

Cultures of Support for Second-Level Writing: A Survey of 2367 Instructors

Writing Across the Curriculum
Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The second-level writing course, designated 2367 across campus, is currently the linchpin in Ohio State's writing curriculum. With 50 different sections across 29 departments, students have a lot of options to choose from. With so many sections and very little central oversight, there is a danger that students' experiences across these sections could be widely inconsistent.

The Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program surveyed second-level writing instructors during the Autumn 2014 semester to learn more about the kinds of support and training instructors have to teach the course, and to collect course materials to learn about how they address the general education outcomes for writing in their teaching. We heard from 67 instructors representing 21 departments. This response gives us our clearest glimpse yet of the kind of training and support instructors receive across the departments offering the course.

We found that the instructors who responded reported a wide range of resources available to them, varying across departments and their status at the university. More importantly, these instructors reported that *these cultures of support mattered to them as teachers*. We found that

- **GAs make up the bulk of instructors (65%),** and among our GA respondents, certain kinds of support and training correlated--sometimes strongly--with how prepared instructors felt to teach the course, namely faculty oversight and intensive, ongoing training in writing pedagogy.
- **Only a half of GAs reported access to robust training in writing instruction beyond shared resources or a single orientation.** Fewer have ongoing training in writing pedagogy.
- **While the lecturers and faculty who responded didn't show as clear cultures of support as GAs, they did identify some kinds of professional development as valuable,** and many illustrated the significant expertise and leadership they brought to teaching in their departments.
- **Instructors had different levels of comfort working with English language learners,** and certain kinds of support correlated with how comfortable different instructors felt, such as engagement with ESL scholarship and with instructional consultants.

In addition, while these cultures of support are often centered at the department level, we found that instructional support centers like WAC and the University Center for the Advancement of Teaching (UCAT) shored up departmental cultures of support, offering supplementary professional development, pedagogical expertise in consultation, and sometimes resources to bolster departmental programming.

There is more we could do if we had further resources and attention to our services, given the results of this survey:

- **For GAs, develop robust departmental cultures of support,** particularly expert faculty oversight, intensive training in writing pedagogy, and ongoing professional development.
- **For faculty and lecturers, offer institutional support to develop teaching** and, where they oversee second-level writing courses, to help them build cultures of support for department instructors.
- **For all instructors, give more opportunities to learn how to help ELL writers.**

We're already collaborating with the departments offering the greatest number of sections of second-level writing to develop common training and resources. Together, we can build a culture of support for teachers to ensure that students get the most out of their learning in this centrally important course in the curriculum.

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METHODOLOGY

During Autumn semester 2014, the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program at Ohio State's Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing (CSTW) surveyed instructors and faculty who had taught the second-level writing course (designated 2367 in the 29 departments that offer the course) over the past year. We wanted to learn more about the support and training instructors had to prepare them to teach the course, following up on a survey of second-level writing instructors in 2009, when OSU was still on quarters.

This year, we added questions about their comfort teaching English language learners, the kind of training they got to work with such students, and what kind of resources they offer them. Furthermore, we asked instructors to share their syllabi and assignments, to get a more comprehensive handle on the kind of assignments they offer their students. This report focused on the first part of the survey on support and training. We will follow up later this year with a report on what we find from the course materials that 28 instructors from 14 different departments shared. [A copy of the 2014 survey is available.](#)

We sent the survey to instructors and faculty who had taught a 2367 class between Autumn 2013 and Autumn 2014, promising enrollment in a raffle for one of eight \$15 Barnes and Noble gift certificates. We received 67 responses out of the 260 instructors we surveyed, a 26% response rate. These respondents, in turn, represent 21 of the 30 departments offering the course. While the response rate was not optimal, it is the best response we've gotten from our surveys, and is reasonably representative of our survey pool. Departments' share of responses don't deviate more than 5% of their share of the survey pool. Faculty and lecturers, however, are over represented in the responses (by 6.4% and 5% respectively), and graduate students, who make up the majority of instructors, are underrepresented (by 11%).

As with our previous surveys, the lower response rate makes it difficult to draw comparisons between groups of respondents or to make generalizations about departments when only one or a handful of instructors participated. For that reason, we reserve our comments to larger trends among instructors of similar status (faculty, staff, and graduate instructors). There are good reasons to address these constituencies separately, since they identify very different needs for their teaching.

