

# Who's Still Bringing That Big Data Energy?

## Leading a SAS® Conference by Leveraging a 48-Year Longitudinal Analysis of 30,498 Presentations in the SAS User Community

Troy Martin Hughes, WUSS 2024 Academic Chair

### ABSTRACT

This analysis examines presentations at SAS® user group conferences between 1976 and 2024, and supplements the introductory analysis that the author debuted at WUSS 2023. (Hughes, 2023) Both analyses evaluate white papers maintained on [www.LexJansen.com](http://www.LexJansen.com) (aka "the LEX"), as well as other presentations referenced on this inimitable site. Presentations are drawn from multiple conferences, including: SAS User Group International (SUGI, *may she rest in peace*), SAS Global Forum (SGF, *may she be revived*), SAS Explore, Western Users of SAS Software (WUSS), Midwest SAS Users Group (MWSUG), South Central SAS Users Group (SCSUG), Southeast SAS Users Group (SESUG), Northeast SAS Users Group (NESUG), Pacific Northwest SAS Users Group (PNWSUG), and Pharmaceutical Software Users Group (PharmaSUG). This current analysis evaluates the critical role that the 2023 analysis played in data-driven decision-making for the WUSS 2024 conference. As always, unremittent thanks to a friend, mentor, and fellow tall guy, "the" Lex Jansen.

### INTRODUCTION

For a comprehensive introduction into the Big Data Energy project, including data extraction from the Lex utilizing Python BeautifulSoup, data quality and integrity issues (and the subsequent solutions engineered using Python Pandas), various presenter- and presentation-level longitudinal analyses, and other analytic insights including a list of the all-time fiercest bringers of big data energy, please consult the referenced 2023 36-page tome: *Who's Bringing That Big Data Energy? A 47-Year Longitudinal Analysis of 30,000 Presentations in the SAS® User Community To Elucidate Top Contributors and Rising Stars*.



Built upon this substantial substrate, the current analysis conveys how the information advantaged the WUSS 2024 conference, in part through the successful strategic recruitment of historically prolific authors, and through the more equitable distribution of presentations across a larger swatch of conference attendees.

## SOME DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The WUSS 2023 conference was held October 31 to November 2, 2023, and although it followed both the SAS Explore and SESUG conferences in 2023, in September and October, respectively those conference data had not yet been published to the Lex. For this reason, some metrics and graphics are updated herein to give a fuller picture of the post-COVID-19 era, to include 2023 data for all national and regional conferences.

Thus, Figure 1 demonstrates that 500 presentations were given across the PharmaSUG, SAS Explore, SESUG, and WUSS conferences in 2023. Despite this subtle recovery, the number of presentations still remained less than half of those in the 2019 pre-COVID-19, owing in part to the continued absence of the MWSUG and SCSUG conferences in 2023.

