Building a Technical Writing Community: The First Year of a Writing and Speaking Tutoring Center for Engineering Ph.D. Students

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Abstract
Graduate engineering students must produce a wide variety of high-quality and discipline-specific work throughout their post-baccalaureate study. They are expected to have expertise in writing journal and conference papers, dissertations, and qualifying proposals, while learning to communicate in accordance with the norms and expectations of their specific disciplines. However, few students have such expertise at the start of their graduate program, nor do they formally acquire it as part of their coursework. Direct writing instruction in engineering graduate programs is scarce, and to the extent that curricular or co-curricular technical communication instruction is offered, it is often deemed remedial or separate from disciplinary content knowledge. As a consequence, writing is largely devalued, despite its outsized role in graduate students’ academic lives and careers in industry and academia.

To address this gap, the Council of Graduate Schools recommends the establishment of graduate writing centers (GWCs) that are staffed by trained writing consultants for one-on-one tutoring and offer various professional career and mentoring workshops, retreats, and student-led writing groups. Research suggests that GWCs can help students cultivate professional skills and can provide emotional support in an environment that can often be isolating. Such services offered by GWCs have been shown to supplement writing coursework in shortening the duration of doctoral degree completion and attrition rates in Ph.D. programs.

As over half of engineering graduate students are from outside the U.S., GWCs that serve this group must also offer support for students developing academic literacy in English. This sometimes involves embracing approaches traditionally disavowed by many writing centers, such as providing grammar instruction and other sentence-level support. The availability of such support, which is actively sought out by multilingual graduate student writers, diminishes the discourse deficit around their writing abilities with a more positive and inclusive stance.

Currently, the University of Southern California (USC), offers a writing center operated by the university that provides writing assistance for all students, faculty and staff. To provide additional and specialized support for USC’s 1,000 engineering Ph.D. students, the authors, who are faculty at the Engineering in Society Program at the USC Viterbi School of Engineering (Viterbi), launched the Communications Hub (Hub) in August 2022 with a one-year financial commitment from Viterbi. This unique academic support is based on the premise that graduate students carry out advanced disciplinary research and have extensive writing needs with a high level of rhetorical complexity that
are distinct from those of undergraduate writing. Students may be defining original research questions and making claims that involve a level of knowledge transformation that exceeds the standard approaches of traditional university writing centers.

The Hub offers one-on-one writing and speaking tutorials administered by faculty trained in technical communication, as well as speaking competitions and writing groups. In this paper, authors present their experiences in creating and operating the Hub, their pedagogical practices, and concomitant outcomes and challenges. They also present quantitative survey data and qualitative feedback from Ph.D. students and faculty in the Hub’s inaugural year.

**Introduction**

Despite the critical role of communication skills in the academic and professional advancement of graduate students in engineering, few students enter graduate school with the requisite competencies in discipline-specific academic communication norms. Fewer still complete communications coursework in graduate school, as formal technical communication instruction is often not part of graduate engineering curricula. The impact of this lack of communications-based instruction is especially significant for the large community of multilingual and international students in engineering for whom English may not be their first or primary language. To the extent that communication-based instruction is offered or required of engineering graduate students, it is positioned as addressing a deficit in language skills; as a result, seeking or receiving writing instruction can be stigmatized rather than viewed as a necessary part of scholarly and professional progress. Although such assistance can be helpful, it is often not geared to the specific disciplinary needs of engineering and science students. Additionally, U.S.-born English-speaking students are likewise in need of support to master the forms, structures and expectations of academic communications in technical fields.

The well-documented and often-articulated need for graduate students to strengthen their communication skills led the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) to recommend the establishment of graduate writing centers (GWCs) to meet the unique communications support of graduate students. Buoyed by research that indicates that GWCs can aid in increasing rates of doctoral degree completion and decreasing attrition rates, the CGS noted that GWCs are critical for academic training and scholarship, the enculturation of professional customs necessary for career advancement, and the provision of emotional and community support for students during their years-long graduate programs.

