 8, 2011)

Another student's blog entry expresses his struggle with writing of an academic quality:

The struggles I had with my writing in week two is I feel as if I answered the question, but maybe not as in depth as I could have. I had trouble getting all the ideas and sentences from my head onto paper in a cohesive working sentence. (personal communication, September 1, 2011)

Further evidence of Theme 2 is demonstrated in the following blog quote in which the student struggles with the mechanics of writing as well as expression of ideas:

In last weeks writing, I had difficulty in a few areas. First off, I had trouble condensing my ideas into a two page paper. Deciding what was the most important and what could be skipped took a lengthy amount of time and after rereading it multiple times, I was still not happy. I also feel that I could work on applying better transitions into my writing. Finally, I had trouble getting a very complex idea on paper in correct grammatical format. I feel uncomfortable with complex grammar and often times this will come across in my writing when trying to relay multifaceted ideas or topics. (personal communication, September 9, 2011)

The examples above demonstrate that students struggled with clear expression, but 43% of students (n=3) also struggled with writing as they tried to meet the expectations both of faculty and of graduate school.

One student's struggle with figuring out faculty expectations is evident in this week 1 blog entry:

I liked reflecting on my past writing events because what I chose to focus on when writing our mini in class exercise was how different professors can render different reactions. That is still a big fear of mine somewhat because although I have taken Dr. Smith [sic] before, I have never written a paper for him. I can get A's on his exams, but what about his papers? (personal communication, September 1)

Another student, who had returned to school after many years, commented in the first writing group meeting about her struggles with expectations of graduate-school, "I haven't been a graduate student very long, so I don't have much to draw on as a memorable writing experience. I guess my biggest struggle is knowing what is expected of me" (personal communication, December 8, 2011).

The comments above highlight typical examples of how participants discussed their struggles with academic writing. Struggles were related to constructing writing of an academic quality, but students were also concerned with meeting faculty and program expectations.

Summary of Writing Experiences. Overall analysis of the data indicates that students in the GWP reported feelings of success related to writing as a result of prior academic, personal, and professional experiences. Participants felt that when they had something to say which was a result of their experience, they were successful in their writing. Struggles with writing were primarily related to issues of writing quality. Some students were not able to select the appropriate words or use appropriate grammar; however, these struggles were linked to feelings of not understanding the expectations of faculty or graduate school.

Writing as a Social Practice. My study of writing groups and student identity was informed by a framework that understands writing as a social practice. Within this framework academic writing includes relationships and interactions: negotiation of expectations, meaning-making, and expression of identity (Lea & Street, 1998) rather than simply skill acquisition. Data on writing as a social practice came from students' blog entries, transcriptions of writing group meetings, transcriptions of interviews, interdisciplinarity perspective papers, and researcher field notes. After the initial rounds of open coding described earlier in this chapter, I organized codes into three categories: expectation-negotiation, meaning-making, and expression of identity.

The following five themes emerging from this data demonstrate that, while students were engaged in expectation-negotiation and meaning-making, this was happening on a very personal and individualized level for each student.

Theme 3: Graduate students negotiate ways of being in the academy through figuring out expectations of faculty and program. Evidence from participant blog responses, writing group transcripts, and researcher observations demonstrates that students actively engage in expectation-negotiation. The most prevalent form of negotiation is of faculty expectations. The following blog entry from the beginning of the semester shows that this student felt apprehension toward the expectations that would be set by the instructor:

The struggle that I have at the beginning of any class is trying to determine what, exactly, is expected of me. I was concerned when I found out that Dr. Smith [sic] is an English Professor; I imagine that the bar for writing will be held particularly high, to which I respond 'Ugh'. (personal communication, September 1, 2011)

Data suggests that students were able to address concerns such as the above through the writing group meetings. In the final blog entry, one student highlights that the writing group meetings provided her the opportunity to see different ways of approaching the assignment:

What was most beneficial for me hearing from my classmates in regard to how they interpreted the assignment and how they responded. Also, it was great to get several opinions on what I could include in my paper to make it stronger, more relevant to what we are learning. I liked that I got candid responses rather than 'great paper'. It is a suggestions that I received from my classmates that helped me to complete this assignment in line with the expectations. (personal communication, December 8, 2011)

In one interview, a participant expressed his experience with how the writing group meetings helped him to structure his writing:

While in the writing groups, I believe being able to compare other papers to your own helps create new ideas and aids in solidifying a structure for the paper. The original prompt for the assignment was vague in part and the discussion with reading. Therefore, by getting to read how other individuals went about their discussion with their reading helped me form my own paper. (personal communication, December 5, 2011)

Further evidence that supports the finding that students used the group meetings to navigate assignment expectations. The following blog reflection again demonstrates that a student found the writing groups helpful to understand the expectations of the assignment:

It was very beneficial for me to hear how my other group members interpreted the assignment. Although it is very clearly laid out, it was helpful to have others to try to break it down and see it from different perspectives. (personal communication, October 13, 2011).

The comments above seem to highlight typical examples of how students worked during their group meetings. Embedded in participant discussions of paper revisions were demonstrations of expectation-negotiation.

Theme 4: Interactions during writing group meetings show evidence of meaning-making for the graduate students. During the in-class, peer-led writing group meetings, there are many instances where participant interactions and reflections demonstrate students making meaning of their academic work and their experiences. Data indicate that students use writing group time to construct knowledge and ideas rather than simply engaging in discussion of writing skill acquisition. During an early writing group meeting, one student discusses her literary processes and comments that she uses the readings to discover her own understanding, “I am using her [assigned reading] piece to be able to work through my own understanding, and use of. . . interdisciplinarity” (personal

communication, September 8, 2011). Another student in a different writing group makes a similar remark demonstrating that she also uses her literary activities to construct her own ideas, “Cause when I read this stuff...I don't know... I just felt that every chance I get, every paper that I write I'm going to try to work toward my own ideas” (personal communication, September 8, 2011).

Additionally, in the feedback that students provide to each other, there is evidence that academic writing tasks cause them to engage in meaning-making. When one student suggests that he may have approached the assignment wrongly, another member of his group states, “That is your interpretation, though. You can take it over literal or under literal, it's *your* [emphasis added] interpretation” (personal communication, September 8, 2011). This student seems to be encouraging her peer to create his own meaning in his writing and from the assigned texts.

One type of evidence that shows students are engaging in meaning-making is that that shows their perspectives have changed, often as a result of reviewing peer papers. The following example demonstrates how peer-review provided her with a greater understanding of the assigned academic reading:

I read yours and then I read the article again and after reading your paper it provided me with clarity in the article. You paper clarified it quite a bit, so that was my biggest take away...I just saw it as an interpretation of the article, which I didn't fully understand, so I like it very much, by the way, but that was just my biggest take away. (personal communication, October 20, 2011)

In another group exchange near the end of the semester one student's comment demonstrates that the peer-review not only strengthened her understanding but it also provided her with multiple ways of understanding:

A lot of great material. What I loved is that you both did this article and that I saw it from two very different points of view. . . which is great because if I'd only read it once, I would have seen it from this view but now I see it with two very different perspectives which was great. You took this material and you melded it to be yours. (personal communication, October 20, 2011)

Again, these typical examples show that students are not simply reviewing the work to provide surface-level feedback, but instead the opportunity to engage in peer-review inside of class allows them to make and revise meaning of the major topics in the course. The writing group provides them with this semi-structured space in which to work in this way.