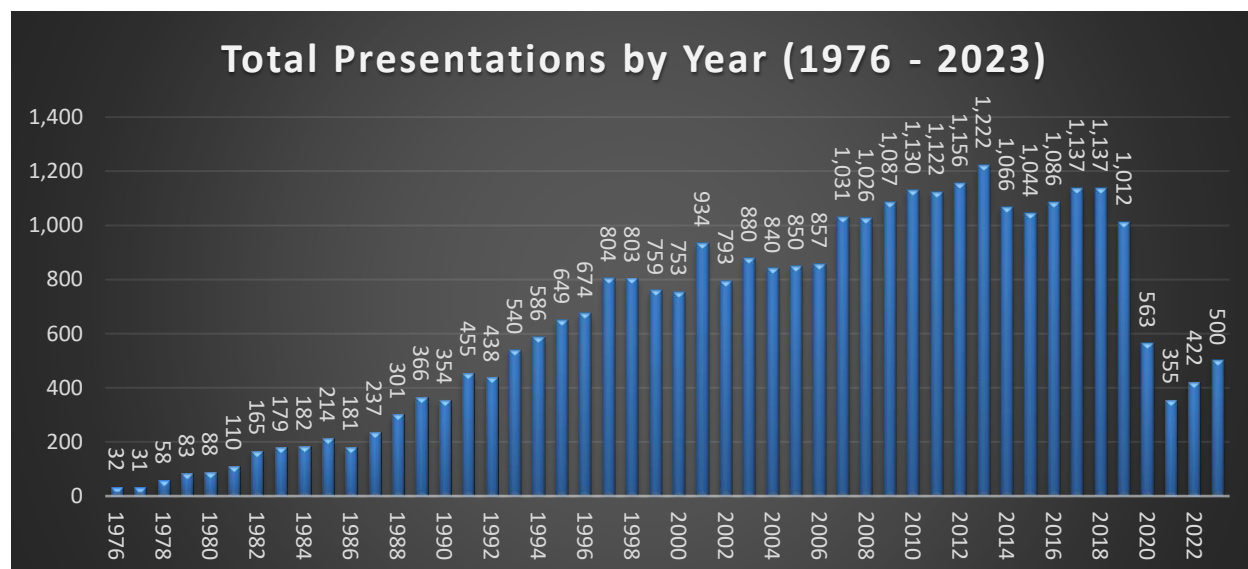


Figure 1. Total Presentations by Year (1976 – 2023)

Of the conferences included in this analysis that continued to operate in 2023, not one had returned to pre-COVID-19 levels in 2023. Figure 2 demonstrates that PharmaSUG had 210 talks in 2023 to its 256 in 2019; WUSS had 94 talks in 2023 to its 115 in 2018; SESUG had 94 talks in 2023 to its 129 in 2019.

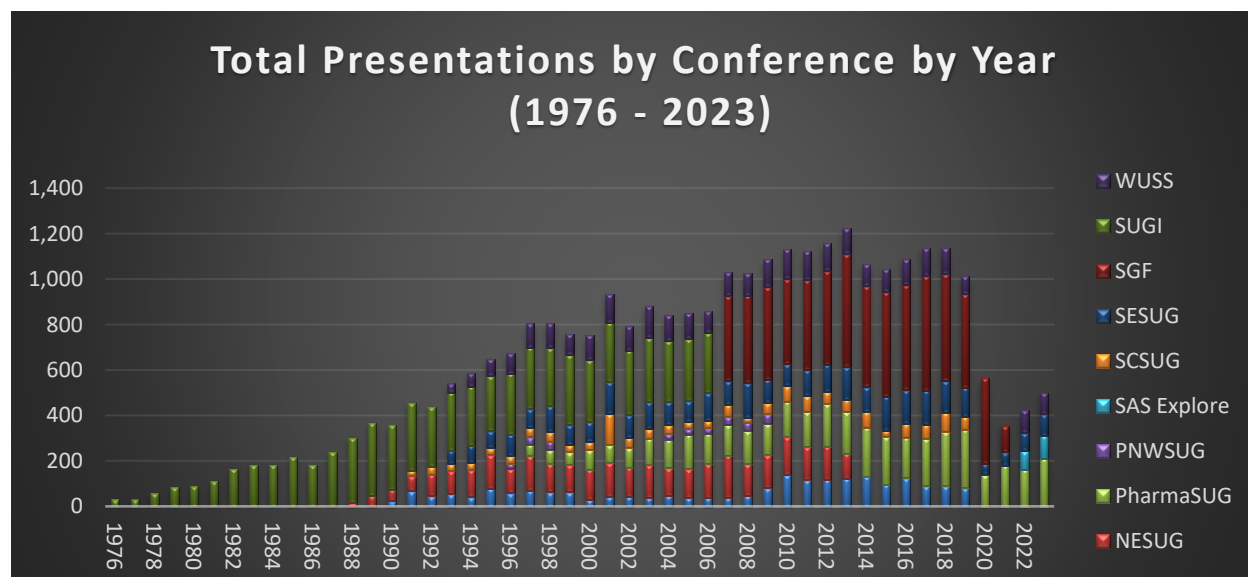
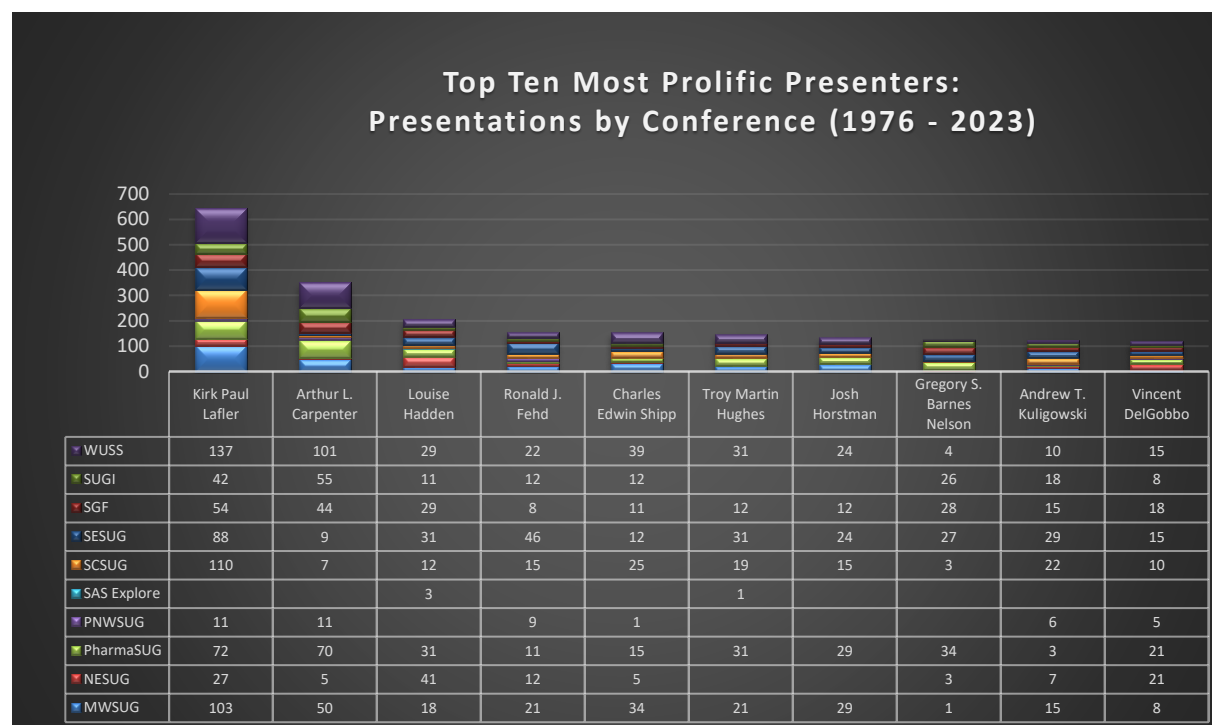


