

## Sigma's 30th International Nursing Research Congress

### Interdepartmental Collaboration to Develop Online Graduate Nursing Students' Writing Skills and Decrease Faculty Stress

**Kathleen Ann Muglia, DNP**

*College of Nursing, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI, USA*

Danielle Clapham, MA

*Ott Memorial Writing Center, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI, USA*

Graduate nursing faculty have long described their discontent with students' scholarly writing. Extended hours of grading papers, making comments, and correcting grammar or APA formatting with little improvement in student writing have added to faculty's lamenting regarding the student writing process. Graduate nursing writing skills are often poor (Oermann, 2013) and many students recognize a need to develop their writing skills, however most are unaware of the writing instruction process within a university. Factors influencing students' weak writing may include; limited interest in improving their writing, time constraints, feelings of embarrassment and intimidation with the university writing center, and not recognizing the importance of writing assignments to their professional goals. Additionally, students in an online learning environment being further removed from university services, describe more challenges in receiving additional writing help if needed. While university writing centers often demonstrate a desire to work with students and faculty to ameliorate the writing process, they are often discouraged by the underutilization of writing center services by professional students and online learners. However, interdepartmental collaborations which include incorporating writing specialists into online nursing programs have demonstrated improved writing skills and increased faculty and student satisfaction with the writing process (Bastian & Fauchald, 2014). Mattson (2016) noted improvement in nursing students' writing skills and satisfaction with the writing process after implementing a quality improvement project to improve writing instruction. Additionally, writing center scholarship confirms that Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programs, such as writing fellows and course-embedded tutoring, lead to measurable, positive effects on student writing and student understanding of course content and discipline-specific writing conventions (Kastner et al., 2018).

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project was to create an online process for interdepartmental collaboration between the college of nursing and the university writing center, to improve graduate students' scholarly writing and increase faculty satisfaction with the grading process. Faculty from two online didactic courses met with the university writing center staff to discuss each departments' dissatisfactions with student writing and opportunities for improvement. Writing center staff evaluated the writing assignment prompt written by college of nursing faculty. The prompt was reviewed by several writing center staff members and suggestions for improvements were communicated virtually to the college of nursing faculty. The major writing assignment grading rubric was rewritten to include awarding the students points for completion of the virtual conference with writing center. Nursing faculty also provided students a video explaining how to successfully complete the written assignment. Students then scheduled virtual conferences with the writing center, utilizing an online appointment calendar. Students completed a brief questionnaire after the conference and this, along with a confirmation of conference letter, was emailed to the nursing faculty and served as documentation of the writing center conference. After implementation of the project, nursing faculty were surveyed to determine level of satisfaction with the grading process, number of visits with the writing center were tallied, grades for the written assignment were calculated, and students were surveyed to determine satisfaction with the writing center's virtual conference.

**Methods:** Outcomes of the project within the nursing program include improved faculty satisfaction with the grading process, decreased grading time, increased student satisfaction with the writing assignment and elevated writing assignment grades. For the writing center, outcomes included an increase in positive student interactions via synchronous online tutoring, better protocols and services for online learners, and professional development for peer tutors on STEM-, nursing, and digital learning-specific tutoring techniques. These positive outcomes demonstrate that the collaboration provides a mutually beneficial relationship across campus departments.

**Results:** Implications for future practice include expanding the project to incorporate more nursing courses and courses in other colleges within the university. Though writing center scholarship has studied the impact of writing fellows on undergraduate writing across disciplines, scholars have only recently begun to study the role writing fellows and other WAC programs can play in graduate education (Hallman, 2014). Additionally, within nursing programs specifically, Oermann et al., (2015), found that although a variety of methods are being used to improve students' writing, including student workshops, course assignments, and faculty feedback, only one third of the programs have researched its effectiveness. Furthermore, it was found that research conducted mainly focused on student and faculty satisfaction and perceptions but lacked data on which approaches improved students' writing. The deficit in research in both writing center scholarship and nursing pedagogy highlights a need for a deeper investigation of potential collaborations between writing centers and nursing programs to explain how graduate nursing students may benefit from the writing center conferences.

**Conclusion:** Also, improvement in graduate nursing students' scholarly writing will hopefully lead to more publishable work. In order to create graduate students who are able to produce such work, continued faculty engagement is needed (Kennedy, Newland & Owens, 2017). While the relationship we developed through this collaboration proved generally beneficial, students describe different needs when working with the writing center. Students may benefit from different aspects of the writing center including simple grammar with English Language Learners and higher-level writing skills in more experienced writers. Writing centers may wish to focus on higher level skills, while some students may benefit from more basic writing assistance. Given these limitations, future questions include; What time is best to conduct the virtual writing center conferences? Some students may attend the conference before putting in a significant amount of time working on the paper and may depend on the writing center for too much help. Other students may not allow enough time between the conference and writing the final draft of the paper. Additionally, future research may also include examining the decision whether or not writing center conferences should be included in the grade of the paper. And lastly, it will be important to investigate how to best talk with students and help them understand how the writing center can help with their professional development in a way that encourages them to seek out the service when it is relevant to their writing process and that encourages writers to ask tutors for the kind of help that will most benefit their writing competencies.