Theme 5: The interdisciplinary focus of the MA program was critically important to graduate students in the GWP. Students enrolled in GWP were required to reflect on their understanding of interdisciplinary studies during the first week and final week of the semester by writing a brief two-page paper, "My Perspective on Interdisciplinary Studies" and "My Perspective on Interdisciplinary Studies – Now", respectively. The data from these reflection papers indicate that the interdisciplinary nature of the program was significant to how students talked about their own professional and personal endeavors. In the first reflection paper, one student focuses primarily on the interdisciplinary nature of the program – but specifically sees it as related to her sense of self:

As I pay dearly for this education, I want to pick the pockets of multiple disciplines as I am enriched by knowledge. This program, I am convinced, was created just for me. I am tremendously excited and honored to be aboard. (personal communication, December 8, 2011)

The importance of interdisciplinarity, and how it is connected to students' lives is also seen in this quotation from pre-writing sample:

Now, as my life journey continues, I reflect on how to incorporate my background with my thirst for knowledge in other avenues. Interdisciplinary to me means that our way of thinking is open to incorporating new ideas that can complement and may even create new solutions to old issues, or vice versa. (personal communication, December 8, 2011).

During the interviews, students were specifically asked to “Talk about words or phrases that you use when you talk to other people about graduate school”. Two of the four participants specifically explained that the interdisciplinary nature of the program was something they discussed. Although, some of this stemmed from the need for them to explain their degree, the responses also showed that this was a critically important component of their work. The way that one student explains the program clearly includes the importance of the interdisciplinary nature of the degree:

Well, I talk about it in sense of what I'm studying. I explain the areas that I am studying and that I have varied interests. I don't want to be a counselor and I don't want to be a gender studies person – but I want a career where these two areas intersect. (personal communication, December 6, 2011)

Another student had a similar response explaining that the even though he no longer says “interdisciplinarity” because people question it, he still talks about graduate school in terms of the different disciplines he is studying.

The evidence above suggests that students strongly connect to the interdisciplinary nature of their program and this area of focus informs their reflection toward their graduate experience. The response papers asked them to reflect on their research background; however, the students very clearly identified with the interdisciplinary nature of their program.

Theme 6: Participants' role as graduate students felt most strongly in contexts that include academic activity. To understand elements of identity, I explored the importance participants attributed to their role as graduate students. During the interviews, participants were asked how important they felt that this role was. The responses indicate that their role as graduate student was extremely important, with one student stating, "I think it's important, because, my degree is directly related to what I want to do with my life" (personal communication, December 6, 2011). Another respondent immediately saw her role as a graduate student as one part of her identity:

I think it's kind of important as an identity characteristic. Because it was kind of bothering me that I wasn't in grad school furthering my education and it feels good to be associated with academia again. And just wanting to improve my thinking skills and learning skills. It just makes you seem like you're more... your thinking about bigger things. (personal communication, December 1, 2011).

These responses are typical of how students talked about their role as graduate student.

In addition to understanding how students felt about the role of graduate student, I was interested in when students identified most with this role. When students were asked where they felt most like a graduate student each respondent

identified context as the most important. For one student, the academic context provided him with the time to concentrate on his graduate work, “In the classroom and on the campus. Otherwise, I’m too busy to think. So, definitely, in the classroom, in the library, and on campus” (personal communication, December 5, 2011). Another student commented that she enjoyed graduate school because it allowed her to focus on topics of interest to her. The following statement indicates that she felt most like a graduate student when she was able to focus on the topics of interest. She stated, “In libraries. Just doing research and studying on your own, on a specific topic that you want to be doing. I like that idea of kind of more individualistic work and research” (personal communication, December 1, 2011). The examples above show that students feel connected to their role as graduate students and that this connection is strongest when they are on campus.

When I began this study, I suspected that relationships with students and faculty would be an important part of graduate students’ role; however, evidence suggests that at the early stage of the program, students have not yet been able to develop these relationships, and only in some cases are they interested in this. One student reflects on her relationship with faculty over the semester. The relationships that she formed were related to a student organization, but were not formed in support of her work:

I wish I would have [formed better relationships with faculty], I guess. I don’t feel like I’ve gotten particularly very close with many faculty in the grad program. My involvement in ISA has forced me to start to reach out to them more, but overall it has been more on a professional level of what they did, how they got to where they are at, and what steps I should be taking. It hasn’t been related to the work that I’m doing right now. (personal communication, December 1, 2011).

Another student very clearly indicated that he was not interested in forming social relationships with his peers. Relationships with faculty (in his undergraduate program), though, were significant to him.

I noticed that on one of the surveys it asked about my social groups, and I have to say I really don't care about that. I got to say that through the University I've met some incredible people, especially with the professors, those are people that I want to emulate and be like. (personal communication, December 6, 2011).

Another student felt that the writing groups helped him form some social relationships; however, these were limited:

Particularly in class, because of the writing groups. I think if not for the writing groups you know very casual relationship nothing where we'd be studying together or anything....so I think because of the writing group I have developed some relationships. If not for the writing groups, I remember in 505 I was kind of there, pick up the briefcase and go. (personal communication, December 5, 2011).

The comments highlighted show that participants' felt that their role as a graduate student was incredibly important. This role was felt most strongly in academic contexts such as the library and the classroom. Although context was important, the relationships within that context were not significant to participants' sense of their role as a graduate student.

Theme 7: Students acknowledge change and increasingly identify themselves as writers. Qualitative data suggest that graduate students felt their writing was personal, acknowledge personal change, and increasingly identify themselves as writers. During the interviews, I asked students about the personal nature of their writing, and evidence showed that graduate students were

connected to their writing and were proud of their work. One student specifically talks about how his writing is personal, and that he is proud of his work:

It [writing] is personal, but I don't mind sharing it. Personal because I feel like it's me and it's who I am and I put myself into it, but it's not personal in the fact that I don't want people to not read it. I want people to read it, because I'm proud of what I've written. I'm an open person, I like sharing, I like showing people my paper. (personal communication, December 9, 2011).

Another student feels as though he has something to write about since he discusses things that are important to him, he is also proud of his work, "Yeah definitely [writing is personal], I always relate it back to me, or what's important to me or, what I'm studying. So I always feel like I have something to say and I'm proud of it when I submit it" (personal communication, December 6, 2011).

These two quotations are representative of how each student talked about the personal nature of his or her writing.

Evidence suggests that students felt more comfortable by inserting themselves into their academic writing and developing their own voice. Observations of early instructor feedback indicated that students did not sufficiently provide their own thoughts in the writing. Over time, however, students began to do more of this and to recognize it in each other's writing. In the transcriptions and writing group observations I found eight examples of students increasingly inserting their voice into academic assignments.

During one writing group a student comments to a peer that she sees his authorial voice emerge in a piece of writing being reviewed, "It was really nice how you combined that, so I see a lot more of you in this paper than I did in the

last paper, that is great” (personal communication, October 20, 2011). This statement was representative of other discussions during the last two group meetings when students began to put their own opinions into their writing. The discussion above shows that participants in the GWP did feel connected to their academic work, and over time, they became more comfortable with their identity as a writer.

In addition to observable changes in their writing itself, of students who responded on their blogs to a prompt asking, “Do you feel that who you are has changed (or will change) as a result of your graduate program work?” A total of 92% (n=13) of participants stated that they experienced some change, or expected to experience some change during their graduate program work. One student hopes to experience change and expects that his academic experiences will help him to grow:

I expect to change throughout my graduate program. I hope to gain new insights through my research and writing. I expect my existing ideas to be challenged or solidified by others (professors, students, research). I enrolled in graduate school to grow and gain new experiences, I am hopeful that this happens. (personal communication, December 8, 2011)

Another student believes that change is ongoing, and concedes that the graduate program will change his perceptions:

Sure. I think that all learning changes and reformulates who you are and how you think. We are constantly changing, works-in-progress, and the more education we receive the better. I don't think I've changed as a person, but maybe how I think about things. (personal communication, December 8, 2011)

These examples represent typical responses from participants. Their responses indicate that academic writing is clearly personal and contributes to

feelings of pride about their work. Additionally, over time, students develop a stronger authorial voice in their writing, and this is noticed by and commented on by peers. Students recognize that they may change during their graduate program and begin to recognize themselves as writers.