GWCs, then, should be viewed as integral rather than peripheral to the institutional infrastructure of graduate schools, with unique features that distinguish them from traditional university writing centers. Graduate student writers in engineering have highly specialized, technical, and discipline-specific tasks including qualifying exams, lab reports, grant applications, conference presentations and journal articles. Graduate students’ communications tasks are also often extremely rhetorically complex with
respect to function and audience, as their work is often a combination of the academic and professional. In light of the complexities and diversity of graduate communication tasks, the GWCs and writing consultants for engineering graduate students must often employ different pedagogical approaches than traditional writing centers. In addition, as a substantial proportion of engineering graduate students are multilingual speakers whose primary language is not English, GWCs must also address these aspects of students’ learning circumstances.

At USC, two technical communication faculty in the Engineering in Society Program with extensive background in communications instruction for engineering students received a one-year commitment from the engineering school to pilot a tutoring resource for its 1,000 Ph.D. students. In this paper, these two faculty discuss some of the center's features, their pedagogical practices, and characteristics and feedback of their students. They also discuss some of the challenges of operating a tutoring center as full-time teaching faculty and their hopes for the center's future.

**Literature Overview**

As noted by [1], there is a relative lack of research specific to graduate engineering students' communication needs, along with little examination of the efficacy of efforts to provide students with such support. [1] describes how there is general agreement that this area is critical to understand, as engineering graduate students must overcome high-stakes communication challenges throughout their academic and professional careers and "thus would benefit from supportive efforts to hone their skills" such as writing centers positioned specifically for engineering graduate writers.

[2] and [3] have noted that graduate students use writing centers in distinct ways. They bring many different types of projects, each with a variety of audiences, and many of their primary writing concerns relate to sentence-level issues with respect to grammar and clarity, as they feel that the high-stakes nature of their writing requires impeccable style and few, if any, errors. [2] also found that graduate students report using the writing center in their preparation for meetings with their advisors and seeking writing center support when their advisors are unavailable for writing guidance.

In light of these unique preferences of graduate students, [3] notes that GWCs employ pedagogies and practices that are distinct from traditional university writing centers that are positioned to support undergraduate students writing for their coursework. With respect to the training of writing tutors for graduate students, [3] discusses the role of disciplinary experience for tutors, as graduate students' writing by necessity must reflect discipline-specific rhetorical moves, genre-recognition, and language, and as such, their tutors are expected to recognize such particularities and be able to enculturate students within discipline-specific communities.

Another distinguishing characteristic of GWCs identified by [4], [5], and [6] is that they often offer services beyond one-on-one consultations such as facilitating the creation and administration of writing groups. [4] describes how writing groups can serve to
ameliorate some of the isolation of engineering graduate students and provide a platform for students to "cultivate an academic identity, wherein they try on the identity of disciplinary expert and peer mentor." [7] explains how the social networking functions of GWCs can be further developed via the implementation of a communication fellows program whereby graduate fellows develop discipline-specific communications resources and programs for their home departments.

Ultimately, GWCs attempt to prepare engineering graduate students to enter communities of practice [1]. For engineering graduate students, according to [1], such communities relate to students' "laboratories, programs, the wider academic field, working groups, informal cooperation, or collaborative projects," all of which have their particularized communication dynamics and are critical components of academic and professional success.

**Year One of the Hub**

In early 2022, two full-time faculty in the Engineering in Society Program at the USC Viterbi School of Engineering submitted a proposal for internal funding for a three-year pilot program for a communications tutoring resource for engineering Ph.D. students. Acting as co-directors, they received a one-year commitment from the school to form the Communication Hub (Hub) with two goals: to provide individualized writing and speaking instruction to engineering Ph.D. students and to build formal and informal communities of writing practice within the engineering school.

The establishment of USC’s Hub marked the school's first graduate-specific writing center and the only communications-based resource for its engineering Ph.D. students other than two 7 week intensive courses in graduate communications: 502x, Writing Communication for Engineering Ph.D. Students and 503x, Oral Communication for Engineering Ph.D. Students. 502x, the writing course, examines the rhetorical conventions of scientific journal papers and encompasses student’s efforts to compose dissertations, prepare defenses, proposals and other academic writing. Course material is also built from students’ active writing projects that are shared in class. The oral presentation course 503x focuses on delivery of conference presentations, adjusting material to varied audiences and principles for teaching technical material. Guided self-assessment in both courses is fundamental to building students' capacities for continued independent improvement.

