

## 20 TALKING THE TALK AND WALKING THE WALK: ESTABLISHING THE ACADEMIC ROLE OF WRITING CENTRES

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Writing centres fill a distinctive and essential role in the Canadian teaching of writing at the university level, and their role is growing in importance as writing gains recognition within university curricula as an engine for the generation of knowledge and an important component in students' maturation as thinkers. The trend towards recognition of writing centres as drivers of a broader view of writing is suggested by the contrasting titles of Roger Graves' two books on the history of writing instruction in Canada. Graves' seminal 1994 study outlines the historical development of writing courses using the title *Writing Instruction in Canadian Universities* (Graves, 1994). His 2006 collection with Heather Graves (Graves & Graves, 2006) divides its focus among different types of instruction, and its title gives writing centres pride of place: *Writing Centres, Writing Seminars, Writing Culture: Writing Instruction in Anglo-Canadian Universities*. At least four of the 15 chapters concentrate on the work done by specific writing centres, outlining their development into hubs of writing instruction in their universities.

And yet, writing centres are also key examples for Hunt's (2006) assertion in his "Afterword" to the same book that writing instruction in Canada has merely "infiltrated the cracks" in university structures without finding a home in the traditional university departments and administrative structures ( p. 376). Published discussions of Canadian writing centres have tended to focus on anxieties about positioning. The seminal study commissioned in the mid-1970s by the Association of Canadian University Teachers of English (Priestley

& Kerpneck, 1976) recognized that the new generation of university students needed “remedial” individual writing instruction, but reiterated emphatically that responsibility for such instruction should not dilute the attention of English Departments to the study and teaching of literature—or, one can infer, influence the allotment of the few English appointments then available in Canadian universities. It remains true that in Canada, with its relative paucity of composition and rhetoric programs, and thus its lack of trainee instructors and of a clear relationship to any one department, writing centres have no standard model of institutional structure or employment. A 1996 survey of Canadian writing centres by Bell and Hubert recorded that half of its 33 respondents still had to “fight for” their funding on a yearly basis; one-third held staff rather than faculty positions. Bell’s very useful article about a research method for self-study was titled “Small-Scale Evaluations for Writing Centres in These Times of Trouble” in its Canadian publication (1996), though only “When Hard Questions Are Asked: Evaluating Writing Centers” in its US publication (2000). A recent Master’s thesis by Kraglund-Gauthier (2006) concludes that, although the 13 Atlantic Canada writing centres in her study could measure local success in very positive terms, as units within their universities they still had to struggle for identity and frequently received only marginal support. Since its founding in early 2006, the listserv of the new Canadian Writing Centre Association (CWCA-L@LISTSERV.UOTTAWA.CA) has also circled back obsessively to anxieties about funding, employment status, and reporting structure.

This chapter will argue, nevertheless, that writing centres have helped create a distinctive position for Writing Studies in the Canadian university culture, one that does not necessarily depend on a departmental home. They can raise awareness of writing issues precisely because to sustain themselves as non-departmental units, they need to argue publicly about the nature of writing as an intellectual activity and to show how their writing instruction across the curriculum contributes to the knowledge creation that is the core value of a university. Because writing centres offer individual instruction to students without the structures of class enrollments and grades that bring income and accrediting power to the institution, they have to define the reasons for their existence repeatedly and progressively in the face of curricular and institutional changes. In this competition for self-justification they have the advantage that their contact with students across the curriculum gives them insights into the patterns of learning for which universities purport to stand. Writing centre instructors know from daily engagement with students how the process of writing generates and shapes ideas, rather than simply transmitting or packaging them. Moreover, discussions about the existence of specific writing centres—the crises, arguments, proposals, and reports that have given them a continuing if not always stable footing in

their institutions—have often taken place in wide university forums rather than in closed departmental meetings or specialized academic journals, and thus have engaged public attention and open discussion. Though not always reflected in publicly available documents, these discussions have left textual traces in such forms as letters, newspaper articles, internal proposals, and committee and individual reports. These traces offer a way to analyse the prolonged and often messy discussions and an historical perspective on the directions they have taken and the issues they have raised generation by generation.