Chapter 5

Findings and Discussion

This action research project had two objectives. The first was to understand how graduate students experience academic writing. This was measured by a quantitative pre- and postinstance of the Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing and qualitative student reflections on successes and struggles with writing. The second objective was to explore graduate student identity and understand the interaction of student identity with academic writing. This was measured by a quantitative pre- and postinstance of the Graduate Student Identity Survey and qualitative graduate student blog entries, writing group-meeting transcriptions, interview transcriptions, interdisciplinarity perspective papers, and researcher field notes. Chapter 4 presented the results of statistical analyses and qualitative analyses, each reporting results related to the study objectives and four research questions.

This chapter will complete the investigation of graduate student academic writing and academic identity by discussing the results in the context of the theoretical framework and existing academic literature. In the first section, Experiences with Academic Writing, I provide a discussion of the results to answer Research Question 1 and Research Question 2. In the second section, Writing as a Social Practice, I will discuss the findings of Research Question 3 and Research Question 4. In each section, I provide disconfirming evidence, where appropriate, to these assertions.

Experiences with Academic Writing

As presented in Chapter 2, there has been an ongoing discussion about the necessity and complexity of writing in graduate school. Literature focusing on graduate student academic writing states that, “Graduate writers must often integrate disparate ideas, synthesise perspectives, and extend theory – which demands a higher-level construction skills and perspective-taking, as well as greater concern for accuracy, voice, and audience” (Lavelle & Bushrow, 2007, p. 809). In the literature I reviewed, there was a consensus that there needed to be more focus on issues related to academic writing (Mullen 2001; DeLyser 2003). Research Question’s 1 and 2 explore graduate student writing experiences and approaches toward writing.

Research Question 1. Research Question 1 asked, *To what extent does graduate students’ writing processes (measured by an Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing) change during one semester while participating in a writing group?* Analysis of quantitative data from the pre- and post- Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing did not find statistically significant differences over time. As a result, the answer to Research Question 1 is that there was no change in graduate students’ writing processes as measured by the IPGW. The analysis of this instrument are limited because the small sample size (N=14) lacked appropriate power and the Cronbach alpha’s fell below the acceptable .70. The lack of a statistically significant change may also be due to the brevity of this action research study. Students may require more than one semester to significantly change their writing processes as measured by this instrument. In

Chapter 6, I provide a discussion of my reflections on using this instrument in future research.

Research Question 2. Research Questions 2 asks, *What success and struggles with academic writing do first semester graduate students experience?* When considered together qualitative data from reflective participant blogs, researcher field notes, and interview transcripts help to inform this question. Specifically, in the blog entries I looked for experiences of success and struggle in academic writing. Analysis of the field notes and interview transcripts also helped to explore how students experienced academic writing. Themes relevant to Research Question 2 suggest, at the very least, that (a) graduate students attribute their successes in writing to previous experiences (b) graduate students experience struggles related primarily to academic quality and (c) disciplinary focus and academic writing are personal to graduate students.

Participants in this study indicated that academic writing was personal to them and they felt successful when they had no shortage of ideas to share when writing their papers. The data indicates that students had ideas most often when they were able to relate the topic to their own personal and professional experiences. These findings, and student's reported feelings of success are in line with much of the academic literature. Ivanic, who researches student identity and writing posits, "Writing is not some neutral activity in which we just learn like a physical skill, but it implicates every fiber of the writer's multifaceted being. Who we are affects how we write, whatever we are writing, whether it is a letter to a friend or a dissertation" (Ivanic, Roz, p. 182). Findings from this dissertation

research seem to support Ivanic's position because they reported that writing was personal and their experiences provided them with content to write.

Furthermore, in *Writing/Disciplinarity: A Sociohistoric Account of Literate Activity in the Academy*, Paul Prior (1998) found that, "In short, students' research proposals and critiques were embedded in and infused with motives, contexts, and resources that extended well beyond the seminar" (p. 49). His analysis of master's students' research proposals were intricately linked to student experiences. Participants in this study also capitalized on the opportunity to relate their academic writing to professional, personal, and academic experiences outside of the course. One statement from an interview demonstrates the personal nature of graduate student's academic writing experience:

I always relate it [writing] back to myself, what is important to me, or what I'm studying. So, I always feel like I have something to say and I'm proud of it when I submit it. I feel like, yeah, I wanted to get that message out, you know? So, I always relate it to something that's personal and worth saying. (personal communication, December 1, 2011)

One way that graduate students talk about success and struggles in writing, then, is in relationship to their own personal experiences.

Another finding from this research suggests that the struggles experienced by graduate students were primarily related to their uncertainty of faculty expectations and academic quality of their writing. This finding is also supported in the relevant academic literature. Greene and Nowacek (2000) write that, "students may be quite capable of fulfilling the tasks we give them, but many of them are unaware of the ways in which the conventions they learned in one context may differ from those of academic discourse" (p. 337). As presented in

Chapter 4, students discussed struggles in writing primarily in terms of not understanding the expectations of the assignment and the faculty.

Conclusion. Data from complementary qualitative data sources and themes 1, and 2 help to inform research question 2. Specifically, to understand experiences of writing, I looked at students' successes and struggles. Students experience successes when their writing is related to personal, academic or professional experiences. Struggles, for most students, are related to uncertainty of program and faculty expectations. Academic writing; however, is personal and as one scholar writes, "academic writing tasks are not isolated events; they are intended to form links in a chain of learning, enculturation, and institutional advance" (Prior, 1998, p.99). Findings from this study are in-line with current research that acknowledges academic writing as personal and diverse.

Writing As A Social Practice

As discussed in Chapter 2, and put forth as the theoretical framework of this study, one perspective of academic writing is to understand writing as a social practice. The academic literacy model described by Lea and Street (1998) "views student writing and learning as issues at the level of epistemology and identities rather than skill or socialization". They go on to argue, "From the student point of view a dominant feature of academic literacy practices is the requirement to switch practices between one setting and another, to deploy a repertoire of linguistic practices appropriate in each setting, and to handle the social meanings and identities that each evokes." (p.159). The following discussion will focus specifically on graduate student writing in one in-class master's level class.

Research Question 3. Research Question 3 asks, *What characteristics of the academic literacy model emerge during the writing group meeting?* To inform this research question, qualitative (participant blog entries, writing group transcripts, interview transcripts, and researcher field notes) and quantitative (Graduate Student Identity Survey) data are considered together. Specifically, in line with the complimentary methodology, I use these data sources to inform the question in distinct ways. My analysis of the data suggests that (a) Graduate students negotiate ways of being in the academy through figuring out expectations of faculty and the program, (b) Work done in the writing group meetings shows evidence of meaning-making by graduate students, (c) Graduate students increasingly demonstrate authorial identity.

Evidence suggests that participants in the Graduate Writing Project engaged in elements of the academic literacies framework used in this study. Perhaps one of the most evident examples of this is Theme 3, Graduate students negotiate ways of being in the academy through figuring out expectations of faculty and program. This finding is important because the ability for students to see expectations of graduate level work and to demonstrate their understanding by meeting these expectations may be crucial for student success. Much of the literature regarding academic writing and academic success supports the idea that academic success is linked to a student's ability to understand the accepted discourse within the academic setting (Elbow, 1998; Hyland, 2000; Margolis 2001).

Negotiation of expectations may be seen as student's ability to apply previously learned knowledge to various academic contexts and new academic settings. In the academic literacies approach students must be able to switch their writing practices in each new academic context they arrive in. The following blog entry from the final week demonstrates that students understood this:

I think that it is extremely valuable to have a toolbox, of sorts, to draw upon and be able to use different styles or forms depending on the need or the purpose. The reading is impacting my writing, perhaps most profoundly because I come across so many words that I have to look up. I now find myself including these words in my writing. (personal communication, December 8, 2011).

