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"I Hate Group Projects"

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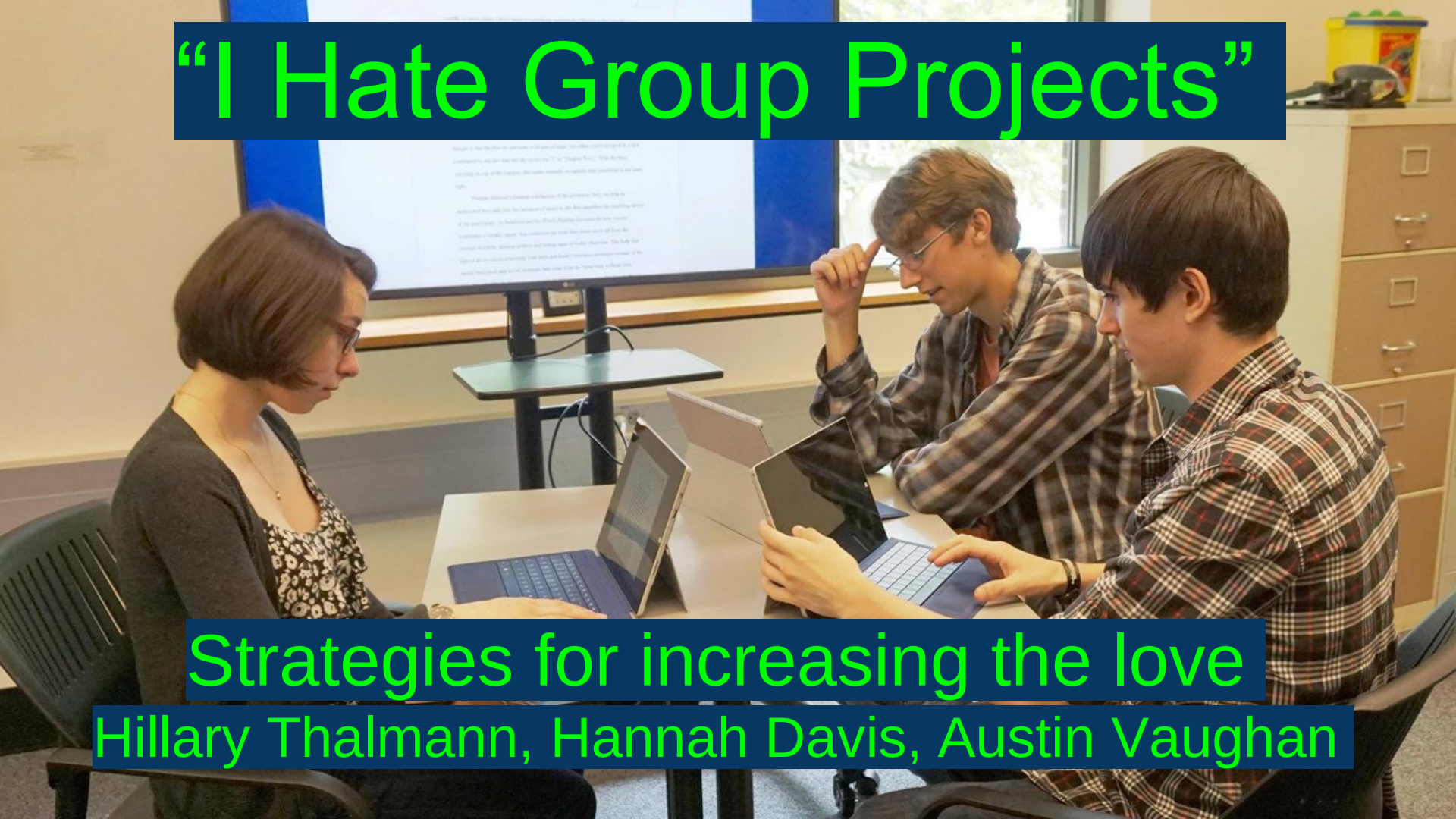


“I Hate Group Projects”

Strategies for increasing the love

Hillary Thalmann, Hannah Davis, Austin Vaughan

Hello! Welcome to the Hacherl Research and Writing Studio!