The public discussions around writing centres at the University of Toronto in the 1990s exemplify the range of challenges, both intellectual and practical, involved in the positioning of writing within a Canadian institution. Because of its size, diversity, and decentralized nature, the University of Toronto has experimented with a range of models for writing centres. This chapter offers some components of its history as a kind of display cabinet for structural and theoretical issues likely to be shared by other writing centres in Canada. My analysis will draw on documents that are part of my files as University of Toronto Coordinator of Writing Support and some that are

Table 1. University of Toronto writing centres: Changes in staffing, September 1991- September 2006.

<b>Employment figures for September 1991</b>	<b>Employment Figures for September 2006</b>
9 Writing Labs (undergraduate colleges)	14 Writing Centres (undergraduate colleges, professional faculties, graduate studies)
36 people in 34 positions 10 faculty appointments 4 full-time, 6 part-time / shared = 7 FTE	76 people in 85 positions 27 faculty appointments 22 full-time, 5 part-time / shared = 25 FTE
usually Tutor (short-term contract) or Senior Tutor (renewable 5-year contracts)	22 full-time faculty, 5 part-time 12 Lecturers (renewable 1-3 year contracts) 10 Senior Lecturers (continuing appointments = tenure)
	36 Sessional Lecturers (short-term contracts, usually part-time, with some security and benefits; CUPE 3902 since 2005)
10 hourly-paid part-timers (no rank)	
15 graduate students (mainly English/Drama)	18 graduate students (10 in / from professional faculties)

publicly available. (The References list gives URLs for those that have been archived online.) I will quote and comment on a selection of these documents in order to identify some of the strengths that a writing-centre perspective can bring to institutional awareness of writing as a knowledge-making practice and, therefore, as central to the university mission. My discussion will also suggest some constraints and frustrations resulting from writing centre instructors' efforts to establish their work on a valid and stable footing in challenging circumstances.

### DEFINING WRITING CENTRE WORK: FIRST STEPS, FIRST WORDS

The University of Toronto was among the earliest adopters of the writing-centre model in Canada, and it faced, from the start, the full range of issues in defining and defending that work. In 1964, the year of its founding, Innis College established a teaching operation offering individual instruction to students working on papers in any of their courses (King & Cotter, 1970). Similar "writing laboratories" were in place in several of the other constituent undergraduate colleges by the mid-1970s. Unlike the writing labs also emerging in US universities (Griffin, Keller, Pandey, Pedersen, & Skinner, 2006; Kinkead & Harris, 1993; Murphy, 1996), these teaching units did not arise from Composition or Rhetoric programs. The early instructors were often recent Masters or PhD graduates in English or another humanities discipline. Their students brought work predominantly, but not only, from humanities departments, and predominantly, but not only, from undergraduate Arts and Science courses. Departments in the humanities took a particular interest in this teaching and sometimes supported it, but the interest was often tinged by distrust and anxiety.

It was clear from the start, for instance, that the Department of English would support the remedial function of writing centres and supply underemployed graduates as instructors, but it was no more eager than its members Priestley and Kerpneck in their 1976 report for ACUTE to let any kind of writing instruction become part of the department. In a 1970 article for *English Quarterly*, the two original Innis College writing-centre instructors King and Cotter note that some faculty members accuse them of "spoon-feeding academic cripples" and assume that their work is a second-class occupation that should be taken on only by "housewives and starving graduate students" (King & Cotter, 1970, p. 56). Priestley and Kerpneck (1976) also use harsh words to downgrade the work of writing centres, by then present in at least

four colleges on their own campus. They assert, for instance, that “writing clinics” should be tolerated only as long as they do not “doctor” the work brought to them for “individual diagnosis and treatment” (pp. 32-5). They assume that English professors will supervise graduate students doing the teaching, but do not consider the possibility of faculty appointments focussed on writing, much less writing as a field of inquiry within the department. Those working in the new teaching operations are not expected to discuss their work except to report on students’ progress in attaining “acceptable university-level English,” and perhaps to supply figures to high schools about how many of their graduates are “languishing in the laboratories” (p. 35). The professors of English will decide what is acceptable as English and how much remedial instruction can be tolerated; writing instructors will uphold the standards and supply the teaching without having a voice of their own.