In this example, the student demonstrates awareness of the different styles needed in different contexts. Other researchers who asked graduate students about writing in multiple courses found, "They [students] were consciously aware of switching between diverse writing requirements and knew that their task was to unpack what kind of writing any particular assignment might require" (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 164). So, in some cases, students were also aware that their success was connected to how quickly they understood the requirements of the academy. Literature is building on the idea that student-writing issues in higher education may be due to the expectations of staff and the interpretations of students (Lea & Street, 1998).

Another particularly evident example of participants' awareness of expectations can be seen during the multiple discussions that participants engaged in about the style of formatting required in graduate school. One non-traditional student discussed his struggle with this requirement. This led him to struggle with

requirements early on, and they wanted these types of expectations to be more explicit. At first, formatting seemed to be an insignificant example; however, conversations regarding formatting were present throughout the semester and were consistent among each group. This shows that basic expectations in graduate school may be difficult for students to discover and master.

The second finding to inform Research Question 3 is that students engaged in the Graduate Writing Project show evidence of meaning making. In the academic literacies framework, graduate students construct meaning through activities such as academic writing. Analysis indicates that students use writing group time to construct knowledge and ideas rather than simply engaging in discussion of writing skill acquisition. Furthermore, the qualitative analysis indicated that students experienced changes in perspectives, constructed knowledge, and shaped their own definitions of interdisciplinarity. These codes each help to support the claim that students engaged in meaning making, one part of the academic literacies framework. Graduate students overwhelmingly reported that the opportunity to read other writing and gain new perspectives was one of the most beneficial parts of the in-class writing groups. Students engaged with their writing groups to discuss different ideas and the instructor of the course encouraged these discussions.

Additionally, as I will discuss in the next section, students became aware of their own authorial identity and began to make meaning of the articles as they related to their interdisciplinary interests. The students in this study were not simply taking the perspective of the instructor or assuming that the instructor had

the answer; instead, the students engaged in their own interpretation. This is in line with research building on the academic literacies framework and advocates for, researchers and teachers to engage with the interests of actual designers, in this case the interests of student-writers, and place these centrally within student writing research and pedagogy (Lillis, p.197).

The final element of the academic literacies framework is student identity and is informed by both quantitative and qualitative results. Theme 7 found that, *Students acknowledge change and increasingly identify themselves as writers.* Student identity is embedded within the negotiation of assignment expectations and meaning making as students change and grow through the academic writing process. Data indicates that students struggled with specific assignment expectations because they were not comfortable with using first person “I” in their academic papers, and this inhibited them from having their voice or opinion in the papers. The instructor; however did provide this guideline in the assignment. So the students had direct instruction that it was acceptable practice to write in first person. Despite this, students indicated that they were uncertain of how to insert themselves into their writing.

On both the pre- and post-GSIS survey, students indicated that they agreed with the following two statements: (a) I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas in writing and (b) When I write an academic paper, the choices I make are deliberate and reflect who I am. These data from the GSIS show that students feel confident about expressing their ideas and feel connected to their authorial

identity; however, despite these reported feelings they also struggled with inserting their voice into their writing early in the semester.

I believe that student's struggle with using "I" may not only be linked to their navigation of the assignment, but, instead may be related to their discomfort of expressing authorial identity. It seems that many students were uncertain of how to write for graduate school, regardless of their amount of previous experience in graduate school. Students, who are accustomed to institutional practices, struggled with inserting their own identity (through the use of "I") into academic papers. Existing literature discusses the importance of the discipline in graduate school. In one such study, *Developing Writer Identity Through a Multidisciplinary Programme*, Crème and Mckenna (2010), found that, "the notion of 'myself as writer'" (p. 159) was new to many of the Ph.D. students participating in their writing workshop.

Conclusion. Data from complementary qualitative data sources and Themes 3, 4, and 5 help to inform Research Question 3. Specifically, I looked at students' journey as they navigated and adapted to their academic writing assignments and how they engaged in meaning making during their writing groups. Students clearly demonstrated that they were engaging in navigation of assignments and faculty expectations. Additionally, students did not simply engage in skill development but instead they worked through meaning and experienced change in perspectives. Authorial identity is a part of the literacies framework and the GSIS indicates that students felt they had a lot to say in their academic work; however, they still struggled in writing in the first person at the

beginning of the semester. Over time, they inserted their own voice into their writing more.

Finally, another component of the academic literacies framework is identity. For the purposes of this study, I will discuss identity (which is embedded in the academic literacy framework) in the next question as part of Research Question 4.

Research Question 4. One objective of this research study was to explore graduate student identity. Specifically, I was interested in understanding ways in which graduate students experienced transition during the first semester of a graduate program and in what ways identity was connected to academic writing. As discussed, identity is one component of the Academic Literacies framework, and in response to Research Question 3 I discussed how students began to develop authorial identity during this semester. In response to Research Question 4 (In what ways do participants in the Graduate Writing Project shape their graduate-student academic identity?) I present two additional findings: (a) graduate program discipline is intricately connected to student identity and (b) graduate students expect to experience change as a result of their academic program.

Data supports that the program discipline (interdisciplinarity) is critically important to the participants in the GWP. An example from Chapter 4 indicates that this study demonstrated that discipline was significant in this study:

As I pay dearly for this education, I want to pick the pockets of multiple disciplines as I am enriched by knowledge. This program, I am convinced, was created just for me. I am tremendously excited and honored to be aboard” (personal communication, December 8, 2011).

This example is representative of other participant responses that show the discipline (interdisciplinarity) is related to their professional endeavors and how they talk about their graduate experience.

The second finding which informs Research Question 4 is that graduate students do expect to change as a result of their academic experience. Participants in this study acknowledge that they use the academic work to better refine their own understanding of subjects. Additionally, observations showed that students commented on the significant level of perception change that was a result of reading peer work and interpretation. So, the act of writing and review of writing demonstrates that these experiences did impact perception. This aligns with literature, Fairclough (1992) writes that, “meaning making is not just about making texts, but is also about the making of our selves, in a process of becoming” (p. 48). Qualitative data shows that the act of writing and reviewing peer writing helped students to refine their own thoughts as well as, in some cases, change their perspectives. These perspective changes may be linked to student identity as they are becoming students, scholars and professionals.

Quantitative data from the Graduate Student Identity Survey also support these findings. Students, overall, reported that their role as a graduate student was an important part of their social relationships, and self-image. This is in line with the qualitative data that showed students felt most successful when the work was

personal. Students were very connected to their graduate work. When students were asked to respond to the question “I am confident in my ability to express my ideas in writing” they agree (pretest $M = 3.13$ and posttest $M = 3.29$).

Additionally, students were asked to respond to the following item “When I write an academic paper, the choices I make are deliberate and reflect who I am”. On the pretest students reported that they agreed ($M = 3.13$) and on the posttest they felt slightly weaker about their agreement ($M = 3.07$).

Another important conceptual framework to this study was the notion that identity is socially constructed and ever shifting. This discussion is influenced by Wenger (1998), who discusses socially defined identities:

As we encounter our effects on the world and develop our relations with others, these layers build upon each other to produce our identity as a very complex interweaving of participative experience and reification projections. Bringing the two together through the negotiation of meaning, we construct who we are. (p. 151)

An example from one student’s blog, “I expect to change throughout my graduate program. I hope to gain new insights through my research and writing. I expect my existing ideas to be challenged or solidified by others (professors, students, research)” (personal communication, December 8, 2011). This student’s statement demonstrates that his relationships (professors and students) and his thoughts as a result of graduate work are beginning to construct who he will be at the completion of the program. Results from this study are somewhat conflicting, because some students indicated they were hopeful of change but others did not, “I feel like this program has the potential to change how I think about things, but it will not change who I am” (personal communication, December 8, 2011).