Faculty in particular reported that the questions seemed more relevant to GTAs or lecturers, and they weren't sure how to respond to some of the questions. In the future, we will design separate surveys for these different constituencies to better reflect their perspectives as teachers of this course. In the meantime, however, we treat these constituencies as separate entities in our analysis, keeping in mind the different stances they might hold toward the questions.

In our survey, we asked a series of questions that asked participants to identify the kinds of support and oversight offered to them from a list (check all that apply), in open short answer questions to identify the kinds of support they feel most prepared them to teach a second level writing course and to suggest what WAC could do to help them better prepare them for teaching. We also asked instructors to rate how adequately prepared they feel to teach the course. We then asked a series of questions that asked instructors how comfortable they were working with ELL students in their classes, what kinds of training or support they received to learn how to work with ELL students more effectively, and the kinds of resources they provided ELL students inside and outside of the classroom.

Above, we tried to correlate the kinds of support and oversight items our respondents in different status and teaching experience groups chose, and attempted to illustrate those correlations with responses from the open ended questions and our anecdotal knowledge of the kinds of teaching support that departments and other areas of the university offer. To determine significant correlations, we used both a t-test comparing the mean scores of independent groups (though our small sample size made us take the results with a grain of salt) and a Mann-Whitney U-test comparing median ranks (which can somewhat mitigate the results of small or uneven sample sizes). In any case, both tended to be very close in p scores. We won't report the t- or U- scores, or the exact p scores for significance, but rather report items under a $p=.05$, call particular attention to items under a $p=.01$.

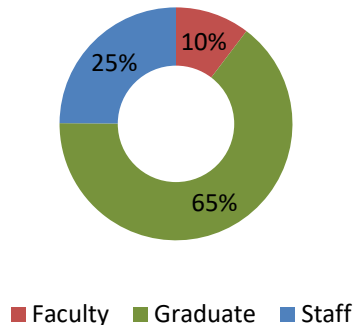
To supplement these correlations, five members of the WAC team coded the open ended questions together, noting patterns of support and training we found among the responses, and reconciling any discrepancies among coders through discussion. We also supplemented the correlations with our anecdotal knowledge of departmental cultures of support, based on our ongoing work in many of these departments, conversations with instructors, and collaborations with the departmental coordinators of the course.

WHO TEACHES SECOND-LEVEL WRITING (2367) AT OSU?

ACADEMIC RANK

We identified 261 instructors who taught 2367 between Autumn 2013 and Autumn 2014 semesters.

Instructor Status within Survey Pool (n=261)¹

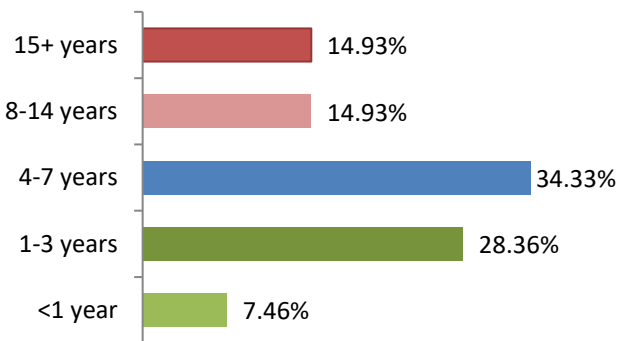


- **Graduate Teaching Associates** made up 65% of instructors who taught 2367 between AU13 and AU14 semesters.
- **Lecturers or staff members** were 25% of the teaching pool, up from 13% in 2009.
- **Faculty** were 10% of the teaching pool. 37% of those faculty teach in the English department.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE OF OUR RESPONDENTS

