



# HGSE Writing Center and Communications Lab

*Peer-to-Peer Learning Community Initiatives*

## Annual Report 2020

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS REPORT:

Simone Fried, Lead TF, HGSE Writing Center

Dylan Lukes, TF, HGSE Communications Lab

Preeya Mbekeani, TF, HGSE Communications Lab

Ning Zou, Associate Director for Student Academic  
Services and Learning Design | Research Librarian  
Gutman Library | [ning\\_zou@gse.harvard.edu](mailto:ning_zou@gse.harvard.edu)

[www.gse.harvard.edu/library](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/library)

# Table of Contents

HGSE Writing Center.....	2
Our Mission.....	2
What We Believe .....	2
Our Team.....	2
What Students Experience .....	3
On the Horizon – Our Future & Your Support .....	4
HGSE Communications Lab .....	5
Our Mission.....	5
Our Team.....	6
What Students Experience .....	6
.....	7
.....	7
On the Horizon - Our Future & Your Support.....	10
Appendix A: Writing Center Consultations by HGSE Program .....	11
Appendix B: Writing Center - Courses with the Most Consultations .....	12
Appendix C: Communications Lab Consultations by Program.....	12
Appendix D: Communications Lab Consultations by Topics.....	13

# HGSE Writing Center

## Our Mission

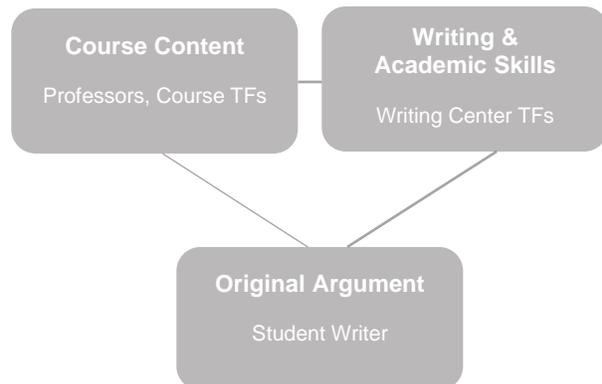
- Provide personalized writing support to all HGSE students with quality one-on-one consultations at any stage of the writing process.
- Strengthen writing instruction and education at HGSE through other forms such as workshops, online tutorials, discussions, and panels, or support groups.
- Collaborate with other offices on campus (Communications Lab, Research Librarians, Office of Students Affairs, Teaching and Learning Lab, and Academic Affairs) to help students navigate the HGSE support network, and to design programs that meet evolving student needs.

## What We Believe

- Our approach is generalist and interdisciplinary; all of our TFs are capable of adding value to all students' papers regardless of their own specialization within education research.
- We may offer critique, ask for evidence, or question an interpretation, but we are not ultimately responsible for content. The course teaching team is expert on the material; the student is the authority on their own argument, ideas, and analysis; and the writing TF focuses on the craft of academic writing. We take care not to become collaborators or allow our own content knowledge to supplant the student's.
- Writing is vulnerable, and as peer tutors, we provide a safe, non-evaluative space for HGSE students. We support students who may feel more comfortable with us than with a professor or course TF.
- We advance students' academic writing skills through course assignments. While this includes language mechanics and style, we are not an editing service, nor do we have a curriculum. Our service is not designed to offer a comprehensive foundation in academic writing, but rather to improve writing through collaborative editing.

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### Area of Expertise during a Writing Center Consultation



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## Our Team

- Our staff are senior HGSE doctoral students in their dissertation phase. Seven work primarily as tutors, while one coordinates and oversees the program in conjunction with

the Association Director for Student Academic Services and Learning Design in Gutman Library.