Imagine yourself as a studio assistant in the Hacherl Research and Writing Studio. You're a pro at helping individual writers with any questions they might have. You feel confident in your scaffolding abilities. Life is good.

But suddenly, a group in the studio turns their table tent to green. Your blood turns cold. A *group project*? How are you supposed to help out with that? You're struggling to think of what to do. You're already an outsider, and they have each other for help, right? Why would they want to talk to you?

Well, this is where we come in! Head to the next slides to see just how important we think it is to conference with groups in the studio -- and to see how you, as a studio assistant, fit into the whole process.

Check out this intimidating group!
How can you help?
Let’s find out together!

Our Question:

The creators of this lab (Austin, Hannah, and Hillary) who have all worked in the Hacherl Research and Writing Studio, noticed that many groups use the studio, but most studio assistants seem to log a lot fewer hours working with groups compared with individual writers. Of course, we wanted to find out more!

And so we set off on a trek to understand how studio assistants perceive groups, and how groups perceive the Research-Writing Studio. We observed groups and surveyed both studio assistants and groups. We pondered over piles of secondary research. We looked at trends in data and brainstormed strategies. And we want to share what we found with you!

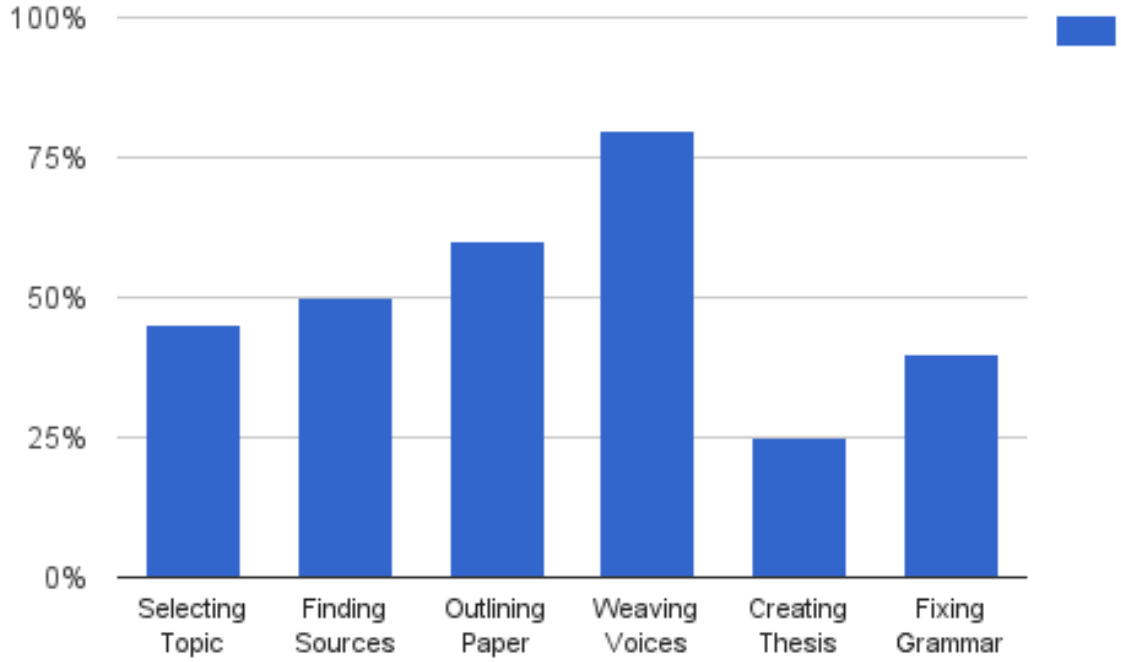
Trends in Data

Of the many topics we studied and the many graphs we created, there were two graphs that we thought were especially significant in the unexplored lands of group projects within the studio setting.

These next few slides will show you graphs of our findings, followed by our own interpretations of what they mean. What did you notice about the trends of the graphs? Are there any similarities between the two? How do these trends inform your own practices as a studio assistant?