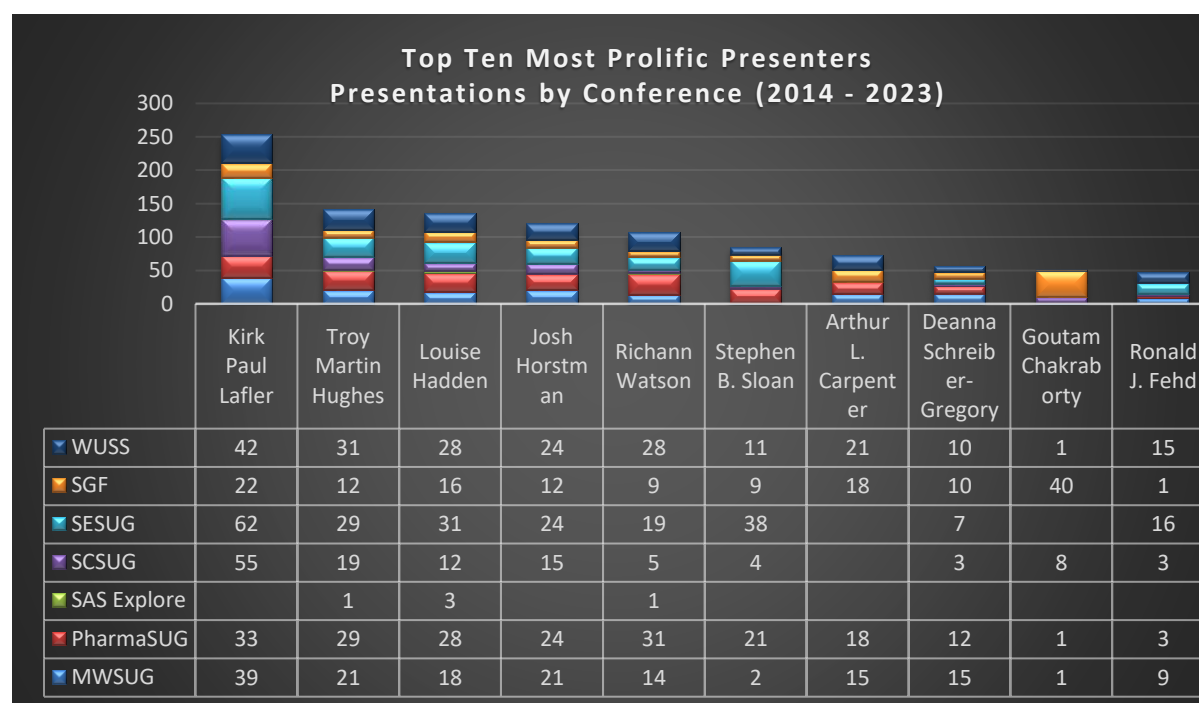
Figure 2. Total Presentations by Year (1976 – 2023)