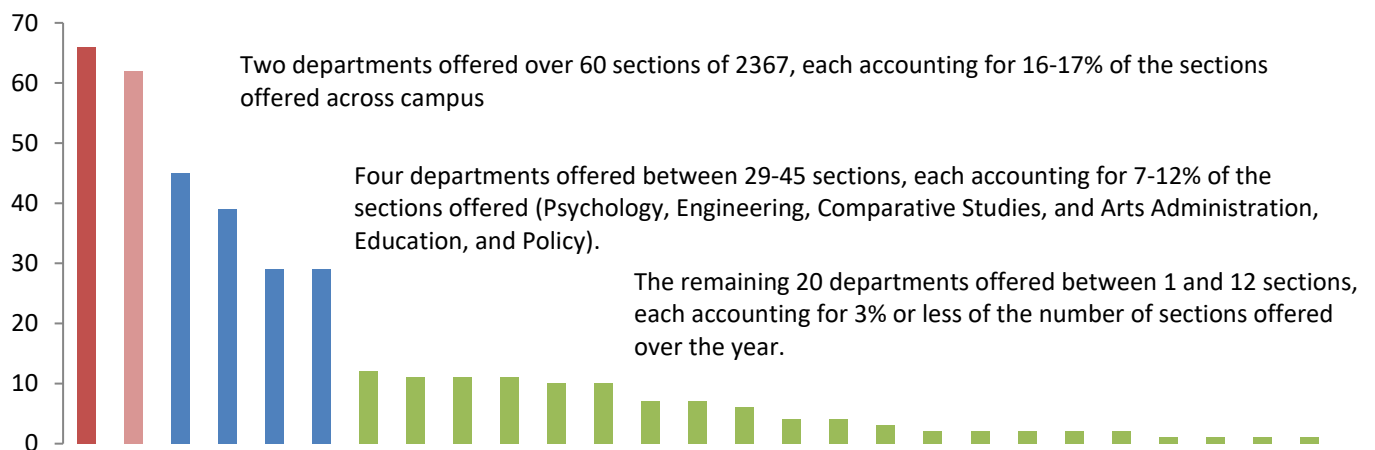
We asked respondents to report how long they had been teaching at the college level.

Respondent Teaching Experience (n=67)



- **Veteran instructors** with 8 or more years of experience (29.8%) were lecturers and faculty.
- **Experienced instructors** with between 4 and 7 years of experience (34.3%) were a mixture of graduate students, lecturers, and a few junior faculty.
- **New instructors** with 3 years or less experience (35.8%) were graduate students.

26 DEPARTMENTS OFFERED 380 SECTIONS OF 2367 BETWEEN AU13 AND AU14



¹While 29 have 2367 courses in the course catalog, only 26 offered the course during AU13-AU14. Source: Course schedule, AU13-AU14. See Appendix A for a complete list of departments and their share of the teaching pool, their share of sections during the 2013-2014 year, and departments' course caps for 2367

CULTURES OF SUPPORT FOR 2367

FROM OUR WORK WITH INSTRUCTORS, WE KNOW ANECDOTALLY THAT:

- Most departments, especially the ones offering the highest number of sections, have **graduate teaching associates as instructors**, supplemented by lecturers and a handful of faculty.
- Other departments, such as those offering a course only once or twice a year, depend on a **single faculty member or senior lecturer** to teach a course.
- A few faculty and lecturers teach **larger lecture courses divided into smaller recitation sections staffed with a few GTAs**.
- Engineering 2367 is **both staffed and administered by lecturers** through the Engineering Education Innovation Center (now the Department of Engineering Education).

INSTRUCTORS WHO RESPONDED TO THE SURVEY PROVIDED MORE DETAIL ABOUT WHAT THEIR CULTURES OF SUPPORT CONSIST OF.

We asked respondents to choose from a list of common training and support items, including courses and workshops, online resources, and oversight from faculty and others.

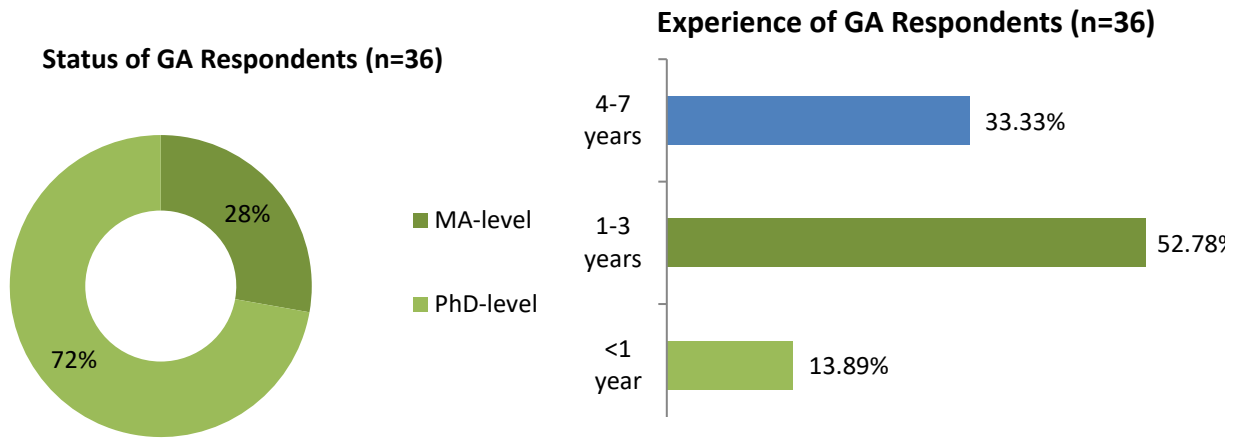
- The department with the largest share of instructors, **English**, has the most varied and robust culture of support.
 - It emphasizes oversight, mandatory training, and optional resources, like sample course materials and occasional professional development workshops.
- In **departments outside of English with a large number of instructors teaching 2367**, resources tend to be varied and robust, if not as comprehensive.
 - They tend to emphasize oversight, a set syllabus, and sample course resources more than training (though these emphases vary between the departments in this group).
- In **departments with fewer instructors teaching 2367**, resources tend to be less varied and robust.
 - These departments often rely on optional resources more than training or oversight.