Although the pre and post results of the Graduate Student Identity Survey did not indicate any significant change, it is interesting to consider how students responded to some of the questions on this survey, and how this data disconfirms some of the qualitative statements above. For example, students reported that they mostly “disagree” with the statement, “Overall, being a graduate student has very little to do with how I feel about myself”. Additionally, students felt that their role as a student was important to their self-image. So, they may voice their believe that they do not think they will change who they are, they do indicate their perceptions of the world and themselves will change, having an impact on their identity.

I also explored context and when graduate students identified most with this role. In each of the four interviews conducted, I asked students when they felt most like a graduate student. Each respondent definitively stated that they felt most like a graduate student when they were either in class, on campus, or and in the library. In response to this question no student referenced communication or collaboration with peers. This is also supported by literature suggests that there is a common perception of writing as a solitary activity (Brodkey, 1987; Phelps 1990). The graduate students in this study reported at the end of the semester that most of the time they worked and wrote alone and had not formed relationships with other students. In this way, these students reinforce the perception that writing and academic work are something that takes place in an academic setting and alone.

Despite this, Peter Elbow discusses the social nature of writing in *Writing Without Teachers*,

But writing is also a transaction with other people. Writing is not just getting things down on paper, it is getting things inside someone else's head. If you wish to improve your writing, you must also learn to do business with more people. (p. 76).

Although the participants who were interviewed described their academic work as a solitary activity, my observations align with Elbow's assertions of collaborative writing practices.

Conclusion. Data from complementary qualitative and quantitative data sources help to inform Research Question 4. Specifically, students' interdisciplinary focus was important and linked to their self-concept. Participants engaged in meaning making activities through the Graduate Writing Project that form and define their identity as they become graduate students, scholars, and professionals. Students describe their graduate experiences in an individualistic way; however, my observations provide some disconfirming evidence. The students were very much engaged in writing as a social practice.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

In this final dissertation chapter I provide an overall discussion and conclusion to this action research project. In the first section, Implications for Practice, I discuss how this research informs my current work. The second section, Future Cycles of Action Research, I make recommendations on changes in the research design for future cycles of research. The third section, Limitations of the Research I highlight limitations in the study and results based on the study design. Finally in Practitioner Turned Researcher, I reflect on my own leadership and learning throughout this process.

Implications for Practice

Scholar Stephen L. Fox (1999) recognized the importance of understanding collaborative learning and proposed further research to provide an in-depth look at what actually occurs in student writing groups and to show how such groups ultimately impact the development of academic literacy (p. 40). This study takes one small step in this direction.

The outcome of this action research project, overall, informs my original purposes to explore: (a) elements of graduate student academic identity, (b) how students participate in writing groups, and (c) how graduate students approach academic writing. As a graduate-student services professional the quality of academic writing and graduate student's ability to successfully navigate through graduate program requirements are issues that arise as a result of discussions with

students, staff, and program faculty. Results from this study inform practice in many ways, I highlight and discuss three of the most relevant here.

Participants were Receptive and Engaged. One positive implication for practice is that graduate students were both interested in and engaged with their writing activities, especially during the in-class writing groups. Since writing may be one of the most prevalent ways in which graduate students are graded it is positive that students were receptive to the GWP intervention. Students' level of engagement during the writing group meetings and their reflections show that they were open to the critique and perspectives provided by peers.

The positive level of engagement in the GWP indicates that students do want to work on their academic writing, and provides one possible model of incorporating writing support into curricula early on in a graduate program.

Structure of Graduate Writing Project. In this study, each writing group had approximately four students. This size seemed to be one reason the students reported positively about their overall experience in the writing groups. Seven students suggested having more time in the writing groups and only one student reported that the groups were not beneficial. This is an important discovery, because the level of engagement and willingness to work through academic writing assignments may provide graduate programs with flexible options in how to structure embedded writing support. The in-class model seemed to be beneficial because the requirement to focus on writing and provide feedback did not become a burden to working professionals outside of class time. When considering writing-group structures, it is also important to note that

participants in this study felt most like graduate students when they were in class, on campus, or in the library. This may indicate that location could have an impact on their level of participation.

The writing group meetings were also set up to specifically align with course assignments. In most cases, this was successful especially when students had the chance to review instructor feedback with their groups. Students seemed comfortable with sharing their feedback, and in-group meetings it was evident that students learned lessons from the feedback shared by other students.

Clarity of Expectations. As demonstrated, graduate students in this study spent time negotiating the expectations of the faculty, assignments, and graduate school. At the end of the semester, student comments did indicate that they had a better understanding of these expectations than at the beginning of the semester. Graduate program staff and faculty may be able to help graduate students understand expectations more clearly by providing an orientation that specifically introduces students to aspects of graduate school that they currently have to pick up on their own. This might be accomplished by offering an orientation, one credit introduction course, or by embedding expectations into the curriculum. Topics may include formatting, disciplinary practices, and publishing. I also think that it is important to consider the role that faculty play in the teaching of writing in a graduate program. From my observations and experience, it seems important for graduate program faculty to address the teaching of writing especially in early courses in a graduate program. Students may also benefit from understanding how to apply the skills from one course to other courses throughout

their graduate program. Faculty may not; however, be equipped to teach specific writing techniques. It may be beneficial for faculty to partner with campus resources such as writing centers to support student writing during the earliest stages of the graduate program.

Online Graduate Programs. Perhaps one of the most exciting implications of this research, the impact it may have on my own practice. Most recently, I have begun supporting 100% online programs at the same suburban campus. Two concerns dominate faculty meetings and discussions including the poor quality of graduate student writing and the fear that online graduate students are not able to make the same types of important relationships with peers that in person students do. After completing this study, I paused to reflect on how these results may inform the structures that we will put in place for online programs. Initial ideas of an online format would include small groups of 3-4 students who would work together throughout the course. This seemed appropriate in person, and would allow for online students to have manageable peer-review throughout the semester. Additionally, it seems that it might be important to structure the online writing groups more than the in person groups. One reason for this structure is because without face to face communication and organic conversation, it would help students to provide feedback most relevant to the writer. Future research will be needed to understand what models may provide benefits to online students equal to those received by students in this in- person program.

Future Cycles of Action Research

There are three areas that I would change in future cycles of action research. If I were to conduct this research again, I would utilize the Inventory for Processes in Graduate Writing in a different way. This instrument was intended to predict writing quality based on beliefs toward academic writing. It would be important to review each academic writing sample required in a course and have these papers scored on a scale that could then be compared to students pre and post results. This would provide further evidence if the inventory does predict writing quality and, as a result, may provide teaching methods up front that would specifically help this population of graduate students.

Another way that I might choose to improve this study would be to provide students with the opportunity (or requirement) to review peer writing outside of the class. I think that the writing group progress may have been better if students used most of their in-class time to discuss their findings, rather than conducting an initial review of the work during class. Since students did not review writing prior to the writing group meetings, the time available for feedback was limited.

Finally, this research study raises many new questions that, if pursued, may help fill several gaps in the literature about graduate student writing and identity. I would be interested in exploring if the responses on the Graduate Student Identity Survey were correlated with graduate student success, specifically with their success in writing. Future research that tracks more specific interventions along with the writing groups may provide very useful

feedback on how to best help graduate students be successful in developing their own identity as a writer. In this study, students did not have much guidance during their writing groups. In future iterations of this study, I would explore specific instruction about writing and how this affects the way the writing groups interact.