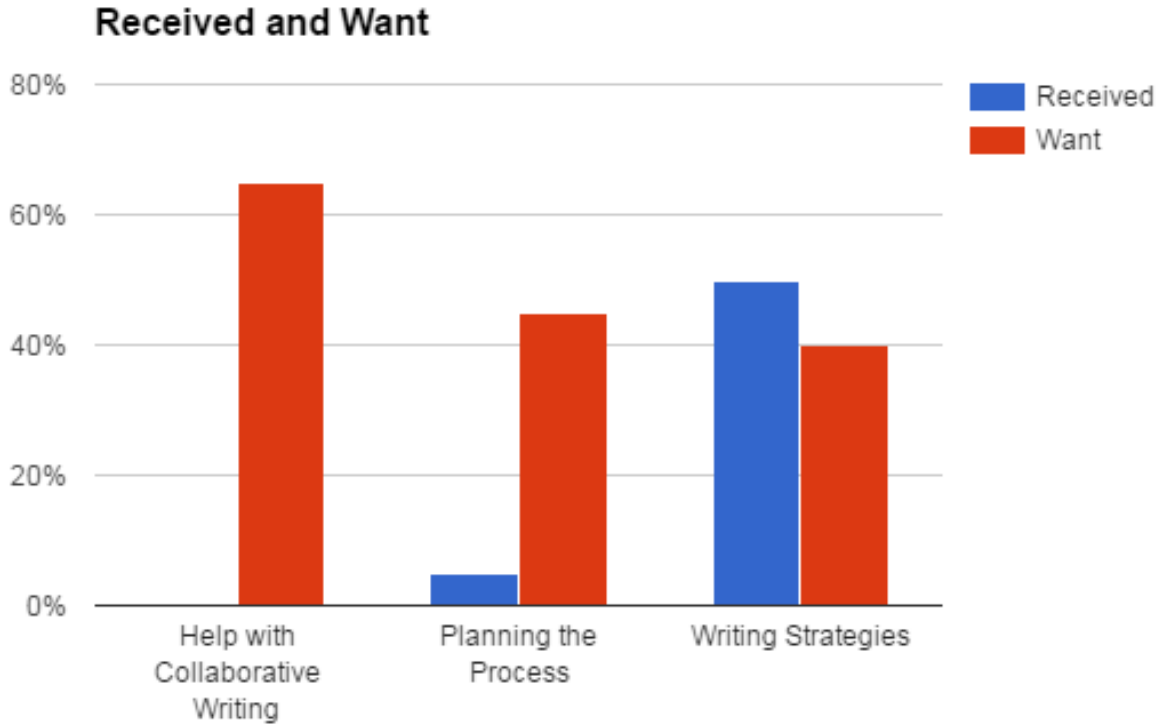
Jot down a few of these thoughts on a sheet of scratch paper or chat with a partner as you go!

Which aspects of collaborative research-writing process do groups find challenging?



In this graph, we can see students responded that weaving together voices and outlining the paper were the most challenging parts of their group papers.

What help have groups received from a Studio Assistant on this group project? In the future, what would groups want help with for a group project?



In the first graph we learned groups struggle with weaving voices and outlining the paper which corresponds to them wanting help with collaborative writing and planning the process in this graph. However, they are not currently receiving that help.

This graph also reveals that our Studio staff are a useful resource to groups since we are currently helping groups with writing strategies and they want to continue receiving that help.

Questions to consider about the data

Why haven’t Studio Assistants been able to help groups with the biggest challenges they face?

What strategies have you tried in the past when working with a group?

What possible strategies for collaborative writing and planning the process can you try as a Studio Assistant to help groups?

And we’re off to the exciting lands of Secondary Research!

Discovering trends within our own studio model is exciting. It’s so exciting, in fact, that we wanted to see if other writing center models have ever looked at how they help groups. It turns out that there has been some research done on groups, and quite a bit of it corresponds to what our studio is seeing. Here’s what others in writing centers have been saying about group projects.

As you read over some of the highlights from our research, think about what ideas would be most helpful for you as a studio assistant working with a group. (Trust us, these thoughts are going to be hugely helpful later on in this module!)

A Thought from Peter McCrorie on *Roles*

Peter McCrorie, author of *Teaching and Leading Small Groups*, gives some insight on the unique roles writing assistants can take when working with two or more members on a group writing project.