FACULTY AND THOSE WHO HAVE TAUGHT THE LONGEST FEEL MOST PREPARED AND SUPPORTED TO TEACH.

In a Likert-scale question (0-5, strongly disagree to strongly agree), we asked instructors how adequately prepared they felt to teach a second-level writing course.

- **Faculty** (4.44 mean) felt more prepared than **lecturers** (4.05) and **GAs** (3.61).
- **Veteran** instructors (4.33) felt more prepared than **experienced** (3.83) or **new** (3.54) instructors.

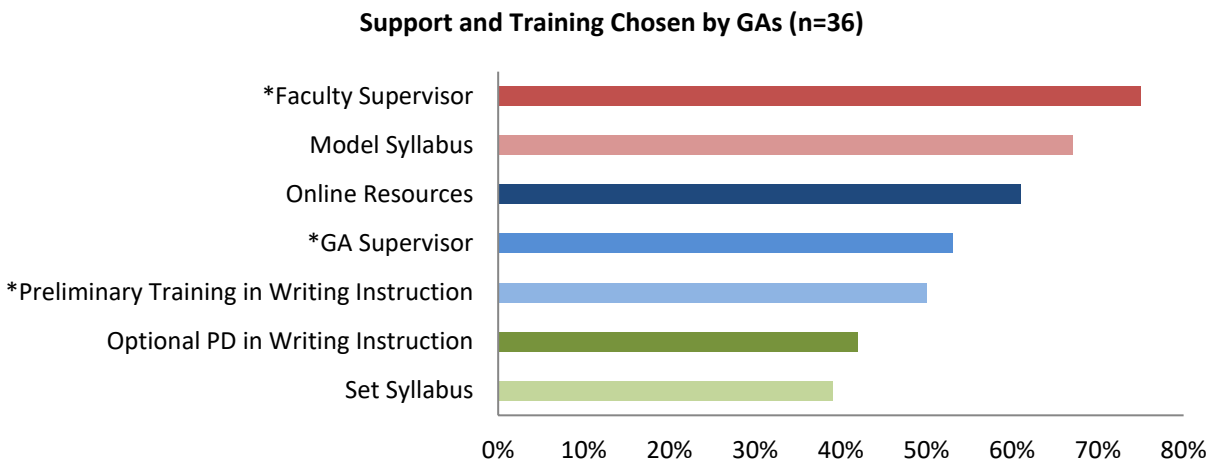
GAS: CULTURES OF SUPPORT FOR NEWER TEACHERS WITH LITTLE TRAINING



- 67% were **new instructors in their first 3 years of teaching** at the college level.
- 33% were **experienced instructors who have taught for 4-7 years**.

MORE CONFIDENT GAS HAVE ACCESS TO ROBUST CULTURES OF SUPPORT IN THEIR DEPARTMENT.

GAs, when asked to choose from a list of common types of support and training, most often chose department oversight personnel and sample course resources. Less often chosen, but still common, were training events.



*FOR GTAS, FIVE TRAINING AND OVERSIGHT ITEMS CORRELATED WITH ADEQUATE SUPPORT:

- Having a faculty supervisor coordinating support correlated strongly ($p < .01$).
- Having a senior GTA providing oversight and support correlated strongly ($p < .01$).
- Having a required preliminary training workshop that specifically addresses writing correlated strongly ($p < .01$).
- Having optional professional development meetings that specifically address writing.
- Having a pedagogical course that specifically addresses writing.