At USC, these elective courses have been positively received in the past two decades of their offering, garnering extremely high ratings in student evaluations. Students, however, have also indicated that they need additional communications support that they can access outside of the time limits of the formal courses and that extends throughout their years of graduate school [1]. In fact students often time their enrollment in these courses to match with submission deadlines so that they can receive instructor assistance. In response, the Hub was created to provide such support. Despite some initial concerns that the Hub would affect students' perceptions of the need or value of the communication courses, an examination of the data relating
to Hub visits indicates that about 45.5% of Hub visits were made by 502x and 503x students and 56% of Hub visits were made by students who had not taken those courses. This initial data suggests that offering both curricular and co-curricular communications support is needed to serve students in a variety of modes. Students have both immediate communication needs that can be met by the Hub as well as long term developmental requirements that are best met through a dedicated course.

Instructors

In order to maintain quality control over instruction and to better understand and respond quickly to graduate students' needs and preferences, the Hub's co-directors limited the delivery of tutoring instruction to themselves. Both instructors are full-time teaching faculty in the technical communication program housed within the engineering school, and both have decades of teaching graduate-level academic communication in specific fields, including engineering, law, and international relations.

This type of instructional delivery bypasses some of the questions encountered by some university writing centers such as the efficacy of peer or undergraduate tutors [3], as well whether tutors should be generalists or specialists within students' fields. As technical communication faculty, the two faculty members approach assessment of student needs and work in terms of the efficacy of their communication in reaching their desired audience. However, this instructional model of having full-time technical communication faculty deliver one-on-one tutoring is not scalable in light of the limited pool of available faculty and related costs; accordingly, alternate models for instruction, such as the establishment of a communication fellows program as that described in [7], need to be explored if the Hub continues and grows.

Students

At USC, about 74% of engineering graduate students were born outside of the U.S.[1]. This aspect of the engineering graduate student population is also evident among the Hub's students, as over 90% of the Hub's first-semester visitors were international students. They also reflect significant linguistic diversity, as 17% of the Hub's students reported they were comfortable speaking Chinese and 10% reported feeling comfortable speaking Persian. Students also reported speaking Korean, Hindustani, Arabic, Greek, Urdu, and Bengali.

Student visitors at the Hub represented every year of graduate study, with 30% in the fifth year of graduate study, 27% in the first year of graduate study, and 16% in the fourth year of graduate study. In terms of engineering departments, most (66%) came from computer science, but every engineering department (including chemical engineering, biomedical engineering, electrical engineering, astronautical engineering, mechanical engineering, civil engineering, and industrial and systems engineering) offered by the school was represented.
One-on-One Consultations

As the co-directors viewed one-on-one consultations as one the primary services of the Hub, the majority of initial efforts were dedicated to building a robust and efficient method of delivering individual tutoring sessions. Such sessions were offered through drop-in in-person hours (6 hours per week) and also online (6 hours per week). Students who could not make drop-in or online appointments were invited to make custom appointments. During the 15-week fall semester, the Hub saw 101 visits with 61% of those visits made in-person during drop-in hours and 39% of visits online. Repeat visitors constituted 65% of the 101 visits.

Tutoring sessions with first-time visitors began with a brief intake interview collecting information about a student's department, year in graduate school, languages spoken, the communication task that they wanted to work on, and specific concerns and goals with respect to that task. Returning visitors were not asked to identify their department, year in graduate school, or spoken languages. They were only asked about the communication task they wanted to work on and their concerns and goals. As part of this discussion on concerns and goals, the instructors worked students to determine the content to be covered within each session and to assess whether such goals could be met within the scheduled time.

Writing: Tasks, Concerns, and Pedagogical Approach

While students brought in many different types of writing, the majority were fellowship applications and conference and journal papers during the fall 2022 semester. During drop-in appointments, students also often came in with questions on career-related documents such as CVs and resumes and speaking tasks such as job talks. Such drop-in sessions generally lasted about 30 minutes long, as they did not require extensive pre-reading or other preparation by the instructor.