Acquiring different roles as a writing assistant can help the writer's progress in the different aspects of the writing process that are essential to success.

When reading through the different roles of the writing assistant, it is helpful to imagine the type of setting that would benefit from each role, and how each role would support the members of the group.

Before moving on to the next slide, write down some predictions of what kind of roles you can take as a Studio Assistant.

Roles

1. **Instructor**: In this role, the tutor imparts information onto the student.
2. **Devil's Advocate**: This role is used to challenge ideas during the conference to evoke thought and discussion among members.
3. **The Neutral Chair**: The assistant would chair the discussion without offering any strong emotions in this role.
4. **Facilitator**: This role is similar to the neutral chair, but the assistant would be more responsive in discussion, and guide the discussion for the writers.
5. **The Consultant**: The writing assistant would not participate in group discussion, but would be attentive and responsive to questions asked by group members.

A Thought from Muriel Harris

Muriel Harris, author of *Writing Center Tutorials and Peer Response Groups*, explains the unique need for writing assistants in a collaborative group writing project.

He explains that it is commonly believed writing assistants are not as useful in group conference settings because group members are able to answer questions for each other and succeed with less assistance.

However, he claims that writing assistants can benefit a group member just as much as the individual during conference because the writing assistant is focused on the writer's progress in the writing process over all, while the other group members are only focused on the final product of the group project.

The unique perspective of the writing assistant shows the importance of developing strategies to support the members of a group project as well as the individual. With this in mind, the next slides are dedicated to guiding you through developing your own strategies for a group setting.

Scenario Activity! (i.e. *You* can help groups too!)

The next section of this module involves you exercising your own skills as a studio assistant working with a group in the studio! We have four scenarios involving group projects that may emerge in the Research-Writing Studio. Your job is to come up with a few strategies for working for groups in the studio based on these scenarios, and to envision yourself applying them! How exciting is that?!

Think for a moment of strategies and roles you might address or use in this conference and write a few down. When you're ready, move on to the next slide to see a few tips that we suggest!

Good luck and happy group-project-ing!

Questions to keep in mind

How might you address the *affect* of the writers in the group?

What *role* could you take as an assistant that would be most beneficial to the group?

How can you apply strategies used in individual conferences to group writing projects?

Scenario #1

Randy, Ronda, and Ralphy are working in the studio on a group synthesis essay on Food and Culture. They each wrote a paragraph on a food from Italy and are struggling with relating their paragraphs to one another. Randy's paragraph is about the history of spaghetti, Ronda's paragraph is about the significance of different Italian spices, and Ralphy's paragraph includes a description of why pizza is awesome. How can Randy, Ronda and Ralphy revise and conjoin their paragraphs so that the final product sounds like one cohesive paper?

Take 5 minutes to map out strategies you could use in approaching this group before moving on to the next slide.

Do your strategies acknowledge each of the writers varying interests and ideas for the assignment? Did your strategies attempt to prompt discussion that gave all writers an equal voice?

Do you identify a specific role as an assistant that would be beneficial to the group? How many different roles did you strategies include?

Possible Solutions #1

- Identify members that are an “expert” in a specific part of the writing process and prompt them to teach others
- Help members divide tasks by identifying who is best at what task
- Create a Venn diagram to find similarities between topics
- Create a mind map linking all of the members ideas
- Prompt discussion regarding rationale for idea
- Facilitating discussion and organization of group work
- Scaffolding different strategies that outline each of the writer’s ideas

Are any of the strategies you wrote down similar to the ones listed above?

Did you come up with something that we had not even considered that may work?

Scenario #2

Heidi, Hailey, and Henry are working in the studio on a group paper about marine conservation in Washington. They decided to talk about the conservation of orcas in Puget Sound. Heidi is a senior majoring in marine biology and has drafted a paragraph about Puget Sound orcas with a full citation list of peer-reviewed journals. Hailey is a film major and is taking the class to fill her last GUR. She wrote her paragraph in the form of a dramatic interview between an orca activist and a news journalist. Henry is a sophomore and hasn't declared his major. He has never been in a upper division group project before, and he wrote a short paragraph based on Wikipedia articles. Heidi, Hailey, and Henry are frustrated because they don't know how to write a paper that they all understand and can contribute to. What strategies can you provide to help this group with their project?