BUT only a half of GAs reported access to robust training in writing instruction.

GA RESPONDENTS VALUED TRAINING WHEN THEY GOT IT.

GAs, when asked in an open-ended question to identify what training most prepared them to teach a 2367 course, most often mentioned some form of training.

DEPARTMENT SUPPORT PROGRAMS WERE FREQUENTLY MENTIONED, INCLUDING

- pedagogy courses,
- online resources, and
- the mentorship of course supervisors.

One GA was specific about what she found helpful,

that a workshop included “discussion of the goals of the course and effective ways to develop assignments and papers” and “specific instructions as to semester-long reading and writing expectations for students in the course.”

APART FROM TRAINING, SEVERAL GAS MENTIONED EXPERIENCE

- as writers in undergraduate and graduate coursework, or
- as peer tutors in writing center programs.

Another GA, who found training lacking, expressed his frustration as a new instructor:

“There needs to be an upper-level mandate to provide more structure, training, and mandatory observation/support for new and developing instructors. I have no background, no training in this field or in teaching writing skills, and no one observing my performance directly. I don't need resources. I need a university that refuses to put people in front of a classroom until they have been rigorously prepared for being there.”

A FEW GAS MENTIONED INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS WITH COLLEAGUES IN THEIR DEPARTMENT AND OTHER DEPARTMENTS THAT OFFER THE COURSE.

One was particularly grateful for cross-departmental conversations, and eager for more:

“I benefited quite a bit from talking to instructors in English, Engineering, and other disciplines about how they structure this class. More of that would be great.”

WAC RECOMMENDS

FOR GAS, DEVELOP ROBUST CULTURES OF SUPPORT, PARTICULARLY

- **EXPERT FACULTY OVERSIGHT,**
- **INTENSIVE TRAINING IN WRITING PEDAGOGY, AND**
- **ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.**

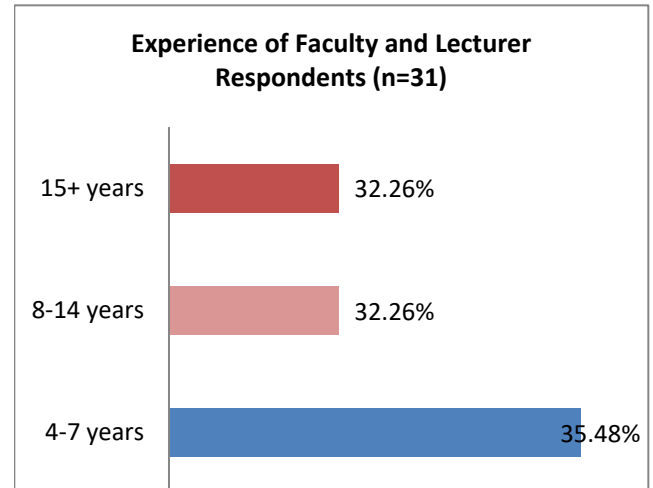
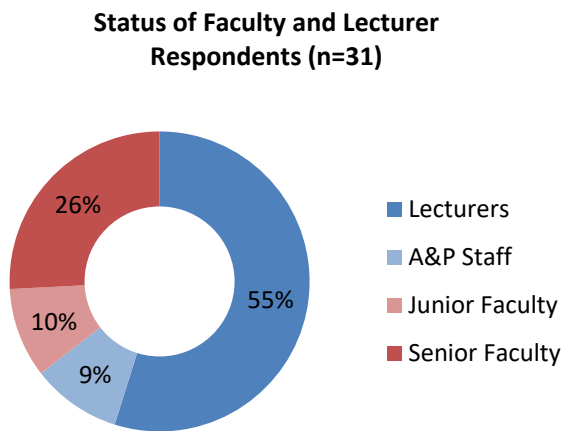
WAC CURRENTLY SUPPLEMENTS MANY OF THESE DEPARTMENTAL CULTURES OF SUPPORT BY

- Leading key workshops on basic writing pedagogy at UCAT's new GTA conference.
- Doing workshops on writing pedagogy in several departments' pedagogy courses or at 2367 GTA meetings in a department.
- Sponsoring events like reading groups where instructors in different departments can talk about their teaching.

