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# "I Had to Discard Initial Assumptions": Equipping Writing Center Tutors with Expertise in Second Language Writing

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**“I had to discard initial assumptions”**

# **Equipping Writing Center Tutors with Expertise in Second Language Writing**

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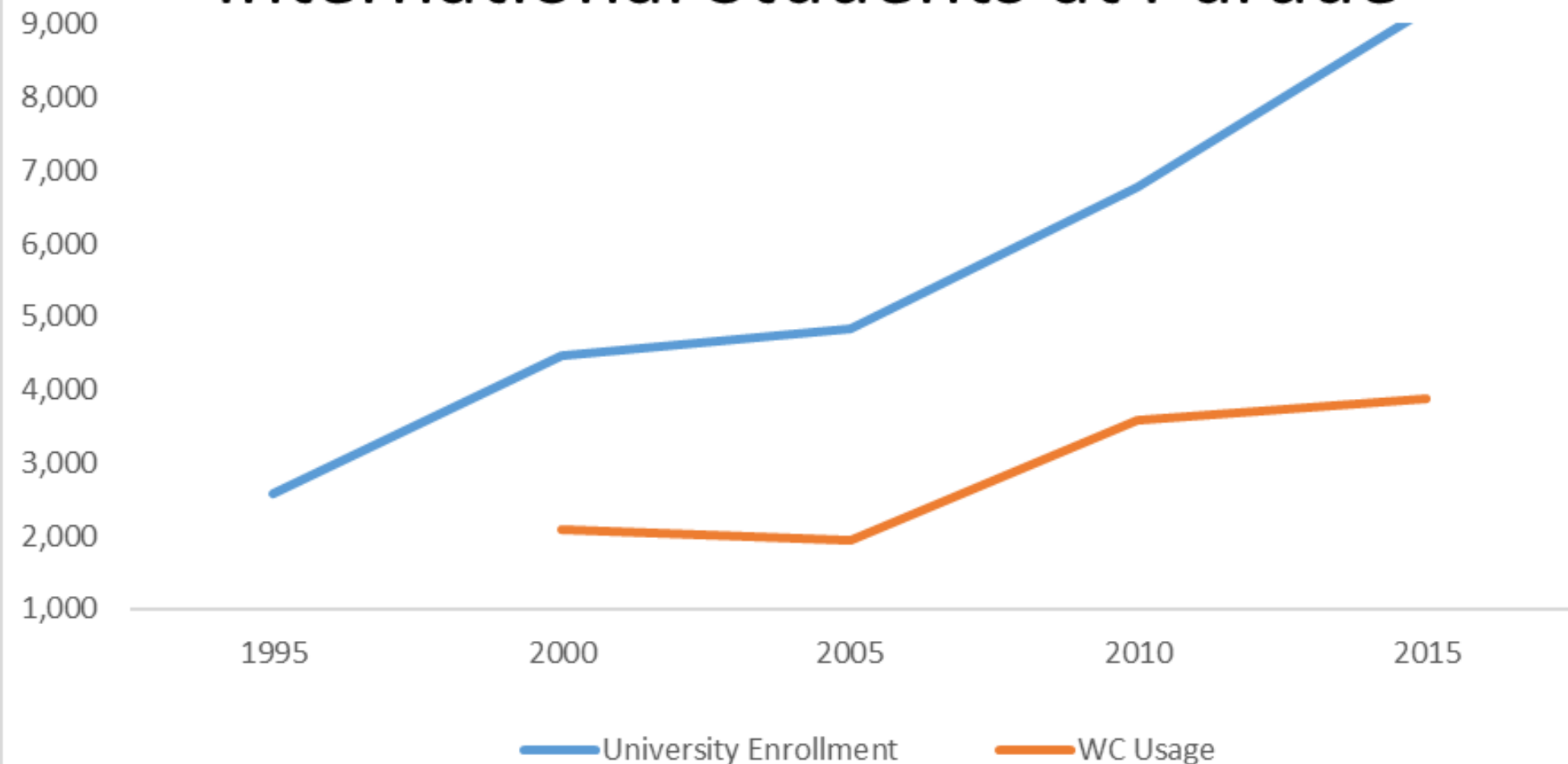
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SSLW, October 2016

# Overview

- Why Writing Center tutors need L2 writing expertise
  - ✓ Background
  - ✓ Need
- How to equip them with what they need
  - ✓ Homegrown training program
  - ✓ Results