---

**Title:**

Interdepartmental Collaboration to Develop Online Graduate Nursing Students' Writing Skills and Decrease Faculty Stress

**Keywords:**

Graduate Nursing Writing Skills, Interdepartmental Collaboration and Online learning

**References:**

Bastian, H., & Fauchald, S. K. (2014). Confronting the Challenges of Blended Graduate Education with a WEC Project. *Across the Disciplines*, 11(3). Retrieved from <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.libus.csd.mu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1115960&site=eds-liveast>

Hallman, R. (2014). Re-envisioning course-embedded programs at the graduate level: a tutor's experience in a doctoral, translingual marketing course. *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, 12(1), 57-62. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2152/62318>

Kastner, S., Keith, S., Kerr, L. J., Stives, K. L., Knight-Rorie, W., Forsythe, K., . . . Lockhart, J. M. (2018). RAD collaboration in the writing center: an impact study of course-embedded writing center support on

student writing in a criminological theory course. *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, 15(3), 34-53. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2152/68075>

Kennedy, M. S., Newland, J. A., & Owens, J. K. (2017). Findings From the INANE Survey on Student Papers Submitted to Nursing Journals. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 33(3), 175–183. <https://0-doi-org.libus.csd.mu.edu/10.1016/j.profnurs.2016.09.001>

Mattson, J. (2016). Improving academic writing in nursing education. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 5(4), 96-102. doi: 10.5430/ijhe.v5n4p96

Oermann, M.H. (2013) Enhancing writing in online education. In K.H. Frith & D. Clark (Eds.), *Distance education in nursing* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., pp. 145-162). New York, NY: Springer

Oermann, M.H., Leonardelli, A.K., Turner, K.M., Hawks, S.J., Derouin, A.L., Hueckel, R.M., (2015). Systematic Review of Educational Programs and Strategies for Developing Students' and Nurses' Writing Skills. *Journal of Nursing Education*. 54(1):28-34. doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20141224-01

### **Abstract Summary:**

An interdepartmental collaboration between the college of nursing and the university writing center, found improved online graduate nursing students' writing skills and increased satisfaction of students and decreased faculty stress.

### **Content Outline:**

#### **I. Introduction**

- Graduate nursing students' writing skills and knowledge of writing instruction are lacking
- High faculty stress grading papers and assisting students with writing
- Increase number of online graduate nursing courses, making writing instruction challenging
- Interdepartmental collaboration project created between writing center and college of nursing to improve students' writing and decrease faculty stress

#### **II. The Interdepartmental Collaborative Project**

##### A. Discussion and project planning; college of nursing and writing center

- College of nursing faculty challenges
- Writing center challenges
- Student challenges
- Quality improvement plan/project created

##### B. Writing Center Role

- Virtual conference with college of nursing faculty to discuss writing assignment
- Evaluate the writing assignment prompt and provide feedback to college of nursing faculty
- Provide students with online scheduling to set up virtual conference appointments
- Conduct virtual conferences assisting students with writing (individualized by student needs)
- Administering and collecting conference questionnaire for students and distributing to college of nursing faculty.

##### C. College of Nursing Faculty Role

- Evaluate and revise writing assignment prompt
- Participate in virtual conference with writing center staff
- Revise writing assignment rubric to include conference with writing center
- Create video for students with explanation of writing assignment
- Collect writing center conference questionnaires
- Grade writing assignments

#### D. Evaluation of Project

- Improved student writing
- Increased student satisfaction in writing process
- Increased faculty satisfaction and decreased stress
- Increased utilization of writing center
- Improved writing center processes for online programs

### III. Limitations and Challenges

- Program specifics of direct-entry nursing program and/or online nursing students
- Writing center staffing limitations (i.e. lower staff over summer, predominantly undergraduate tutors, less reception staff to handle documentation)
- Student circumstances and limitations (i.e. blended student population, commuter students, non-traditional students, etc.)

### IV. Future Implications

- Expand program to other nursing courses
- Expand program to other university courses outside the college of nursing
- Research to evaluate effectiveness of program

First Primary Presenting Author

**Primary Presenting Author**

Kathleen Ann Muglia, DNP

Marquette University

College of Nursing

Clinical Assistant Professor, Direct Entry Master's in Nursing, Coordinator

Milwaukee WI

USA

**Author Summary:** Dr. Muglia is the Program Coordinator for the Marquette University Hybrid Direct Entry Master's in Nursing program. She is also a certified online educator and clinical assistant professor teaching multiple courses in the program since 2017. Dr. Muglia is dedicated to bringing innovation to online nursing education through new and creative modalities, while decreasing faculty stress.

Second Author

Danielle Clapham, MA

Marquette University

Ott Memorial Writing Center

Assistant Director of Professional Development

Milwaukee WI

USA

**Author Summary:** Danielle Clapham is a PhD candidate in literature at Marquette University. In addition to her literary research, she has taught in Marquette's First-Year English program since 2012 and currently serves as a graduate tutor and Assistant Director of Professional Development at the Ott Memorial Writing Center where she conducts pedagogical research on accessibility, cross-campus collaboration, and peer mentoring and leadership.