WAC COULD FURTHER DEVELOP THIS SUPPORT BY

- Developing a GA certification program for 2367 instructors to supplement departmental cultures of support.
- Establishing a core training seminar for 2367 instructors that helps them align their teaching practice with GE objectives.

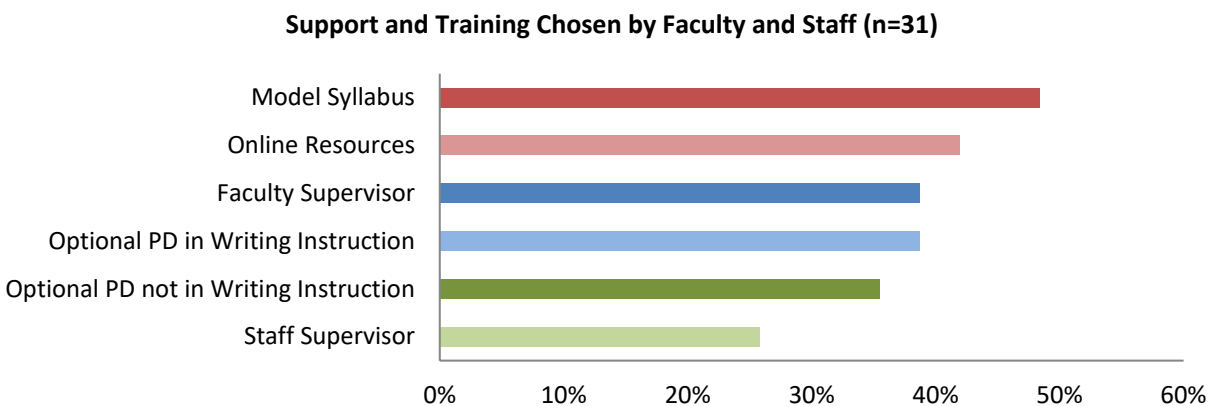
FACULTY AND LECTURERS: SCHOLARLY EXPERTISE, EXPERIENCE, AND LEADERSHIP



- 65% were veteran instructors who had taught for 8+ years.
- 35% were experienced instructors who have taught at the college level for 4-7 years.
- 64% of faculty had taught for 15 years or more.
- Nearly half (45%) of the faculty respondents were educational researchers of some kind, including those in the field of rhetoric, composition and literacy studies.

FACULTY AND LECTURERS VALUED THEIR AUTONOMY, BUT SOUGHT A RANGE OF SUPPORT AND OVERSIGHT.

Faculty and lecturers, when asked to choose from a list of common types of support and training, chose items that were optional, such as sample course materials or professional development events. Faculty and staff supervisors were recognized, but chosen less often.



NONE OF THE TRAINING AND SUPPORT ITEMS SIGNIFICANTLY CORRELATED WITH FACULTY OR LECTURER'S SENSE OF PREPAREDNESS.

FACULTY AND LECTURERS BROUGHT THEIR TEACHING EXPERIENCE AND SCHOLARLY EXPERTISE TO THEIR CLASSROOMS.

Faculty and lecturers, when asked in an open-ended question to identify what training most prepared them to teach a 2367 course, most often cited experience as writers and researchers. Many, however, also pointed to support and training that they sought out voluntarily as part of their professional development. Furthermore, they acknowledged the support and advice of their colleagues in developing their teaching.

One faculty member mentioned experience as an editor of several academic journals and as an active researcher.

However, another faculty member expressed skepticism that the course should be assigned to a scholar like him simply because he “wrote well,” suggesting that the idea that good writers make good teachers of writing is a “specious argument.”

IN ADDITION TO APPEALING TO THEIR EXPERIENCE AS TEACHERS AND WRITERS, LECTURERS AND FACULTY

- acknowledged formal and informal departmental support structures for those teaching the course,
- expressed gratitude for the help of a course supervisor, and
- appreciated regular training sessions or a pedagogy course.

MANY HAD FOUND SUPPORT OUTSIDE OF THEIR DEPARTMENT AT OHIO STATE, SUCH AS

- the UCAT Course Design Institute,
- WAC workshops and book groups, or
- the Columbus area Writing Project Summer Institute.
- Some had received similar support and training at previous institutions.