For online appointments, students were provided with the option of sending their work to the Hub early so that instructors could pre-read the work prior to the appointment. Almost all students who made online appointments exercised this option and submitted their writing work prior to their appointment times. This type of hybrid appointment with pre-reading followed by an online face-to-face appointment seemed to appeal to students as it allowed for more time during appointments to discuss long pieces of writing. This arrangement appealed to both instructors as well, as they report that pre-reading allowed for more deliberate and holistic evaluation of student work and reduced the discomfort of reading in front of the writer. This observation aligns with the literature on hybrid consultations described in [8], which noted that hybrid consultations are helpful to make tutoring sessions "less stressful and more structured, satisfying, and efficient."

Common writing issues identified by students included difficulty organizing ideas, writing with correct grammar, and editing for academic audiences. Addressing and reconciling reviewer’s feedback for journal submissions and editing papers written by multiple
authors were additional tasks that brought students to the Hub. Other issues included fitting material into given parameters, transforming a paper into a presentation, developing compelling openings and closings, using transitions effectively, and tailoring content (e.g., tone, style, and word choice) for varied audiences.

Such concerns were addressed and framed in a holistic manner when working with students, as the instructors made a conscious decision not to impose the traditional writing pedagogy of a hierarchy of concerns when assessing students' concerns and work. Rather than first assessing the overall shape or structure of writing and then moving on to more "micro" or "local" issues such as grammar correctness, they started by addressing what students identified as primary concerns. Doing so helped to establish trust with students and demonstrate that their concerns were being heard and acted upon. The instructors found that not de-prioritizing grammar or "surface" errors as being "below" or outside the purview of writing instruction was well-received by students, as many remarked that their previous interactions with writing centers made them feel that their grammar questions were too rudimentary to be directly addressed at all.

In light of the importance placed on correctness by academic readers and journal editors, student writers' deep concerns about grammar were welcomed at the Hub, as instructors integrated such concerns into holistic discussions of organization, language flow, word choice, and clarity of expression. By directly addressing this common concern among graduate students, Hub instructors were able to communicate a more "inclusive, positive, explicit, and effective tutoring stance" such as that noted in [2] in the hopes of encouraging international graduate students to further engage in discourse about academic literacies and writing communities by visiting the Hub and discussing their writing [9], [10]. To avoid the perception of being an editing service, however, the Hub's instructors applied proofreading notes on student work in short and discrete sections of text as described in [11], and revisions were explained and discussed with the expectation that students would then apply similar revisions in future writing endeavors.

Speaking: Tasks, Concerns, and Pedagogical Approach

As engineering students must pass an oral portion of a qualifying exam, provide presentations at conferences, and give job talks, the Hub included tutoring on public speaking skills, and during the fall 2022 semester, about 14% of Hub visits related to verbal tasks. The most commonly reported concern about speaking was stage fright, and other requests for assistance related to many delivery elements including vocal quality, body language, and pace, as well as connecting to an audience. Many sessions included students practicing their presentations in front of an instructor, followed by feedback and more practice run-throughs. As with writing concerns, Hub instructors provided feedback with students in the lead. They began with addressing students' identified concerns to build rapport and confidence and let the students guide the session.
Events: Three Minute Thesis Contest and Writing Retreats

To provide engineering graduate students with a supportive and fun environment to practice their speaking skills and encourage students to utilize the Hub's resources, the instructors organized USC's first Three Minute Thesis® (3MT) contest in November 2022. This event was selected because it is a tool for students to develop and demonstrate mastery in communicating their research in a public forum; such "rhetorical dexterity" is needed in an "increasingly fast-changing, complex and market-driven" academic and professional landscape [12]. Founded in 2008 at Australia's University of Queensland, 3MT takes place at over 1,000 graduate schools around the world and requires graduate students to present their research to a non-specialist audience in three minutes or less using just one PowerPoint slide.