At the presenter level, it's important to note the significant contributions of the most prolific presenters, as shown in Figure 3. Yes, that is HUNDREDS of individual presentations by the top three superstars!!!



**Figure 3. Top Ten Prolific Presenters by Conference (1976 – 2023)**

It's also important to highlight those highest contributors across the conference landscape in the past decade, as demonstrated in Figure 4.



**Figure 4. Top Ten Prolific Presenters by Conference (2014 – 2023)**

## WUSS 2024 DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING

In 2024, with invited presenters slashed due to budget concerns, which had previously been one of the only mechanisms to attract celebrity presenters to the conference, and which had been a long-standing badge of honor to wear the coveted "Invited" ribbon around the conference, the invited speakers program was slashed by WUSS leadership.

As Academic Chair, and with the invited speakers program slashed, the one carrot that remained was the WUSS tutorials program—in which instructors of paid classes would also receive a free registration. Thus, the decision was made to recruit predominantly SAS book authors, some of the most prolific and well-recognized speakers.

## WUSS 2024 – OVERCOMING THE SELF-LICKING ICE CREAM CONE

In the prior 2023 analysis, I identified the troubling metric that in both 2022 and 2023, the number of WUSS presenters giving five or more presentations had skyrocketed, in part—and let's be honest here—because other content had not been submitted to the conference proceedings, as depicted in Figure 5.