# International Students at Purdue



[www.purdue.edu/datadigest/datadigest2001\\_02/pages/students/stu\\_int.htm](http://www.purdue.edu/datadigest/datadigest2001_02/pages/students/stu_int.htm)

[www.purdue.edu/datadigest/Diversity/WLEnrlInternational.htm](http://www.purdue.edu/datadigest/Diversity/WLEnrlInternational.htm)

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/writinglab/annualreports>

# The Need—Writers

## Writers ask for:

- Grammar
- To sound like a native speaker
- Zero grammar errors

## Writers also need:

- Cultural knowledge
- Vocabulary
- Realistic expectations
- Writing help common to all inexperienced writers

# The Need—Tutors

	Graduate Tutors				Undergraduate Tutors			
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2013	2014	2015	2016
1 <sup>st</sup> yr. of tutoring	15%	36%	43%	0%	57%	47%	41%	71%
Yrs. of experience w/international students	77%	58%	65%	79%	40%	41%	41%	35%
	2-5 years experience				1 <sup>st</sup> year of experience			
Lack knowledge of cultural issues	33%	up to 80%	up to 60%	up to 42%	up to 71%	up to 76%	up to 88%	63%
Lack knowledge of L2 grammar/vocab problems	17%	up to 30%	up to 40%	up to 42%	up to 43%	up to 47%	up to 49%	up to 56%

- “I had to discard **initial assumptions** about their abilities.”
- “I assumed that **writing processes** . . . were fundamentally the same.”
- “It was challenging to differentiate between **writing concerns** and **language issues**.”
- “I find it difficult to **explain grammatical rules** to students, which are easier for me to do "instinctively" rather than explain.”
- “I would like more training on how to overcome **language barriers** during conferences.”
- “I was worried about **pretty much everything**.”

# Context Constraints & Goals

## Context Constraints

- Mixed Disciplines (WC & SLW)
- Funding & Time
- Topics
- Methods

## Goals

- Theoretical conversation
- Strategies and skills
- Self-reflection





### **Discourse Analysis--A Closer Look at Tutor Talk**

This module will ask you to look closely at tutor talk and how it

This module will most likely take you 5-6 weeks of training time early in the semester.



### **Attitudes and Assumptions**



### **Cross-Cultural Communication**



### **Cultural Impacts on Writing**



### **Grammar and Proofreading**



### **Grammar Requests--What They Might Mean**

This module explores what it means when a writer asks for help who really knows what a paper needs.



### **Plagiarism**



### **Second Language Acquisition**



### **Tutoring**



### **Vocabulary and Sentences**

# Creating Interactive Content

- Observation: Identify areas of need
- Research: Identify relevant theoretical material
- Thought: Identify (& create) interactive content
- Test newly developed materials

# Creating Interactive Content: Observations

Client comments on own ability in language or writing		
Client requests grammar/vocabulary/ sentence help		
Client requests other help (HOCs)		
Client finds own errors while (R)eading or while (T)utor reads	(R)– (T)–	(R)– (T)–
Client corrects own errors when tutor points them out		
Client challenges or disagrees with tutor's suggestion		
Tutor interrupts reading to talk about grammar/vocabulary/sentences		
Tutor interrupts reading to talk about other concerns		
.....		

# Creating Interactive Content: Observations

	Agenda-Setting		Client Mentions	They Talk about
	Client	Tutor		
Understanding the assignment				
Generating ideas				
Thesis statement				
Argument				
...				

# Creating Interactive Content: Observations

Sample Chart

Turn length in seconds			Tutor Questions			
Tutor	Writer	Silence	Reading	Known Answer	Authentic Question	Back-channel from listener?
	15					X (the tutor spoke)
20					X	X (the writer spoke)
	5					X (the tutor spoke)
60			X			

	Tutor	Writer	Silence	Total
Number of turns				
Length of speaking time in seconds				
Average turn length (length of speaking time divided by number of turns)				
Number of turns for back-channeling (remember to count the rows when the person was NOT the main speaker)				
Length of time spent reading				
Number of <i>Known Answer</i> questions				
Number of <i>Authentic</i> questions				