Finally, I would change my role as the researcher in another cycle of action research. Although I learned a great deal (as discussed in the following section), I believe that one critical flaw in this study was my inability to really become a part of the class. The course instructor was very inclusive of the writing groups; however, it was difficult to work with these groups when I was not the instructor of the course. This may have been improved if I participated more in the coursework as well as was more active in the writing groups and played less of an observer role. Due to the structure of the study, though, it was difficult to become a true participant-researcher.

Limitations of the Study

Some limitations to this study should be considered when considering the findings and discussions presented above.

Quantitative Survey Instruments. One limitation of this study was the reliability of the Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing. The Cronbach's Alpha reported on this inventory was low, and this affects the interpretation that can be done on this instrument. In addition to the low reliability, this survey instrument did not have enough power because of the small sample size. The purpose of this instrument is to provide some information on how graduate

students approach writing processes. Although this type of diagnostic information may be helpful when working with graduate students, I am not confident that this is a reliable measure that should be used as the only measurement of student writing. Additionally, over the course of just one academic semester, the use of this instrument as a pre- and posttest survey may not provide useful information. Writing, as a process, is something that students will develop throughout their academic program. As I saw in this study, students benefited from instructor and peer feedback, as well as the act of writing. They began to feel more comfortable with expressing their ideas and talking with each other about feedback. This measurement instrument does not provide this type of information.

The Graduate Student Identity Survey had acceptable reliability; however, as reported in Chapter 4 there was not change over time. As I reflect on this, I am not surprised by these results. The inventory measured how students felt about certain elements of their academic and personal life that may be linked to their perception of their identity. Although I adopted the view that identity is ever changing and may change in different circumstances, these different identities each exist simultaneously. It does not seem that any of the items this instrument measures would experience any significant change over the course of one short academic semester. This may especially be true for graduate students who have some level of academic and life experience and as their own responses indicated, are fairly stuck with who they are. I do believe, that in future research it may be interesting to use this Graduate Student Identity Survey to understand if responses

are linked to student engagement in class, student success in class, and or success in the program. It may be most interesting to not look for a change in response as this study initially proposed, but, instead to look at how responses correlate with other aspects of graduate student behavior and performance.

Sampling Procedure. This action research study used a non-random purposeful-convenience sample. Although this is a supported sampling measure in action research and supports the objectives of this study, it limits the generalizability of the results. The results are restricted to students in this program. Academic staff and faculty who face similar challenges with graduate student writing may use this information to inform an intervention appropriate for their population.

A Reflection: Practitioner Turned Researcher

This action research study sought to understand graduate student identity and academic literacy skills. It only seems appropriate, then, to conclude my dissertation with a brief reflection on my own experience with writing and identity.

My academic identity as a doctoral student is intricately linked to my professional identity as a student support specialist. Moje and Luke (2009) argue that, "...people's identities mediate and are mediated by the texts that they read, write, and talk about" (p. 416). My experience as a student strongly resonates with this literature. Program coursework, conversations with faculty and students, as well as my own reading and writing have each shaped my development as a student, scholar, and professional. In many ways I feel fortunate that my student

identity fits well within my professional setting, this has provided me the opportunity to engage in discussions as a student and professional that my not have been possible in other settings. My interest in graduate student writing has been informed through my coursework as I have studied and read existing literature; however, my understanding has been strengthened because my professional setting has provided regular reminders for the need to study graduate student writing. Additionally, I have had many opportunities to share my student knowledge with faculty and staff in my professional setting which allowed me to see real and immediate results of my academic work.

When I began thinking about this study, I was interested in the models of leadership presented by John Tagg (2003). Specifically, I identified with his notion of the functional leader who works toward identified objectives because of a sense of purpose. Reflecting on the past 18 months through the conceptualization, planning, researching, and analyzing of the Graduate Writing Project my sense of functional leadership has been reinforced. In each professional role that I have held in the university, issues of academic writing have been important to the students, staff, and faculty that I have worked with. Specifically, in my current position I work with online students at a large regional online university. My experience this semester has taught me that it is critically important for student success services staff within higher education to work with faculty and engage with students to support their development as academic writers.

One hallmark of this doctoral program is the Leader Scholar Community (LSC) a model which has many similarities with the theoretical framework of this study, writing as a social practice. Specifically, working in the LSC has provided me the opportunity to engage with students and faculty with issues specifically related to my study that allow me to construct meaning of my area of research. Additionally, the conversations and work of the LSC in many ways require negotiation of meaning as I have worked toward the requirements of the Ed.D. The LSC structure proved to be most beneficial during the final stage of the graduate program because it provided me with the opportunity to engage with peers and faculty to discuss and understand the assignments. As I reflect on the LSC meetings I see much evidence of meaning-making, another important concept in this study.

The action research model I pursued, equipped me with the research tools necessary to systematically study graduate student writing and identity. Throughout this process, I had the opportunity to shape and inform my professional practice through research.

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APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL

To: Keith Wetzel
FAB

From: Mark Roosa, Chair 
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 02/16/2011

Committee Action: **Exemption Granted**

IRB Action Date: 02/16/2011

IRB Protocol #: 1102006031

Study Title: Graduate Student Identity and Writing

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

APPENDIX B

WEEKLY DATA COLLECTION PLAN

Table 7

Data Collection Plan

Fall 2011 Semester by Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Data Collection																
Inventory of Graduate Writing Processes (RQ1)	X															X
Graduate Student Identity Survey (RQ 4)	X															X
Interviews (RQ 2, RQ 3, RQ 4)															X	X
Writing Group Audio (RQ 2, RQ 3, RQ 4)		X					X			X	X			X		
Participant Blogs (RQ 2, RQ 3, RQ 4)			X	X	X				X							X

APPENDIX C

GRADUATE WRITING PROJECT PRESENTATION

Graduate Writing Project

Writing Group Meeting 1

Graduate Writing Project

- Expected Outcome
 - Assignment to Writing Project Group
 - Each WPG will establish structure/operations
 - Build safe space for participants
- Writing Project Group Assignments

Activity: Building a Writing Identity

- Create a timeline of your writing life.
- Place positive experiences above the line and negative experiences below.
- Select event and free write about it.
- Each member will briefly share this free writing as group introduction (From Living and Teaching the Writing Seminar)

Why Writing Groups

- Benefits of writing group feedback
- Focusing on feedback
 - Specific feedback
 - Multiple questions
- Types of feedback
 - Criterion-Based (How does it work)
 - Reader-Based (What it does to the reader)

Writing Project Group: Structure Decisions

- Time
- Leadership
- Monitor
- Paper Exchange
- Preparation

Suggestions

- Insist on a commitment to come and to bring writing.
- Give equal time to each writer.
- Let the writer be in charge of feedback time.
- Use a monitor.
- Get each reader to give summary, and positive feedback.

Assignment

- Discuss the concepts, experiences, and preferences with your Writing Group Project.
- Decide on a structure
 - How and when will your group exchange papers?
 - Will you have a monitor? Will this person rotate? What will their role be?
 - What will the leadership structure be like? What role will the reader(s) have? What role will the writer have?
 - Other issues/discussions

Next Steps

- Assign topics presentations (September 22 – week 6)
- Submit your writing timeline and free-writing
- Submit your first assignment via email
- September 1 – Blogs (reflexive)
- September 8 – WPG Meeting

APPENDIX D
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Graduate Student Identity and Writing

Date: August, 2011

Dear Participant:

I am a doctoral student under the direction of Professor Keith Wetzel in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to help understand what role a peer-led writing studio can play in developing academic writing skills and how graduate students construct an academic identity.

I am inviting your participation in this study, which will involve completing several tasks. Please check the boxes below if you consent to participate in the applicable part of the study.

- Survey – Inventory of Graduate Writing Processes (Pre/Post). Estimated Time: 20 minutes each.
- Writing Sample – Research Paper, Reflection Paper(s). (Release your GWP 500 work to be included in analysis for this study).
- Blog – Release your GWP 500 reflection blog to be included in analysis for this study.
- Writing Group – Consent to have participation in GWP 500 writing groups included in analysis for this study.