The inaugural showing of 3MT at USC included eleven finalists presenting their graduate research in front of an audience of graduate and undergraduate engineering students, staff, and faculty. The finalists came from a variety of engineering departments and were in various stages of their graduate education. They represented the departments of computer science, electrical and computer engineering, electrical engineering, industrial and systems engineering, aerospace and mechanical engineering, and biomedical engineering, with one finalist in his eighth year of graduate school, one in his seventh year, two in their sixth year, three in their fifth years, two in their fourth years, and two third-year students. The judging panel consisted of USC engineering professors in electrical and computer engineering and information technology, along with a marketing professional at the engineering school. Four out of the eleven finalists made appointments at the Hub to work on their 3MT presentations and slides, including the first place winner.

The event was well attended by both graduate and undergraduate students who listened to the presentations, voted for their favorite presentation, and provided feedback. Student feedback after the event was overwhelmingly positive with recommendations for future 3MTs to be held in larger and grander spaces and for more high-profile participation from engineering school administrators. As a side benefit, undergraduate engineering students were given direct exposure to graduate level research and graduate students learned about work across the engineering school outside of their own specific disciplines and had a venue to meet other students. A full-length recording of this event is available on YouTube [13], and a summary of proceedings can be found on the Hub website [14].

USC's first place winner will be competing in 3MT western regionals in Portland, Oregon during the Western Association of Graduate Schools Conference on March 28 and 29.

The 3MT was followed by a two-day winter break writing retreat modeled after that described in [5]. The goal for the retreat was to provide a quiet space and sustained writing time after a busy semester. Additionally, this event was intended to facilitate a collegial environment for attendees while they learned how to increase their writing productivity. One instructor was present during each day to provide assistance and
feedback when requested. The writing retreat had all spots filled on both days, with attendees expressing appreciation for the space and time for concentrated writing as well as the chance to explicitly reflect on their writing habits with other similarly situated students. Based on this feedback, the Hub’s co-directors added weekly "Quiet Writing Time" in the spring semester and are considering offering another writing retreat during spring break.

Other Public Speaking Activities

To further encourage students to participate in speaking events, the co-directors encouraged Hub students to submit a proposal on the topic of communications resources for Ph.D. students at the 2023 ASEE-PSW conference. In this way, participating students can directly advocate for themselves using written and verbal communication skills, while adding to their academic profiles by presenting in a conference. The Hub’s co-directors view this type of applied learning and agency-building as critical, because graduate students are the primary stakeholders in any discussion about graduate school resources and must therefore be equipped to lead such endeavors.

Student Feedback

Information about students' experiences at the Hub was gathered through a mixed methods survey instrument for the collection of structured data and narrative-based experiential comments. This feedback was requested at the close of each Hub interaction.

Students’ feedback about their Hub experiences were collected via a two-question survey. At the end of each tutoring session, students were provided with a QR code linked to the survey. Question 1 asked them to rate their experience using a Likert scale with the following:

1 - The experience was not at all helpful.
2 - The experience was not so helpful.
3 - The experience was somewhat helpful.
4 - The experience was very helpful.
5 - The experience was extremely helpful.

By the end of the fall 2022 semester, 50 responses were collected, and 88% rated the Hub experience a 5 ("extremely helpful") and 12% rated the experience a 3 ("somewhat helpful") or a 4 ("very helpful"). Question 2 of the survey has respondents to provide reasons for their ratings in narrative form. Many comments focused on the efficiency and efficacy of the instruction, and this result seems to reflect graduate students' priorities in saving time and receiving explicit writing support. All of the survey responses are attached as Appendix A.
In addition to positive student feedback in surveys and repeat visits, successful outcomes such as the awarding of fellowships and internships, paper submissions, and progression through an academic job candidature have been relayed.

Another positive outcome of Hub visits is the impact of having this resource on students' interactions with their advisors. Students have reported that having access to the Hub has lessened the workload of advisors in terms of reviewing student writing and that using the Hub has allayed their anxieties about sharing their draft writing with advisors. For example, one student noted that "if this service had been available before, it would have saved my advisor so much time that he had to spend in correcting my draft and providing feedback." Similarly, the Hub has been well-received by advisors with students using the Hub. One faculty noted that "I know that at least one of my students is benefitting from it immensely, and I will ask the rest of my students to take advantage of this important opportunity in the future as well."