In practical terms, however, people working in writing centres at the University of Toronto have regularly had to raise their voices to define what they do and to defend the value of their teaching. In the 1990s, one of the most urgent needs was to establish a different basis for their work than the one assumed by the faculty members and administrators who might speak about them in the terms noted above. Their employment in an institution dominated by departmental power and with somewhat fluid categories of faculty appointment (Nelson, 2007), left writing-centre instructors in a particularly vulnerable position. During the 1970s and 1980s, the decentralized nature of the university could generate teaching jobs without requiring a uniform type of contract. But with budget retrenchment in the early 1990s, faculty status became a burning issue for people who did not have “regular” appointments, and it has been closely interwoven since then with other questions about the function and value of writing centres and writing instruction. The success of writing-centre instructors’ arguments about their employment status can be seen in the following table comparing data from the period of an employment crisis and the most recently available figures.

The more than doubling of the number of people employed since 1991 tells only part of the story. The rank of “Tutor” and the short-term contracts that accompanied it have been replaced by the term “Lecturer” and the establishment of tenured status for Senior Lecturers. Many of the people in the lower left of the table have become those in the upper right, as part-timers and graduate students won full-time positions. Whereas there were once nine isolated teaching units, each led by a single faculty member (with one spare) in a distinctly ambiguous appointment category, now a set of teaching units constitutes a network of colleagues who hold formally-defined faculty appointments. The 14 or so writing centres are still separate entities reporting to deans and college princi-

pals rather than forming a single department or free-standing unit. As described in two chapters of Graves and Graves' recent collection (Irish, 2006; Procter, 2006), University of Toronto writing centres have capitalized on their independent status to develop innovative programs of credit and non-credit courses, collaborative instruction of disciplinary courses, and highly respected methods of instruction. The range of work represented by the right-hand column is much larger than that in the left-hand column. Writing labs were once marginal, but the units now called writing centres are now indeed central to many areas of the university.

### DEFINING WRITING CENTRE WORK: CRISIS AND RESPONSE

These changes in size and status did not happen automatically or easily, even though writing centres had the advantage of a relatively well resourced institution (well resourced in parts, at any rate) and a field that very clearly needed cultivating as the university grew in size and began to mirror the multicultural nature of the Greater Toronto Area. The creation story for the current state of writing centres at the University of Toronto took place in 1991 with an employment crisis at one of the suburban colleges. It was an event that turned the spotlight on writing instructors' terms of employment, but also reminded the university community of the need to define the role of writing in relation to university learning.

On August 31, 1991, the Principal of Scarborough College called Adele Fisher, the Senior Tutor who had directed the Scarborough College Writing Lab for fifteen years, to notify her that she should not come to work the next day because she was going to be replaced by five Mac computers equipped with the new grammar-checking software Grammatik. She was told to serve out the final year of her third five-year contract by staying at home and looking for employment elsewhere. The facts of this story have been narrated elsewhere (e.g., Procter, 2006), but its textual traces in the form of unpublished documents and university records are worth examining further. The texts reflecting this story reveal the assumptions about power and about writing that governed the conditions of writing-centre work in this period—assumptions that have changed radically over the last fifteen years because writing instructors and others have challenged them by both words and deeds.

Here is a revealing passage from the first public communication about this administrative attack on the writing centre, now resting in my file as a sheet of mimeographed paper. It consists of a memo on college letterhead that was du-

plicated and placed in the mailboxes of all Scarborough College faculty members during Reading Week in the spring term of 1991:

18 February 1991

To Members of the College

You are all aware that the College is being required to meet an overall budget reduction by 1995, 5% assigned by the Provost and a further 1.45% to meet faculty renewal commitments. Each budget head has been asked by the Principal to participate in developing a plan for meeting this reduction.

After long consideration and consultation with the Principal and the Administrative Group at the College, I have proposed meeting the reduction in my budget by replacing the present Writing Lab with a Writing Centre, equipped with computers, where students will be able to use various software programmes to analyse and improve their English writing.