All items are a required part GWP 500; however, your participation in this study is voluntary. You can skip questions if you wish. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty, it will not affect your grade.

The possible benefits of your participation include greater awareness of writing processes and thinking about your role as a graduate student. Data from the Inventory of Processes for Graduate Writing will be used as part of my dissertation. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

If you choose to participate in this study your responses to the survey and blog will be confidential. My analysis of your writing sample and my writing group observations will also be confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publication but your name will not be used. Results of each survey will only be shared in the aggregate form.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at: Keith.Wetzel@asu.edu or Tosha.Ruggles@asu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

By signing below you are agreeing to participate to in the portions of the study selected above .

Signature

Date

By signing below, you are agreeing to be taped in the Writing Group meetings.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX E

INVENTORY OF GRADUATE WRITING PROCESSES

Participant ID # _____

Pre-Test

Inventory of Processes for Graduate Writing
(Lavelle & Bushrow 2007)

This questionnaire describes different ways that graduate students go about writing academic papers (e.g. research papers, critiques, reviews and theses). There are no right or wrong answers because there are many different ways that work for different students. Just think about what you usually do and respond quickly.

Please circle Answer Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree as it relates to each statement.

- 1. When writing an academic paper, I stick to the rules.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 2. I set aside specific times to do academic papers.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 3. I reexamine and restate my thoughts in the revision process.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 4. Writing academic papers makes me feel good.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 5. I closely examine the writing assignment before beginning.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 6. I can hear my voice as I reread papers that I have written.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 7. Revision is a onetime process at the end.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 8. There is usually one best way to write an academic paper.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 9. When faced with an academic paper, I develop a plan and stick to it.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 10. I keep my topic clearly in mind as I write.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 11. When writing an academic paper, I tend to write what I would say if I were talking.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

- 12. The thesis or main idea dictates the type of paper to be written.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 13. I can write a term paper without any help or instruction.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 14. Originality in writing is highly important in academic writing.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 15. I worry about how much time my paper will take.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 16. I tend to write a rough draft and then go back repeatedly to revise.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 17. Revision is the process of finding the shape of my writing.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 18. Writing an essay or paper is always a slow process.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 19. Academic writing is symbolic.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 20. Writing academic papers reminds me of other things that I do.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 21. Academic papers usually have little to do with what I do in my career or my life.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 22. It is important to me to like what I have written.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 23. Studying grammar and punctuation would greatly improve my writing.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 24. I visualize what I am writing about.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 25. I can hear myself while writing.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 26. My prewriting notes are always a mess.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 27. I am familiar with the components of a research paper or thesis.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

- 28. I put a lot of myself in my academic writing.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 29. I never think about how I go about writing**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 30. Writing assignments in graduate courses are always learning experiences.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 31. In my writing I tend to use some ideas to support other, larger ideas.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 32. Having my writing evaluated scares me.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 33. I tend to spend a long time thinking about my writing assignment before beginning.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 34. When writing a paper, I often get ideas for other papers.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 35. I like to work in small groups to discuss ideas or to do revision in writing.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 36. I imagine the reaction that my readers might have to my paper.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 37. I complete each sentence and revise it before going on to the next.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 38. I cue my reader by giving a hint of what is to come.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 39. My writing rarely expresses what I really think.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 40. Writing an academic paper is making a new meaning.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 41. My revision strategy is usually making minor changes, just touching things up.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 42. I am my own audience.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 43. The thesis or main idea is the heart of the academic paper.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

- 44. Academic writing helps me organize information in my mind.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 45. At times my academic writing has given me deep personal satisfaction.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 46. The main reason for writing an academic paper is just to get a good grade on it.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 47. When given an assignment calling for an argument or viewpoint, I immediately know which side I will take.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 48. My essay or paper often goes beyond the specifications of the assignment.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 49. I expect good grades on academic papers.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 50. Writing an academic paper is like a journey.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 51. I plan, write and revise all at the same time.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 52. I usually write several paragraphs before rereading.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 53. I worry so much about my writing that it prevents me from getting started.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 54. I like written assignments to be well-specified with details included.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 55. I start with a fairly detailed outline.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 56. I do well on tests requiring essay answers.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 57. I often think about my paper when I am not writing (e.g. late at night).**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 58. My intention in writing is just to answer the question.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 59. I just write off the top of my head and then go back and rework the whole thing.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

- 60. Often my first draft is my finished product.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 61. Writing an academic paper helps me develop my ideas.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 62. Academic writing is cold and impersonal.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 63. I need special encouragement to do my best academic writing.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 64. I can't revise my writing because I cannot see my own mistakes.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 65. When writing an academic paper, my idea or topic often changes as I progress.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 66. I do not normally expect to make significant changes to my text by revising it**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 67. It is important to me to have my ideas or arguments clear before writing**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX F
GRADUATE STUDENT IDENTITY SURVEY

Graduate Student Identity Survey (GSIS)
(Ruggles Fall 2011)

This is a survey to assess how you think about several items that are part of, or may influence, your academic identity. Please rate each item according to the scale provided. There are no right or wrong answers. Your responses are confidential.

Please circle answer: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree as it relates to each statement.

Role as Graduate Student

The following questions explore your role as a graduate student.

1. **Overall, being a graduate student has very little to do with how I feel about myself.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
2. **In general, being a graduate student is an important part of my self-image.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
3. **Being a graduate student is unimportant to my sense of what kind of a person I am.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
4. **I have a strong sense of belonging to an academic community.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
5. **Being a graduate student is an important reflection of who I am.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
6. **Being a graduate student is a major factor in my social relationships.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Academic Writing and Identity

The following questions explore how you feel about your academic work and student identity.

1. **I feel comfortable sharing my academic writing with peers.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
2. **I feel comfortable sharing my academic writing with faculty.**
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

- 3. I am confident in my ability to express my ideas in writing.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 4. When I write an academic paper, the choices I make are deliberate and reflect who I am.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 5. Academic writing is disconnected from who I feel that I am.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Non-Academic Characteristics and Identity

The following questions explore non-academic qualities.

- 1. I am successful in my job.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 2. I am satisfied with my life.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 3. I have achieved a goal that took many years.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 4. I feel like I am making progress toward my long-term goals.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 5. I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 6. I am comfortable taking on leadership roles in my life.**
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX G

GRADUATE WRITING GROUP STRUCTURE HANDOUT

**Graduate Writing Project
GWP 500
WG Meeting #1**

Expected Outcomes

- Participants will be assigned to their GWP 500 Graduate Writing Project Group (WPG).
- Each WPG will establish their group operation/structure.
- Build a safe space for participants to feel comfortable participating.

Meeting Activities

1. Introductions within Writing Project Groups

a. *Building a Writing Identity.*

Create a timeline of your writing life. Place the positive experiences above the line and the negative ones below. Select one event and free write about it. Each member will briefly share this free writing.

From: Living and Teaching the Writing Workshop (Painter,
Kristen)

2. Decide on group operation/structure

- a. Review handout on suggestions for a writing group (Peter Elbow, Writing with Power).
- b. Talk with participants about possible structures for the writing group.
- c. Have each group establish and document the structure that they agree on.

3. The Writing Process & Sample Feedback

- a. Use the Inventory of Graduate Writing Processes as a way to introduce and to begin discuss writing processes.
- b. Demonstrate feedback. I will use my own writing and work with the instructor to 'act out' feedback styles and possibilities.

Items to be Collected

1. *Collect each writer timeline and free writing sample.*
2. *Collect one structure summary from each group.*

APPENDIX H
BLOG PROMPTS

Week 3 Blog Prompts

Please respond to the three questions listed below. These prompts are meant to be somewhat open ended to allow for you to free write a response in the way that makes the most sense to you. Responses should be reflective and thoughtful.