- All took HGSE courses as students and later worked in other course TF positions, making them intimately familiar with both faculty expectations and the student experience.
- Writing TFs have also served on academic editorial boards, coached thesis writers, tutored writing at both HGSE and other institutions, and taught secondary English. Several have published in academic journals or for professional organizations.
- Our TFs include international students, U.S. students from multilingual homes, scholars of language and literacy, and other backgrounds that contribute diverse perspectives on writing instruction.
- At the beginning of the year, TFs participate in a half-day training on inclusive pedagogy, common scenarios, and strategies for supporting HGSE students. Collectively, our staff represent many years of experience, which they use to tailor each conference to the student's goals and concerns.

## What Students Experience

Our one-on-one approach allows us the flexibility to adapt offerings for our diverse student community. The following composite profiles draw on details and quotes from multiple students to represent some common ways they use our services.

Policy student Mbaye Ba<sup>1</sup> first encountered Writing Services during an OSA-sponsored “Lunch and Learn” presentation aimed at multilingual writers. Born and raised in Dakar, Senegal, Mbaye spoke both French and Wolof fluently, and had spent the past two years working for the Senegalese National Office for Vocational Training. During the September lunch session, TFs summarized principles of U.S. academic writing and led a discussion to elicit key differences from writing in other countries. When Mbaye received his first policy memo assignment, he made a writing center appointment to ensure his format, language, and style met the strict criteria. Mbaye was surprised to learn that his TF was also an international student and told her it made him feel more comfortable sharing his English writing. Over the course of the year,

### Quick Facts (2019-2020)

- 8 Writing TFs
- 546 Consultations
- Provided introductory workshops: Citing and Referencing, and Style, Structure, and Strategy, in September 2019
- Held Lunch ‘n Learn session for Multilingual Writers in fall 2019, sponsored by OSA
- Transitioned to a new scheduling system for better user experience and data tracking
- Held write-in event during fall 2019 reading period, to provide students with productive environment and flexible writing support
- Implemented exit surveys to collect student feedback on consultations
- In spring 2020, held weekly Academic Writing in English peer support group
- Transitioned to Zoom to support students remotely through COVID

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<sup>1</sup> All names and specific details (program, background, etc.) have been changed. Each profile is based on multiple real student experiences.

Mbaye visited the center almost weekly, developing relationships with multiple TFs and using the meetings as a form of external writing support and accountability.

After nine years of teaching elementary science in Brentwood, TN, Christal Miller entered the Learning Design program apprehensive about returning to student life. She signed up for the center's fall Introduction to Academic Writing workshops to refresh her skills. Christal then made an individual appointment when Professor Pamela Mason required students to meet with Writing TFs for their first assignment. Christal and her TF talked through her argument, then concentrated on her use of evidence in three key paragraphs. Towards the end of the session, Christal brought up academic and personal challenges that had affected her transition to HGSE. She and the TF talked about the shared stresses they faced as grad students, and the TF referred Christal to OSA for additional support. Christal visited the center twice more for help with major assignments, writing on a feedback form: "Each time I have a session, I leave with a more cohesive through line, a clearer thesis, and stronger evidence. Thank you for your support!"

Taylor Perez, a recent Boston College graduate, enrolled in the Developmental Science program to build her experience before pursuing a Ph.D. One blustery Saturday morning in October, she met with a TF to brainstorm her term project: a research proposal based on her internship in Professor Meredith Rowe's psychology lab. The TF, Marisa, listened to Taylor's ideas, asking questions, and offering perspective while taking notes. Together they clarified key points and mapped them to each section of a standard research proposal. A few weeks later, Taylor returned with a rough draft, and the two spent the next hour aligning claims, evidence, and interpretation throughout the paper. After Taylor left, Marisa stayed in the office for fifteen minutes to jot down some unexpected thoughts their conversation brought up for her own dissertation work.