This administrator sees writing solely in terms of problems and deficiencies—sometimes in students, sometimes in budgets. The assumption is that students need only mechanical drill in language correctness in order to improve the products of their writing, and that cost concerns are central; thus if machines are cheaper than people in applying the required drill, it is logical to pay for them rather than people. The tone of the memo is impersonal and managerial, relying on passive verbs (“is being required” and “has been asked”), but it uses personal pronouns to confirm power relationships. The “you” group of recipients is reminded in the letter’s first words to keep economic considerations primary, and then “I” speaks magisterially only after invoking the other top administrators. Though the decision is called a proposal, this note is clearly an announcement (“students will”), not an invitation to comment.

But those affected did comment, starting with students and faculty members at Scarborough College. Here is a glimpse of the History Department, as a group, writing to the Principal. By addressing the Principal by name, their two-page letter went above the administrator who had written the memo. It also went beyond the Principal by distributing copies to other faculty members. As with other similar letters from members in other departments, the authors signed their names individually but also invoked their academic department.

2 March 1991

Dear [*first name*],

... [*expression of shock and dismay*] ... Much language learning derives from the home environment, which means that many Scarborough students may be consequently disadvantaged in their English communication skills. The Writing Lab is the last chance these young people have of improving their skills before seeking careers in an increasingly competitive workplace. As Harvard University Business School Professor Michael Porter points out, one must achieve lower-order skills before advancing to higher orders. If our students do not learn how to write proper English before they leave the University, they never will, and their future will be severely compromised.

In our capacity as Historians, we expect our students to be able to express themselves clearly. When they cannot, we invariably counsel them to seek assistance from the Writing Lab. It is our experience that some students who do so have been able to raise their marks by as much as two full grades (that is, for example, from a 'C' to an 'A'). Is it fair to deprive them of this possibility?

... [*call for faculty consultation on the decision about the Writing Lab*] We trust that you share our concern and that you will give this subject the attention it deserves.

Respectfully submitted,

[*individual signatures*].

This letter adopts a different type of rhetoric from the managerial announcement of the Vice-Principal's letter. The signatories address the Principal directly, presenting themselves as his colleagues ("Dear Paul"), and they express indignation at being excluded from the college's decision. Though the letter does not touch on the termination of the writing director, it speaks confidently about the place of writing in the university. The professors base their sweeping categorical statements on presumptions of common knowledge about language learning and "the home environment," and then on a citation from an academic author-



ity (authoritative in being from Harvard, at least, though not from a field one might recognize as related to the issue). The expertise they claim as teachers comes from being Historians representing an established discipline. These professors are clearly happy to leave the transmission of skills to others. Their language displays the same set of assumptions about deficiency (“improving”) and gatekeeping (“proper English”) as those held by the first administrator, though writing tutors are shown as holding the gate open for students who acknowledge their deficiencies. The goodwill of this and other faculty letters was broad and sincere, and in 1991, the public support for the Writing Lab was timely and welcome. From the present perspective, however, the conception of writing and writing instruction seems sadly limited.

Student journalists involved themselves even more publicly and heatedly in the controversy. They, too, noted that the administrator had made the announcement when people were generally off campus, and they, too, protested the lack of consultation. Students were also much quicker than the professoriate to protest the unsuitable use of technology. A story in one of the downtown student newspapers used a picture of a computer monitor replacing the head of a business-suited male, heading it “Professor IBM”—a picture that was copied and posted in several other places around campus as summing up a general problem of reliance on impersonal teaching methods. Within a week of the administrator’s memo, the Scarborough College student paper published an editorial protesting the proposed change:

16 February 1991, editorial

Welcome back from Reading Week! Oh, and by the way, while you were gone the Administration has decided to “restructure” the Writing Lab, restructure it right out of existence.

The Writing Lab has offered personal tutoring to students on their writing and grammar at this campus for almost twenty years. As of June 30, 1992, the Writing Lab will no longer exist and in its place will be computers.

Computers may be great, but they can only do so much. They may be able to help with punctuation and other grammatical errors but they are not able to help a student clarify ideas or write an essay which flows properly. Computers fail to offer a personal one-on-one conference, which many students desperately need.