In addition, we have received feedback that some Hub-assisted work is being directly used by faculty in co-authored articles and presentations. For example, according to one Hub student who received significant assistance on a presentation and accompanying slides over multiple visits, "[m]ost of the powerpoint and talk that you [Hub co-director] and I [Hub student] worked on remained for the final presentation that my advisor delivered. So, it was exciting that the committee is interested in funding our project. Thanks again for your help!"

**Hours and Budget**

In terms of the tutoring and administrating the Hub, each instructor spends approximately 8 to 10 hours per week tutoring students, marketing efforts, and planning events. The summer workload was substantially in excess of 8 hours per week for planning, establishment of tutoring protocols, office set-up, website creation and administration, and marketing. During weeks where there are events such as the 3MT and writing retreats, hours worked per week for each instructor exceed 8 to 10 hours. Writing retreats, for example, last for 5 hours each day.

The budget for the Hub's first year consisted of one 4-unit course relief for each instructor and $2500 for the Three Minute Thesis event for student prizes and food. Travel to the 3MT Western Regional competitions was about $2000 and food for the writing retreats was about $500. The website and appointment platforms are Google tools and free, and the office space is shared with the student affairs office of the engineering school.

**Challenges**

While meeting and working with students outside of a classroom setting has been a highly rewarding and impactful endeavor, the Hub’s co-directors were met with some administrative and institutional challenges with respect to marketing and the daily logistical work in the running of the Hub. The creation of the website and the selection
and implementation of the scheduling system were done in the weeks prior to the fall semester using the free Google apps available to school faculty, and after a short learning period, these tools have proven to be reliable and easy to access and use by the instructors and students.

Although many students and advisors expressed a high level of enthusiasm for the Hub when contacted directly, few, if any, faculty assisted in actively promoting use of the Hub’s services to their students. The vast majority of the Hub’s visitors were referred by other students in their lab groups or courses. Notable exceptions include several faculty who responded enthusiastically to queries about acting as judges in the 3MT competition, the director of research for the engineering school who sent members of her lab to the Hub, and the head of one engineering department who encouraged junior faculty to visit the Hub for writing support.

In addition, as the instructors did not have access to marketing resources within the school to reach all engineering graduate students, the co-directors themselves did extensive one-on-one outreach to familiar faculty, presented at faculty meetings, posted notices on the university calendar, and posted flyers on billboards. Marketing the Hub proved to be time-consuming for the two instructors, who were also teaching their regular courses while building and administering the Hub. The limitations of the co-directors’ marketing efforts of relying on other faculty and posting flyers were evident, as the majority of Hub students noted that they had not heard about the resource until referred by a friend or by their 502x and 503x professor, who is also a co-director of the Hub.

Future

A look at the Hub’s busy first year so far shows that it has been welcomed by graduate students and many of their advisors. It is a unique resource - distinct from traditional writing centers in its disciplinary focus of engineering graduate students and in its pedagogical stance vis-a-vis multilingual speakers. It is also a highly welcomed resource, as shown by student feedback.

Currently, there is no commitment from the school or elsewhere in terms of continuing the Hub beyond its first year. However, the Hub’s instructors plan to re-apply for internal funding and continue investigating external sources. If the Hub continues beyond its first year, there are plans for expanding the number of tutoring hours with additional instructions, along with offering more community-building events for Ph.D. students, such as more frequent writing retreats, dissertation workshops, and colloquia. Adding more administrative resources to aid in scheduling, marketing, and event organization is also a priority so that the co-directors can focus on delivering one-on-one instruction, developing online writing sources, and building more varied communications-based support for greater disciplinary enculturation as professional academics [15].
References


Appendix A
Responses to Question 2 of Student Exit Survey ("List reasons for your rating").

1. Professor Fife really helped highlight the weak parts of my writing (eg. repetition, transitions that were not smooth) and suggested approaches as to how I could address them. She also helped me in restructuring the paper from a bottom-up approach to a top-down one that my advisor wishes to see in the draft. Working with her helped save many hours I would've spent on this paper by myself, and it has led to a substantially better paper! Thank you!