## On the Horizon – Our Future & Your Support

Given the current climate, we cannot be fully certain of what our services will look like in the 2020-2021 school year. However, we will continue to provide one-on-one tutoring, support writing skills development at HGSE, and expand our virtual options to be more flexible and accessible to all students. During the summer and beyond, we plan to:

- Update our website for easier navigation;
- Expand our resource list of supplemental content, such as recommended online courses;
- Elevate discussion of writing on campus through events such as HGSE faculty panels on writing or publishing; and
- Develop workshops, self-paced online writing modules, or other training on other high-need content like writing for a specific genre, editing and revising, or grammar and language mechanics.

# HGSE Communications Lab

## Our Mission

The HGSE Communications Lab, founded in fall 2019, is an educational program within the Harvard Graduate School of Education. We exist to cultivate and sharpen HGSE master's and doctoral students' oral, written and visual communication skills, with an emphasis on academic and professional presentations, posters, and career readiness. Our core offerings include a series of workshops and webinars, in addition to one-on-one and small group consultations. Throughout the academic year we strive to equip HGSE students with communication skills we believe are essential for both academic and career success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Our program is collaborative in nature, both leveraging and connecting students to the rich set of cross-discipline educational resources at HGSE. We partner with other offices on campus (e.g. Writing Center, Research and Scholarly Communications Librarians, Office of Students Affairs, Teacher and Learning Lab, and Academic Affairs) to both help students navigate the HGSE support network and to design new communications based programming to meet evolving student needs inside and outside the classroom.

## What We Believe

- We are generalists who embrace an interdisciplinary approach. All our Lab TFs, independent of their expertise as education researchers, are capable of adding value to the Lab through content creation and direct support of every HGSE student's communication needs.
- We provide constructive criticism, positive feedback, suggest frameworks and define action steps, but we are not responsible for created content. The course teaching team is expert on the material; the student is expert on their own argument, ideas, and analysis; the Lab TF is an expert on oral, written or visual communication skills. We take care not to become collaborators or allow our own content expertise to supplant that of the student's.
- We are peer tutors, who provide a welcoming, safe and non-evaluative space for HGSE students to practice and improve their oral, written and visual communication skills.
- We are responsible for meeting students where they are, listening to their needs and aligning our support to their communication tasks and deadlines.

### Quick Facts (2019-2020)

- 2 CommLab TFs
- 31 Consultations
- 8 Workshops & Webinars
- Provided doctoral students with consultations on doctoral defenses
- Offered coaching sessions for the HGSE commencement student speaker
- Implemented online exit surveys to collect student feedback on consultations
- Created online surveys to gather students' feedback on workshops and webinars
- Transitioned to Zoom to support students remotely through COVID

- We focus on the craft and technique of oral, written and visual communication. While our assistance is varied and dynamic across multiple mediums, we are not an end-to-end service offering. That is, we do not create from start-to-finish a student's or group's final deliverable including oral scripts, presentation slides, posters, and pitches.
- We direct students to other HGSE academic supports and resources as needed.

## Our Team

- Our team is composed of advanced HGSE doctoral students in their dissertation phase. The team's two TFs are responsible for creating all CommLab programming materials, hosting CommLab workshops/webinars and holding private one-on-one or small group consultations. We are led by Ning Zou, the Associate Director for Student Academic Services & Learning Design, who manages our week-to-week operations and strategic planning.
- All CommLab TFs have participated both as students and TFs for numerous HGSE courses resulting in familiarity with the HGSE student experience and a firm understanding of course expectations. CommLab TF's experiences as students and TFs help the CommLab identify and strategically target courses with oral, written or visual communication deliverables.
- Our CommLab TFs have coached Ph.D. and Ed.L.D. candidates on their defenses and have advised academic and non-academic clients on oral, written or visual communication skills. CommLab TFs have featured their academic work at leading education policy conferences and university colloquiums including AEFPP, AERA, ESS, SREE and the HGSE EPPE Doctoral Colloquium.
- One of our TFs received professional training on oral, written and visual communication skills during their 2 + years as a management consultant. Another TF spent time as a secondary teacher and has experience leading educator professional development.
- Collectively our team houses professionals with many years of experience in both preparing and providing professional-grade oral, written and visual communication deliverables. Our team's set of rich experiences and communication-based expertise makes our lab a home for student-centered, career facing, quality programming that meets diverse communication needs of the HGSE community.