Scarborough Campus has many foreign students whose first language is not English. Such students may have trouble writing grammatically correct English, or, like many other students, just have trouble expressing their ideas. It is not fair to set them down in front of computers and wish them the best of luck. In fact, it is downright cruel.

Speaking from experience and observation, and drawing on emotional terms rather than intellectual generalizations to express their concerns about equity, the students comment more pointedly on teaching methods than did the professors. In mentioning students' need to clarify ideas and to write essays that "flow properly," the editorial is reaching towards the recognition that writing instruction involves idea-generation and logical organization as well as language correctness. The list of those who need writing support includes both the out-group labelled "foreign students" and also "many other students." The editorial rises to considerable eloquence in expressing a sense of violation and inequity when students are given a technological substitute for personal instruction. It sees writing instruction as part of university learning, not just as remedial activity to be administered on the margins of the institution.

## DEVELOPING DISCOURSE ABOUT WRITING AND WRITING CENTRES

The clear threat to their employment brought together the remaining writing-centre instructors across the university and impelled them to join in the public uproar—and eventually to find powerful ways to speak on behalf of writing instruction as a vital part of the academy. Because of the decentralization of the various writing centres, writing instructors at this time barely knew each other and had no official reason to work together. But in September 1991, the University of Toronto Association of Writing Tutors came together and began to act and speak collectively on behalf of their work—a group of more than 30 people who knew how to communicate and could call on the concern and outrage of both students and faculty members.

The following is a retrospective summary of what this group of writing instructors found they needed to say and do, in 1991 and over the next few years, to define a place for writing instruction within the university. Both practical and political themes will be evident. So will the growing ability of writing-centre instructors to speak and write thoughtfully about the nature of writing and writing instruction, and the growing acceptance of their views of writing.

First of all, writing instructors had to speak for themselves, and speak not just as employees but as authorities on learning and teaching writing. They had to speak as faculty members to other faculty members, whether they held that status or not. By mid-September of 2001, a group of a dozen or so people began meeting regularly to think through the nature of the challenge. That involved much discussion and hand-wringing, but it also required informed analysis of what Grammatik actually did and reflective investigation of writing-centre work within the University of Toronto and other universities.

In early 1992, at the initiative of the graduate student Cynthia Messenger, the group wrote to the Provost demanding a seat along with deans and department chairs on a university-wide Steering Group on writing that had been set up to quell the increasingly hysterical protests about betrayal of students and misuse of technology. Gay MacDonald of New College, one of the three remaining full-time writing-centre instructors, filled that seat very effectively over the next four months, speaking confidently from her 15 years of experience teaching writing in the New College Writing Lab. The writing instructors in the new association quickly learned the value of working with her as our spokesperson. Though most of us lacked position titles and job security, we knew how to act like researchers, initiating, for instance, a critical analysis of the chosen software, a step that the university administrators had neglected. We began by reviewing the literature on grammar-checking software; then we tested Grammatik empirically on actual student work and reported on its often absurd results. We analysed other types of instructional technology in terms of the actual range of student needs, and we summarized our findings cogently in written reports that we sent to MacDonald for distribution at meetings of the Steering Group. With our help, MacDonald spoke knowledgeably to the committee on the primitive nature of Grammatik as an editing tool and on its even more limited function as an instructional resource. Her clear and well-grounded explanations faced down the enthusiasm of the computational expert from English who also served on the committee and gradually became accepted as key elements in the committee's discussion. MacDonald also kept insisting that the error-fixing that Grammatik seemed to promise was not the only or main function of writing centres. Starting with her reports on the unsuitable technology, she made the most of her chances to outline the ways that individualized writing-centre instruction helped students develop their ideas and come to terms with larger issues of evidence, reasoning, and authority.