2. Instructor clearly discussed expectations for appointment, made significant progress on the goals outlined in the appt, friendly, super friendly overall, provided great insights and explanations

3. One-on-one guides helps to focus on the issues raised concerning the manuscript, and thereafter makes refining the manuscript more efficient. The discussion provides several thoughts for writing in the future.

4. The help I have received from The Communications Hub significantly improved my writing and my paper! If this service had been available before, it would have saved my advisor so much time that he had to spend in correcting my draft and providing feedback. I am glad it is finally available to phd students all year round. It is hard to time a research paper submission to the ENG 502x course, and the ability to get 1:1 coaching all year round to improve our papers is extremely valuable! Thank you for starting The Communications Hub!

5. Prof. Fife spend more than 3 hours going through so many details and she later on followed up with another round of review. I am very greatful for the time she devoted

6. The EiS faculty gave very useful feedback on my writing. It was also very detailed, so I gained a lot!

7. My instructor helped me identify many issues and gave constructive re-writing structure.

8. I expected it to be helpful. I have a good sense of direction/next steps and the NSF expectations were clarified

9. Drop-in hours were extremely productive. I have learned so much about writing in just two meetings. I strongly recommend this resource to fellow PhD students. Absolute lifesaver!

10. 5 stars for supportiveness, clarity, and knowledgeability! They went above and beyond to connect me to other USC resources and writing examples!
11. I had taken a class with Elizabeth before and she was absolutely as helpful as I had remembered.

12. Instructor was supportive and helped a lot with aspects of writing that I struggle with like the clarity of my statements!

13. I learned many new techniques to write more clear and easy-to-understand proposals!

14. I thought Prof. Choi had an amazing way of delivering feedback and helped clarify the questions I had. I came away from the session feeling good about my paper but with ideas and action items that could help me improve the sections I was worried about (and even other sections that I didn't realize had problems). It was extremely helpful, more so than I knew it would be.

15. The appointment was extremely helpful in refining my CV and cover letter for the positions I am applying for. Highly recommended!!

16. efficient and friendly

17. Got great feedback

18. The hub was incredibly easy, efficient, and effective - awesome!

19. I received a lot of useful feedback for my writing, more than what I was expecting!

20. Even thought the appointment for half an hour, she finished reviewing my draft by extending the time. I appreciate her time and effort.

21. The professors running the Hub always manage to find small details I had not thought of to improve my writing.

22. I love how this resource is available during my PhD studies. My undergraduate institution’s resources did not have this specialized level of technical expertise and kind encouragement, so I’m glad I can get the support I need for writing!

23. I really appreciated how both professors gave me detailed last minute feedback on my drafts - I feel very prepared now to submit to my fellowship!

24. Always helpful!

25. I am very grateful for the time and insights that Professor Fife provides to improve my application.

26. I received very good help for my fellowship essays
27. I met with Dr. Fife for help with my motivation letter for an internship application. Her help made it a lot more succinct, as well as read better. She offered helpful suggestions about how to convey my ideas, how to best convey how I could help execute the project the internship was about, and the value I bring to the table.

28. It's very useful to have a separate space for writing where we can come to only write. Having the professors around also helps to not procrastinate and give feedbacks to improve.

29. The professor is really helpful, patient, and professional.

30. It provided me with exactly what I needed. Accurate and considerate.

31. Professor Fife’s feedback was very concise and useful. She offered helpful suggestions about how to structure my talk better, and offered tips to deliver it with more impact. It was a very productive use of our time!

32. The appointment was really helpful in refining my talk. It is much tighter now, and I think it makes a bigger impact now with far fewer words. Being able to ask a professional for writing advice is incredibly helpful since engineers are typically not trained in writing efficiently and eloquently. Thank you!

33. The advice I have received has greatly improved the delivery of my talk.

34. I received several helpful tips during my appointment about how to give a better talk. They really improved my talk, and I won first prize! I would highly recommend the Hub to anyone who has a presentation or talk coming up!

35. Tremendous help in writing structures, etc

36. The brainstorming and preparation for my faculty interview

37. The comments and suggestions helped me improve the quality of the writing of the conference paper

38. Good feedback, I feel like I know where I'm going now. I noticed things in my paper I never considered before