## What Students Experience

Our dual offerings of workshops and private one-on-one or small group consultations give students a diverse set of programming they can choose from to best meet their needs. Our workshops provide broad exposure to introductory communication skills and frameworks in an approachable, welcoming environment where HGSE students can meet and interact with their peers. These sessions serve to shore up the foundation of HGSE students' oral, written and visual communication skills and act as a launching pad for students to explore more advanced topics in one-on-one or small group consultations. Relative to our workshop offerings, our private consultations provide greater flexibility to adapt and differentiate our support to meet the individualized needs of HGSE's diverse student community.

In 2019-2020, all CommLab TFs were advanced HGSE doctoral students in their dissertation phase. Collectively, they represent many years of professional teaching and/or communication experience, which they use to both curate workshop programming and tailor consultations to

each student's goals and concerns. The following profiles and quotes draw on real student experiences to represent some common ways students use our services.

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### *Ph.D. Candidate @ HGSE*

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1

#### Overview

- Seeking to gain feedback and practice her dissertation defense
- Learned about the offerings of the CommLab through an email on the Ph.D. student list-serv

2

#### Goals

- Receive feedback on the deliver and content of their presentation
- Practice the timing of the presentation

3

#### Results

- Through the one-on-one consultation, student was able to see areas that could be trimmed from the presentation, receive input on what should be added, and improve fluency through delivering the presentation
- Feedback also provided on the order of the presentation to streamline delivery

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### *Ed.L.D. Candidate @ HGSE*

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1

#### Overview

- Seeking to gain feedback on their upcoming defense
- Learned about the offerings of the CommLab through an email on the Ph.D. student list-serv

2

#### Goals

- To receive feedback on their PowerPoint presentation structure, slide ordering and individual design
- Brainstorm how to use visuals to communicate their frameworks and results

3

#### Results

- The student left our one-on-one consultation with a better understanding of best practice for .pptx deck creation and the importance storyboarding plays in creating a cohesive narrative for a high impact presentation.
- In a follow-up session, the student showcased their preliminary deck and received substantive feedback on a dry run of their defense.
- Provides examples of common frameworks and visuals in addition to connecting the student with CommLab resources online

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## *Ed.M. Candidates @ HGSE*

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### **STUDENT 1**

1

#### **Overview**

- Teaching and literacy focus
- Signed up for session during first weeks of spring semester to learn about what supports CommLab teaching fellows could provide.

2

#### **Goals**

- To gain more comfort and fluency in group presentations
- She expressed frustration that she felt constrained/unnatural in these situations even though she had experience delivering presentations and workshops.

3

#### **Results**

- TF explained the services to her and directed her to resources on delivering presentations from our workshops and webinars
- She signed up for two additional consultations in which she practiced delivering her portion of two group presentations.
- The TF provided feedback on content delivery and time management.
- The student was also able to practice incorporating elements that made the presentation feel more natural.

### **STUDENT 2**

1

#### **Overview**

- International student from Pakistan with native-like proficiency in reading and listening English but less confidence in speaking.
- Ed.M. candidate in Mind, Brain and Education

2

## Goals

- Learn to create and effectively use notes for large group presentations
- Particular focus on making their transitions smoother and connecting with the audience in an engaging and authentic manner.

3

## Results

- The student walked away with a better understanding of the process of storyboarding and how to prepare slides in a systematic way on paper before creating them in PowerPoint.
- Student was also reassured by CommLab TF and appreciated their probing but polite questions and questioning of their prior assumptions related to fluency, authenticity, and preparation

### **STUDENT 3**

1

## Overview

- International student from Mexico
- Ed.M. Candidate in Technology, Innovation and Education

2

## Goals

- To improve their pitch for an educational product.
- Previous pitches had already been given as part of Harvard Innovation Lab's 2020 President's Innovation Challenge where the student was a semi-finalist.