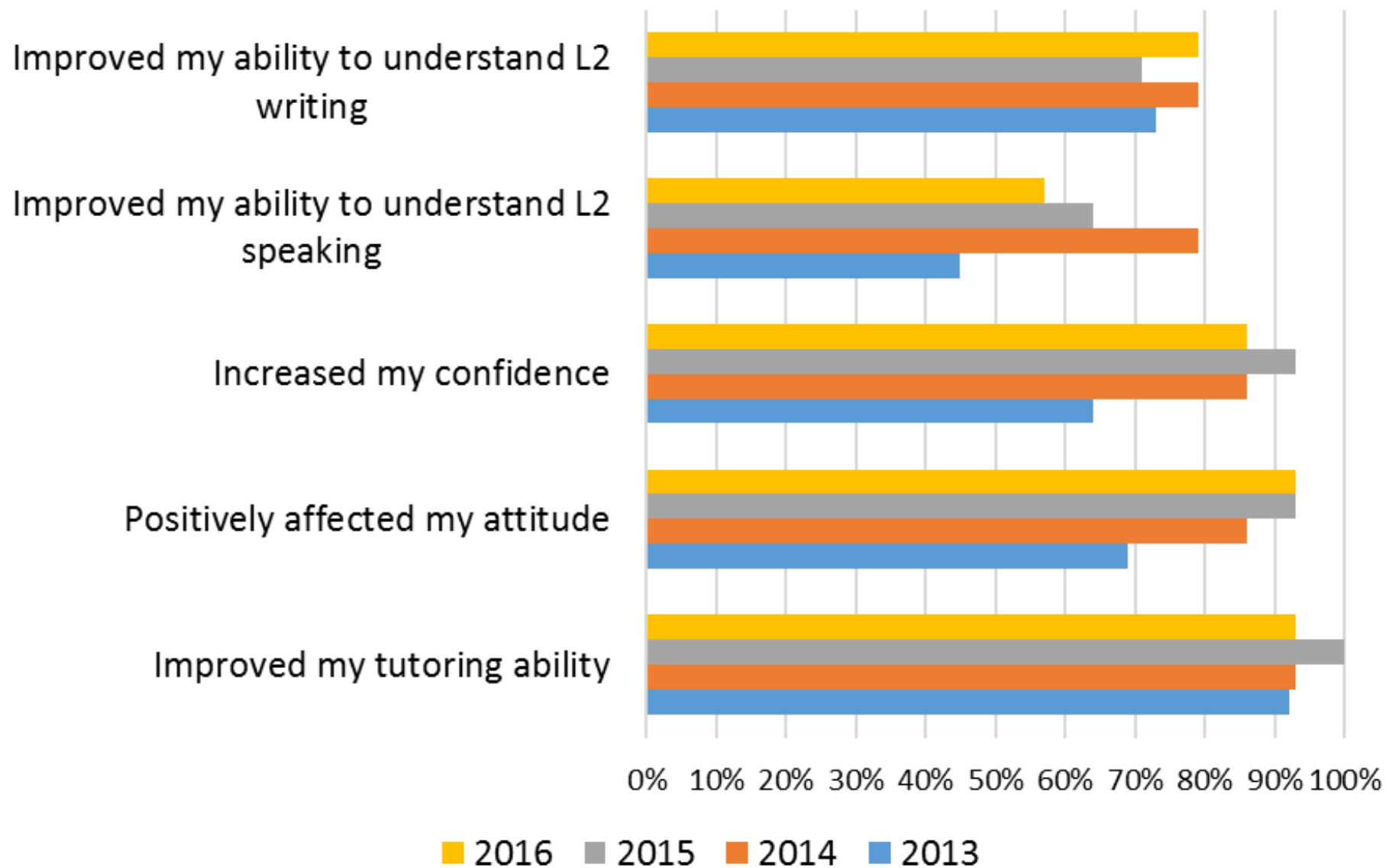
# Creating Interactive Content: Sample Papers

- Collect sample documents from writers
- Use a permission form
- Potential methods include
  - ✓ L2 and presumed-L1 comparison
  - ✓ Error marking method tryout and comparison
  - ✓ Mark a draft then compare to the video-recorded tutorial of that draft

# Putting It All Together

- Training should allow tutors to
  - ✓ Join the theoretical conversation
  - ✓ Practice skills
  - ✓ Become aware of their own assumptions
- Any module should include
  - ✓ Relevant background reading and theory
  - ✓ Activities for practicing skills
  - ✓ Reflection guided by questions

# Graduate Tutor Training Evaluation





- “I **make far less assumptions** and view [L2 writers] more individually.”
- “The tutorial checklist helped me see the **common issues . . .**”
- “I have been able to see more clearly how some **assignment guidelines are culturally bound.**”
- “The interview . . . was a great reminder of the **difficulty of writing academic papers as an ESL student.**”
- “**Clients seem more comfortable** as a result of my knowing more about their needs.”
- “These exercises have helped me **identify both patterns of error and my own assumptions** about the writers.”

# Questions?

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