By the time the Steering Group wrote its report to the Provost, MacDonald's points were further supported by an eloquent collection of written statements from other writing instructors about what they actually did in their work. The Writing Tutors' Association's 14-page submission to the Steering Group answered a call for public input and again made the most of the opportunity to speak authoritatively

from an informed and reasoned basis. The committee read and discussed this submission in detail and with considerable respect, eventually publishing it in full as an Appendix to its 35-page report. The contributions to this submission displayed different perspectives and voices, but were sent without individual names attached because of concern about retribution by local supervisors. Three representative excerpts suggest the range of topics raised and the level of discussion:

a. Because we are concerned to make students more aware of the relation between language and thinking, we deal with writing not just as product but also as process: with developing essays from the most preliminary stages of analysis to the editing and polishing of the final draft. While many of us offer basic theoretical instruction in grammar and composition, the main thrust of our approach is practical. Dealing primarily with essays in progress, we show students, often over a number of sessions, how to build on their strengths and how to identify and overcome their characteristic problems. These may involve language errors, and are equally likely to include matters of focus and argumentation.... Our success comes from our unique opportunity to combine basic pedagogic principles: practical focus, interactive work, and a flexible approach that changes with the individual student's development.

b. In the oral exchanges typical of writing lab appointments the student's thinking becomes subject to immediate critical analysis—his own as well as that of the tutor—before it can be returned to the page as writing. This kind of discourse amazes students on their first meetings with us: often they have not previously realized the depth or closeness of attention that goes into critical reading. They emerge, however, with clearer expectations both about how their papers will be read and about how they themselves can exercise this kind of reading and analysis.

c. Our experience with such style-checking software as Grammatik IV, Correct Grammar and Right Writer convinces us that its relevance to teachers of writing is limited. Since we do not offer proofreading services to students, such programmes cannot help us directly in our work. Their method of attempting to comment on every instance of possible stylistic weakness runs counter to the pedagogic principle of concentrating on the most important

problems, seeing them in context, and working on them consultatively. Because of the low reliability of the present generation of programmes (an accuracy rate of well under 50%, according to recent popular and scholarly reviews), we cannot yet recommend their use even outside the writing lab.

These voices make broad assertions about the nature of writing and of student learning, mentioning both experience and pedagogical principle as the basis of their statements. The various authors use personal pronouns confidently (“we” and “us”), asserting a collective identity even if individual names are not displayed.

The Steering Group’s report displays a remarkable transformation of the university’s discourse about writing. After four months of intense discussion, including the direct and indirect contributions of writing-centre instructors, the report turned away from instant solutions, put the spotlight on the responsibility of administrators and professors for offering appropriate instruction, and began to frame the issues in terms of student needs rather than only budgetary problems. The conclusions of the Steering Group Report of May 1992 show a much more solid and inclusive understanding of the pedagogical and institutional issues underlying academic writing than had been seen in any of the previous discussions. Though the recommendations still refer to academic requirements as self-evident monolithic standards and equate them with the conventions of the disciplines, writing is no longer merely a matter of student deficiency to be dealt with by separately-delivered remediation. The following resolutions (from a list of 13) call on the university as an institution to face up to its responsibilities for teaching students writing:

6. That all divisions be required to concern themselves with the quality of student writing and its improvement in meeting their academic requirements.

7. That divisions be encouraged to provide opportunities in credit courses for all their students to expand their writing skills within the specific conventions of their disciplines.

8. That divisions and departments review the role of writing in their academic programmes, with particular reference to the types of assignments required, the services needed and available to students within the department, and the expressions in calendars and brochures of the academic unit’s interest in effective writing.

The two explicit references to writing labs in the recommendations sum up their liminal position at this point in administrative awareness. Recommendation 11 asks that writing labs work with the college principals to consider “ways to optimize the cost effectiveness of the services provided” (still services, not yet teaching, and still distrusted in terms of their cost). Then recommendation 12 gives writing labs a position on a Writing Board that will assist the divisions in achieving their goals. Even if the value of their teaching needed more consideration, the value of their voices was now clear.