Take 5 minutes to map out strategies you could use in approaching this group before moving on to the next slide.

Did you address the varying backgrounds of Hank, Hailey, and Henry? If you did, what do you feel worked well? If you didn't, do you feel like addressing these differences would have helped your conference?

What strategies did you use to help Hank, Hailey, and Henry feel like they were all able to contribute to the project?

What was hard about this scenario? What do you wish you had known about before you started the conference?

Possible Solutions #2

- Work on transitions to better merge voices
- Put ideas on a whiteboard, see how ideas connect (mapping)
- Strengths of group members who are not as versed in the subject (group “experts”)
- Offering opportunities for group members to teach other group members
- Prompt writers to explain the rationale for their ideas
- Ask writers to imagine a final product
- Assist writers in establishing an end goal for the project

Are any of the strategies you wrote down similar to the ones listed above?

Did you come up with something that we had not even considered that may work?

Scenario #3

Trevor, Travis, and Trisha are revising their Art History group paper on the Mona Lisa painting. The paper is due Friday and they are trying to figure out what part of their essay they should focus on revising in their limited time. Trevor has noticed a lot of punctuation and grammar areas, but does not want to go through the entire 20-page paper by himself to fix the errors. On the other hand, Travis thinks the group should continue discussing their analysis of Mona Lisa's eyebrows since he feels this section is not as strong as the section on Mona Lisa's eyes. Meanwhile,Trisha is still doing research and just found an interesting article on painting styles that she wants to include into the paper now. What strategies can you provide to help this group with their project?

Take 5 minutes to map out strategies you could use in approaching this group before moving on to the next slide.

Do you use negotiating skills with this group to determine which aspects of the project they felt like would need the most attention, based on your ideas of what you think would need the most attention?

How many of the strategies you used were similar to ones that you might use in a conference with an individual writer? Which of the strategies were unique to a group writing project?

Can you think of a different way that this interaction might have progressed? Would this alternative way have a different level of effectiveness than your first strategy?

Possible Solutions #3

- Help identify higher order concerns
- Give a rationale for prioritizing higher order concerns
- Identify assignment expectations to prioritize tasks
- Guide discussion towards reflection and impact of each idea

Are any of the strategies you wrote down similar to the ones listed above?

Did you come up with something that we had not even considered that may work?

Scenario #4

You are a studio assistant and have noticed Aaron, Abel, and Annabel working together on a group project for the past two days. They have been actively working and discussing topics. The shift manager asks if you can check up with them, and you say “Yes!!!” and bounce over. What strategies would you use to enter into this group dynamic and begin a conversation with the group about their project?

Take 5 minutes to map out strategies you could use in approaching this group before moving on to the next slide.

How natural did it seem to you to enter into this group’s dynamic? Did you feel like an outsider? Did you think of strategies for simply introducing yourself and the studio?

Envision yourself in a group project (I know you’ve done one at some point!). What would you appreciate from a studio assistant? What would be the most helpful information that a studio assistant could provide?

Did you envision yourself as a studio assistant interacting with all three members of this group? If you did, how do you think that helped? If you didn’t, do you think that it might have been useful?

Possible Solutions #4

- Ask writing-specific questions to the writing group (i.e. How's the organization going?)
- Try to include multiple voices in the group
- Assess visual cues -- ask the person who seems the most hesitant
- Becoming part of the group by pulling up a chair
- Direct questions at specific people, addressing each group member

Are any of the strategies you wrote down similar to the ones listed above?

Did you come up with something that we had not even considered that may work?

Conclusion

Groups are definitely a change in scenery for many studio assistants. They come to us concerned about collaboration and merging their different voices. They come to us not sure where to start in the long process of planning their papers. Sometimes strategies that we use for individual writers work for groups. Sometimes they don't. Sometimes we have to come up with new strategies on the fly.

But despite of the challenges, we *are* an integral part of the group process. Previous research identified five roles we might fill, and we shouldn't stop there. Let's make it a goal to bring the group project fully into the realm of the studio, so that the next time you see a group, you want to run into their conversation and not run away.

Thanks for participating! Happy group-project-ing!