SEVERAL FACULTY AND LECTURERS WHO RESPONDED OVERSEE 2367 COURSES IN THEIR DEPARTMENTS, EITHER

- managing cohorts of GTAs and lecturers, or
- working with a few TAs who lead recitations associated with a lecture-oriented course.

SOME FELT THAT THEY NEEDED MORE SUPPORT AND TRAINING TO MANAGE THE COURSE.

One faculty member expressed a desire to participate in more WAC events, but complained that his teaching schedule was too busy, and that his course was too understaffed to allow him to attend.

WAC RECOMMENDS

FOR FACULTY AND LECTURERS, OFFER INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT (FUNDING, PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION, COURSE RELEASES) TO DEVELOP TEACHING AND, WHERE THEY OVERSEE SECOND-LEVEL WRITING COURSES, TO HELP THEM BUILD CULTURES OF SUPPORT FOR DEPARTMENT INSTRUCTORS.

WAC SUPPORTS FACULTY AND LECTURERS IN THEIR TEACHING AND LEADERSHIP ROLES BY

- Providing professional development for those who don't have expertise in writing pedagogy.
- Supplementing the departmental cultures of support they oversee through workshops and contacts with colleagues across campus.

WAC COULD FURTHER DEVELOP THIS SUPPORT BY

- Creating a learning community where faculty and lecturer experts can share their expertise, develop curricula, and strengthen departmental cultures of support for 2367.
- Consulting with course coordinators charged with assessing GE outcomes for 2367, and establishing a clearinghouse for second-level writing assessment to share across departments.

EXPERIENCED INSTRUCTORS DON'T NECESSARILY FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE TEACHING ELLS THAN NOVICE ONES.

In another Likert scale question (0-5, very uncomfortable to very comfortable), we asked instructors how comfortable they felt working with English Language Learner (ELL) writers.

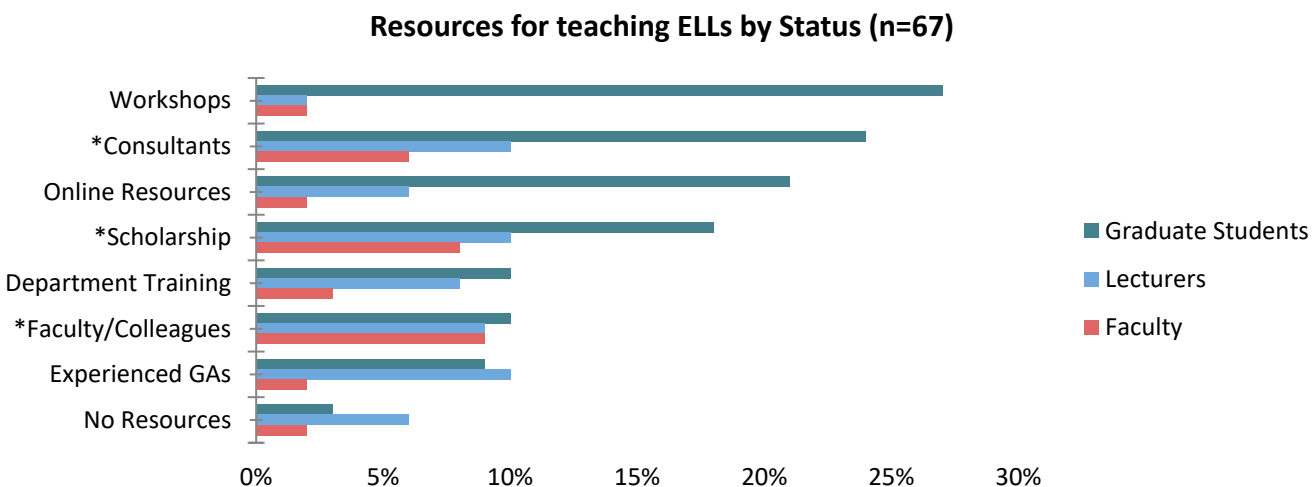
- GTAs were more comfortable teaching ELL students (mean: 3.72) than lecturers (mean: 3.65) or faculty (mean: 3.18), who were by far the least comfortable.
- Instructors with 1-3 years experience were the most comfortable (mean: 3.79).
- The most experienced instructors (15+ years) were least comfortable (mean: 3.5).

WHY THIS MIGHT BE IS PUZZLING. IS THIS BECAUSE:

- Faculty and the most experienced instructors have a more mixed view, since they teach at different levels of the curriculum, upper-level courses as well as lower-level GE courses like 2367?
- Less experienced instructors are more reluctant than others to identify themselves as struggling with a particular group of students?
- Our response rate is simply too low to get an accurate perspective?