3

## Results

- The student left the meeting with a better understanding of each of the key elements of an effective pitch and with tangible advice on how to improve her pitch in a way that more effectively communicated what her product was, it's impact and her ask.
- CommLab TF was able to connect the student with curated CommLab workshop materials and other pitch related resources giving the student access to effective pitch examples broken down by each of the key components previously discussed.

# On the Horizon - Our Future & Your Support

This was the inaugural year for the newly refit HGSE CommLab and with it brought much progress towards creating a home to HGSE master's and doctoral students for all their oral, written and visual communication needs. Throughout the academic year, the CommLab curated in-house communication-based content for workshops/webinars and connected with students in individualized one-on-one consultations. In the transition to an all-digital learning environment due to COVID-19, our lab has continued to see students turn to us for help and support as witnessed from well attended webinars and consistent bookings of one-on-one consultations. As we adjust to potentialities of remaining remote next year, we remain posed to positively impact the student experience and provide a space that showcases the quality programming HGSE commits to providing our students along their graduate school journey.

That said, there is still work to be done to continue to improve and expand our offerings. These include the following action items:

## **Greater offerings**

- Develop new workshop/webinar series based on curriculum needs
- Create a new website with a rich body of digital resources in communication
- Recommend relevant free/open source tutorials from Harvard Communication and beyond (e.g. LinkedIn Learning, MOOC, etc.)

## **More focused outreach and marketing**

- Establish a marketing plan
- Conduct more targeted program outreach activities

## **New TF training**

- Generate consultation norms and policies/TF training materials

## Appendix A: Writing Center Consultations by HGSE Program

HGSE Program	# of Consultations
Human Development and Psychology	90
Language and Literacy	78
International Education Policy	71
Education Policy and Management	69
Higher Education	61
Ed.D./Ph.D.	20
Prevention Science and Practice	18
Technology, Innovation, and Education	11
Learning and Teaching	9
Mind, Brain, and Education	8
Specialized Studies	7
School Leadership	5
Ed.L.D.	4
Arts in Education	2
Teacher Education	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>454</b>

Fall 2019

HGSE Program	# of Consultations
Human Development and Psychology	19
Language and Literacy	18
International Education Policy	14
Mind, Brain, and Education	8
Education Policy and Management	7
Ed.L.D.	7
Learning and Teaching	7
Higher Education	6
School Leadership	3
Specialized Studies	1
Ed.D./Ph.D.	1
Prevention Science and Practice	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>92</b>

Spring 2020

## Appendix B: Writing Center - Courses with the Most Consultations

Course Title	# of Consultations
H818 Reading Instruction and Development	49
H250 Developmental Psychology	49
A205 Microeconomics: A Policy Tool for Educators	46
A125 State Education Policy: A Practicum	31
H700 From Language to Literacy	20
A702 Proseminar in Higher Education	20
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>215</b>

Fall 2019 - Spring 2020 (the total # of consultations above counts toward 47% of the total # of appointments)

## Appendix C: Communications Lab Consultations by Program

HGSE Program	# of Consultations
Technology, Innovation, and Education	9
Language and Literacy	5
Mind, Brain, and Education	4
Human Development and Psychology	4
Ed.D./Ph.D.	3
Ed.L.D.	3
International Education Policy	2
Higher Education	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>31</b>

Fall 2019 - Spring 2020 (Consultation started on 11/12/2019)

## Appendix D: Communications Lab Consultations by Topics

Appointment Topic	# of Consultation
Class presentation	12
Elevator pitch	5
Capstone defense	4
Public speaking	3
Dissertation defense	2
HGSE Commencement speech prep	2
Research poster	2
Paper presentation	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>31</b>

Fall 2019 – Spring 2020 (Consultation started 11/12/2019)