1. Reflecting on your GWP 500 Profile Paper from Week 2, what successes did you have in your writing this week?
2. Reflecting on your GWP 500 Profile Paper from Week 2, what struggles did you have in your writing this week?
3. Looking forward into GWP 500, what do you, personally, hope to accomplish as a graduate student writer?

Week 5 Blog Prompts

Please respond to the three questions listed below. These prompts are meant to be somewhat open ended to allow for you to free write a response in the way that makes the most sense to you. Responses should be reflective and thoughtful.

1. Reflecting on your first GWP 500 writing group meeting, what do you believe was the most beneficial from this meeting?
2. Reflecting on your first GWP 500 writing group meeting, what was missing from this meeting that you would like to see in your writing group in the future?
3. Please identify one most memorable success OR struggle with writing as a graduate student.

Week 9 Blog Prompts

Please respond to the questions listed below. These prompts are meant to be somewhat open ended to allow for you to free write a response in the way that makes the most sense to you. Responses should be reflective and thoughtful.

1. Based on instructor feedback and writing group feedback on your Response Paper #1, what (if anything) will you change as you approach writing Response Paper #2? Please be specific and provide insight to why you will change your writing/approach to writing.
2. We are approaching the mid-way point in the semester. In what ways have you developed and/or changed as a graduate student/scholar? Do you feel that these changes may impact your writing?

Week 16 Blog Prompts

Please respond to the three questions listed below. These prompts are meant to be somewhat open ended to allow for you to free write a response in the way that makes the most sense to you. Responses should be reflective and thoughtful.

1. Reflecting on your first GWP 500 writing group meeting, what do you believe was the most beneficial from this meeting?
2. Reflecting on your first GWP 500 writing group meeting, what was missing from this meeting that you would like to see in your writing group in the future?
3. Please identify one most memorable success OR struggle with writing as a graduate student.

APPENDIX I
FEEDBACK REQUEST FORM

GWP 500
Graduate Writing Project
Writing Group Meeting #2
Feedback Request Form

Feedback is the core of what writing groups do. This feedback request form allows you, the writer, to focus on your writing and ask for specific feedback to help you. Bring a copy (or multiple copies) of your Response Paper #1 with feedback and attach a completed copy of this document. This should be completed prior to the writing group meeting.

1. Briefly summarize the assignment. What was your main idea?

2. Is there a particular part of your Response Paper #1 that you would like your group members to focus on (the introduction, conclusion, or main body paragraph)? Would you prefer they review the whole paper?

3. How did you approach this piece of writing? Did you have multiple drafts? What did you incorporate from the first GWP meeting?

4. What do you think are the biggest strengths and weaknesses of this piece of writing right now?

5. Summarize feedback received from the instructor (bullet points are OK).

6. What kind of feedback would be most helpful to you at this stage? Be as specific as possible. Are you looking for “macro” feedback involving ideas, structure, sequence or “micro” feedback such as grammar, citations?

7. What kind of feedback would NOT be helpful at this stage?

APPENDIX J
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Graduate Writing Project: Demographic Information

Please check the appropriate responses to the following questions. Results will only be reported in an aggregate form, and no individual respondent will be identifiable.

Do you consent to including these responses in aggregate form?

- Yes
- No

Gender

- Male
- Female

Please select your age

- 20 – 25
- 25 – 30
- 30 – 35
- 35 – 40
- 40 – 45
- 45 – 50
- 50+

Please list your undergraduate major: _____

Please list other graduate degrees/certificates you have earned and/or are working toward.

What academic areas/disciplines are you most interested in studying in the GWP program? Please list them.

How many credit hours did you complete in your graduate program BEFORE the Fall 2011 semester? _____

How many courses total did you take during the Fall 2011 semester?

- 1 class
- 2 class
- 3 class
- 4 class

What is your primary reason for seeking the MA in Interdisciplinary Studies?

- Career advancement
- Career change
- Personal development [opportunity to study area(s) of interest]
- Preparation for further schooling (Ph.D., Ed.D., etc.)
- Other: _____

APPENDIX K
COMPLEMENTARITY TABLE

Complementarity of Data					
Quantitative			Qualitative		
RQ1:	Measure 1 (N=14)	Construct	Data Analysis	Data Collection Tool	
What successes and struggles with academic writing do first-semester graduate students experience?	Qualitative Only			Participant Blogs	Week 1. Question 1 & 2 Week 2. Question 3 Week 4. Question 3
Complementarity: Specifically, how does data from one measure compliment the data from another tool?					
The participant blogs collected on Blackboard were informal responses to specific open-ended prompts. These data were collected at four points during the Fall 2011 semester.					
Quantitative			Qualitative		
RQ2:	Measure 2 (N=14)	Construct	Data Analysis	Data Collection Tool	
What characteristics of the academic literacy model emerge during writing group meetings?	Qualitative Only.			Participant Blogs	All blog responses and writing samples.
				Writing Samples	
				Writing Group Transcripts/Researcher Observations	All transcripts.
				Interviews	
Complementarity: Specifically, how does data from one measure compliment the data from another tool?					
To answer RQ2, I am looking for evidence of negotiation, meaning making, and identity. In the participant blogs, students reflected on their experience in the writing group and that touched on negotiation of expectations and meaning making. The interviews specifically asked students about their academic identity. The writing samples gave students an opportunity to discuss their perspectives and understanding of interdisciplinarity and express ways of meaning making. Researcher observations and writing group transcripts also provided evidence of each characteristic. These are all parts of writing as a social practice.					
Quantitative					
RQ3:	Measure 1 (n=14)	Construct	Data Analysis	Data Collection Tool	Construct
To what extent does graduate students' writing processes (measured by an Inventory of Processes in Graduate Writing) change during one semester while participating in a writing group?	Inventory of Graduate Processes in Writing	Items 1-67.	RM ANOVA	NA	NA
				NA	NA
Quantitative			Qualitative		
RQ4:	Measure 1 (N=14)	Construct	Data Analysis	Data Collection Tool	Construct
In what ways do participants in the Graduate Writing Project shape their graduate-student academic identity?	GSIS		RM ANOVA	Participant Blogs	
				Writing Samples	
				Writing Group Transcripts/Researcher Observations	
				Interviews	
Complementarity: Specifically, how does data from one measure compliment the data from another tool?					
Data from the Graduate Student Identity Survey will help to inform how students reported perceptions of characteristics that may be related to identity. This information, when considered with all other qualitative data informs the research because student's quantitative perceptions of identity may be very different than observed characteristics of identity characteristics using the theoretical lens of this study.					

APPENDIX L
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

GRADUATE STUDENT WRITING AND IDENTITY

Interview Questions

Focus Area	Questions
Student Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tell me about words or phrases that you use when you talk about graduate school. ▪ How important do you feel your role as a graduate student is? ▪ In what places or situations do you feel most like a graduate student? ▪ What types of relationships have you developed with faculty as a graduate student? ▪ What types of relationships have you developed with other graduate students? ▪ Who influences your work as a graduate student the most?
External Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tell me how your academic experiences influence other areas of your life. ▪ Do you feel that your work as a graduate student is relevant to other aspects of your life? ▪ Do you feel that you are a diligent person? ▪ Tell me about a time when you persevered. ▪ Outside of the classroom, do you spend time with faculty and students?
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tell me how you feel about academic writing in graduate school. ▪ How do you feel about working in groups with other students and sharing rough drafts of your writing? ▪ Do you feel like your writing makes a significant contribution to your academic development? ▪ When you complete written assignments, do you feel that your work is personal? ▪ What influences your academic writing the most?
Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tell me how you would describe your academic identity? ▪ Do you feel that who you are has changed as a result of your graduate program work?