INTERVENTIONS MIGHT IMPROVE INSTRUCTORS' COMFORT TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS.

In a question asking them to choose from a list of common resources for teaching ELL students, respondents most often identified resources that were outside their department, though some of the most valued support was informal collaboration with departmental colleagues and mentors.



FOR ALL OF THE RESPONDENTS, TWO SUPPORT AND TRAINING ITEMS CORRELATED WITH COMFORT WORKING WITH ELL STUDENTS,

- scholarship on teaching international students and ELL students, and
- talking with colleagues or faculty.

FOR EITHER FACULTY OR LECTURERS, NO TRAINING OR SUPPORT ITEMS CORRELATED WITH THEIR COMFORT WORKING WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS.

FOR GAS TWO ITEMS CORRELATED,

- advice from learning consultants (from groups like UCAT or WAC) and
- scholarship on teaching international students and ELL students.

WAC RECOMMENDS

FOR ALL INSTRUCTORS, GIVE MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN HOW TO HELP ELL WRITERS.

WAC SUPPORTS THE TEACHING OF ELLS THROUGH

- Co-sponsoring workshops on teaching writing to ELLs at the university and department level.
- Facilitating yearly reading groups featuring scholarship on teaching international students and ELLs.
- Collaborating with units like the ESL programs and the Office of International Affairs to share information about the international student experience with the university community.
- [Sharing best practices on teaching ELLs through our resource wiki.](#)

WAC COULD FURTHER DEVELOP THIS SUPPORT BY

- Incorporating into ALL of our programming, beyond special sessions:
 - Research on the OSU international student experience, like that provided by the Office of International Affairs.
 - A process for designing and facilitating intercultural classrooms through universal design for learning.
 - Strategies for making learning accessible for students coming from a range of cultural backgrounds and educational experiences, domestic and international.

APPENDIX: DEPARTMENT DATA

Sources: Schedule of Classes AU13-AU14, [Course Enrollment Reports](#) AU13-AU14

	% Share of Teaching Pool (AU13-14)	% Share of Sections Offered (AU13-14)	Average Course Caps
English	22.14%	17.37%	24
Psychology	12.21%	7.63%	28
Communication	11.07%	16.32%	29
Comparative Studies	9.16%	7.63%	25
Art Education	8.78%	10.26%	25
WGSS	4.20%	2.89%	25
Philosophy	3.44%	2.89%	25
Economics	3.05%	3.16%	35
Engineering	2.67%	11.84%	27
Theatre	2.67%	2.63%	27
Ling	2.29%	2.63%	26
Sociology	2.29%	2.89%	35
Dance	1.91%	0.53%	25
AAAS	1.53%	1.84%	25
Edu T&L	1.53%	1.05%	25
Germanic	1.53%	1.05%	25
HDFS	1.53%	1.84%	50
Slavic	1.53%	0.79%	30
ENR	1.15%	0.53%	50
AECL*	1.15%	0.53%	53 (26)*
Nursing	1.15%	1.58%	24
Animal Sciences*	0.76%	0.53%	100 (25)*
Physics	0.76%	0.26%	30
Land Arch*	0.38%	0.53%	110 (20)*
Political Science	0.38%	0.26%	40
Spanish	0.38%	0.26%	40

*Numbers in parentheses are recitation sizes for lecture-recitation courses.

DEPARTMENTS' SHARE OF TEACHING POOL DOESN'T QUITE MATCH UP EXACTLY WITH THEIR CORRESPONDING SHARES OF SECTIONS OFFERED OVER A YEAR:

- Two departments offered over 60 sections during the 2013-2014 year, English (17.4% of the sections) and Communication (16.3%).
- Four departments offered between 29-45 sections (7%-12% of the sections): Engineering, Art Education, Psychology, and Comparative Studies.
- Six offered between 10 and 12 (2.6%-3.2%)
- The remaining 15 departments offered between one and seven sections (1.8% and below).

From our tracking of instructors each term, we know that this variation largely seems to result from the fact that lecturers (and sometimes GTAs) teach multiple sections of a course in a term or over a year. Furthermore, there is sometimes more turnover within a department from term to term where instructors teach a wider variety of courses rather than sticking with 2367.