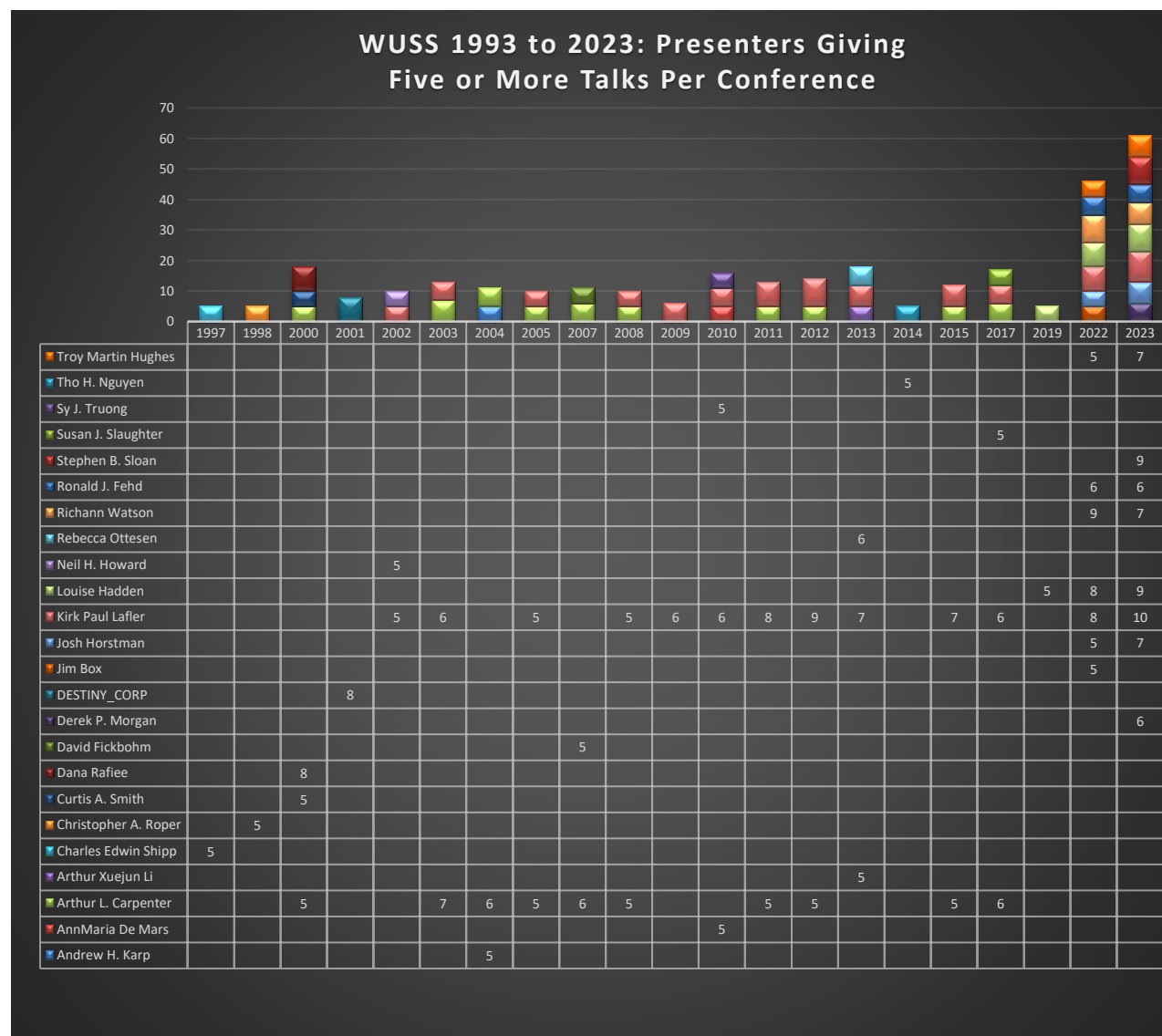


Figure 5. Overcoming the Self-Licking Ice Cream Epidemic of 2022 and 2023

*A self-licking ice cream cone* exists for no other reason than to maintain or sustain itself. Thus, in 2023, only six presenters gave more than 50 percent of the total talks at the conference! And this begs the question, are we putting on the conference for ourselves, and why is there such reduced demand to be a presenter?

Thus, in 2024, one of my principal objectives was to break this cycle, and WUSS successfully overcame it, in part by enforcing the no-more-than-three-talks-per-presenter policy that had gone unenforced for a decade. And although this offered less availability for attendees to see some of the celebrity presenters, it nevertheless offered a more egalitarian approach, and gave more newcomers the ability to participate more fully in the conference.

## **CONCLUSION**

The LEX provides an invaluable resource to SAS practitioners, and its metadata were used extensively in support of this project. This analysis, which supplements the prior 2023 big data energy project, specifically evaluated the role that these data played in decision-making and conference-planning activities. That is, the concern that too few presenters were contributing to the WUSS conferences in past years was first identified through the prior analysis, and this enabled a shift in approach toward recruitment of WUSS 2024 speakers. Moreover, even despite those pesky budget cuts, a cadre of the best and brightest of the global SAS community was recruited to participate in and present at the conference.

## **REFERENCES**

Hughes, T. M. (2023). Who's Bringing That Big Data Energy? A 47-Year Longitudinal Analysis 30,000 Presentations in the SAS® User Community To Elucidate Top Contributors and Rising Stars. Western Users of SAS Software. San Diego, CA. Retrieved from <https://www.wuss.org/proceedings/2023/WUSS-2023-Paper-204.pdf>

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

Your comments and questions are valued and encouraged. Please contact the author at:

Name: Troy Martin Hughes

E-mail: [troymartinhughes@gmail.com](mailto:troymartinhughes@gmail.com)