



# Graduate Student Spotlight

## Lauren Olsen, PhD

I completed my PhD degree in Sociology in June 2019. My research lies at the intersection of the sociology of medicine, knowledge, education, culture and inequalities. In my dissertation, I examined how U.S. medical educators integrate the humanities and social sciences into their curriculum to cultivate more compassionate and socially aware doctors. One of the most exciting parts of my research agenda was that it cut across subfields and utilized multiple methods of data collection; however, this generative dimension often came with some troubles, particularly when engaging in academic writing.



**Before I started attending sessions and seeking help at the Writing Hub,** I often felt unsure of where to even start with some of my writing. I had many other teaching and service responsibilities on my plate that made it easy for me to feel productive without making writing progress. I buried myself in more data collection and analysis but kept putting off writing, because sewing together multiple subfields felt difficult and when I would attempt it, reviewers often had much to critique. The first time I sought help at the Writing Hub was at a Writing Retreat, the year before I went on the job market. I had an article that I needed to get out, and I felt like I had “one shot” because the market was encroaching. I wanted to learn how to develop better writing practices and find ways to push through some of my own hurdles.

**I learned more at the Writing Hub than I bargained for in that first Writing Retreat, and I kept coming back for more – from utilizing the Grad Writing Room space to scheduling individual tutoring sessions.** With the one-on-one meetings, the tutors were so adept at meeting me where I was at and customizing the feedback to my individual writing goal needs. I remember thinking how these practices were the best possible way to engage in advising. I often would accomplish more in those thirty to sixty minutes than I would in much longer meetings or workshops about my work.

The Grad Writing Room, too, was a much-needed space and community for me to move forward on writing-related projects. It felt like a sacred time, and a time that I knew I could *at least* get 2 hours of good writing progress in. Often I would move to another room in Geisel after the Writing Room ended to maintain the momentum. The coffee is such an incredible perk and it is inspiring to work alongside other graduate student with similar schedules and goals as me.

The Writing Retreat should be REQUIRED for any graduate student. I took it in my "advanced" years as a graduate student and kept thinking: "I wish I had this as a 3rd year". The skills, attitude realignment, habits, and reflective exercises of the Writing Retreat will be gifts that keep on giving as I move beyond UCSD. And, I know that the Writing Retreat is designed to work on the practice and *process* of writing rather than the *product*, but I must say, I turned out two incredible products while doing the Writing Retreats. With the first one, I completed a revision of a manuscript, and that manuscript is now published in a top journal in my subfield. With the second one, I finished my dissertation, which I have since successfully defended.

**Some of the most exciting parts about graduate school also make it tough:** we juggle many responsibilities and often wade into uncharted territories. The Writing Hub operates as a supportive place where students can make the progress they want to make and feel a sense of community in what can otherwise be an overwhelming and isolating experience. **Many thanks to the Writing Hub leadership and staff. While I acknowledge you in my dissertation, I would like to also extend that acknowledgment here.** I have benefited immensely from the work that you all do.

*Dr. Lauren Olsen defended her dissertation in June 2019. She is also a recipient of the NSF Dissertation Improvement Grant, the Chancellor's Research Excellence Scholarship, and the UC President's Dissertation Year Fellowship. She is now an Assistant Professor at Temple University.*