The central Writing Board never did materialize, but writing instructors have more than fulfilled its intended function through their own initiatives. When I took on the new position of University of Toronto Coordinator of Writing Support in 1994, I knew I would have to continue grounding discussion of writing in references to research and explanations of the underlying pedagogical principles—in other words, to act as if I were a faculty member representing a coherent discipline. My first efforts were to produce heavily documented research reports, first on writing software (Procter, 1994), and then on post-admission testing (Procter, 1995), using academic weaponry to ward off the most imminent threats. Other writing-centre directors have continued to do the same, writing thoughtful reports to their deans and principals and offering well-informed comments on divisional curricula and teaching even before they are asked. Similarly, instead of merely following another of the Steering Group’s recommendation to compile and disseminate existing departmental wisdom on writing, writing instructors have created their own instructional material for students and professional-development material for faculty. Their work now takes the shape of Web sites used widely as course resources by students and instructors across the curriculum at the University of Toronto and elsewhere, this time with each file displaying its author’s name (see the list of topics at <http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/advise.html>). Several textbooks and handbooks have also been published (e.g., Gilpin & Patchet-Golubev, 2000; Northey & Procter, 1998), with more forthcoming on specific areas of expertise (for instance on proposals from Jane Freeman; on Engineering communication from Rob Irish and Peter Weiss; on writing in the health sciences from Dena Taylor).

## SHAPING THE PLACE OF WRITING IN INSTITUTIONAL CULTURES

The 1991 crisis demonstrated unmistakably to writing-centre instructors that they should engage proactively in institutional planning processes rather than being subject to others’ decisions about budget and pedagogy. Such par-

ticipation is not easy when writing centres lack the departmental status that gives an automatic right to sit on committees and take part in official discussions. Nevertheless, writing-centre instructors have managed to capitalize on their understanding of curriculum and teaching processes in order to help steer university change. Their knowledge and awareness of these topics give them an advantage in institutional discussions, even if they have no more formal training in educational theory or policy analysis than other academics. Again, this is evident in the textual traces of the discussions that founded at least six new writing centres in the 1990s.

The four professional-faculty writing centres, which account for about half of the growth in writing-centre employment shown in Table 1 above, sprang up in the mid-1990s in response to overall curriculum changes and to new administrative awareness that writing centres had a record of achievement. Small-scale pilot initiatives used both actions and words to demonstrate and document ways that professors could teach their subjects more effectively when writing tutors worked alongside them. Typically, writing tutors would first give in-class presentations to get students to do what the course instructors wanted them to, and then take active roles in discussions about teaching methods and eventually in collaborative teaching. Freeman's (1997) account of her work in an Engineering Thermodynamics course encapsulates this development: she started by standing at the back of the room in lab sessions and answering students' questions about spelling and format, but soon began to help the graduate student Teaching Assistants answer more complex questions about sentences and wording that the students brought them, followed up by talking to these TAs after class about their own puzzlements as graduate writers and teachers. Within a few weeks she was giving presentations on precision and logic in scientific writing from the front of the room and eventually offering training sessions for the whole group of course TAs (Freeman, 1997; Irish, 2006). Similar types of work in Engineering and other professional faculties, including that of Andy Payne in Architecture and Dena Taylor in several Health Science faculties, helped shape course assignments and assessment methods, and, eventually, also influenced divisional curriculum reform (see Procter, 2006, for a fuller account).

The university's budget planning cycle of 1995-2000 generated a number of divisional reports that reflected the newly recognized writing experts' views about teaching and learning—sometimes only as distant echoes, but eventually more directly because writing instructors were members of the planning committees and sometimes drafters of the reports. All of the following sentences are excerpted from divisional proposals for funding of new or renewed writing centres from that crucial planning cycle. (These were once public documents within their academic divisions, but only the 1998 University of Toronto at Scarborough report and the

1999 University of Toronto, Faculty of Arts and Science resolution are still recoverable as references, having been archived online for public access.)

Faculty of Pharmacy (1994). Subcommittee recommendation to Curriculum Committee:

That undergraduate course coordinators be encouraged to require effective writing in their assessment of students. Writing-intensive components of Pharmacy courses should be encouraged. In the senior years of the undergraduate curriculum, attention to student writing should be continued through greater emphasis on writing assignments and the level of proficiency should be taken into account in establishing the final grades.

Pharmacy and Nursing deans (1995). Proposal to Council of Health Science deans:

The ideas in this report build on our self-analysis, suggesting that cooperatively the Health-Science programs can achieve a flexible and practical solution to their acute need for writing support. The writing-lab model, now available only to undergraduate Arts and Science students, can with suitable adaptations provide the specialist help needed to support the kinds of teaching and learning done in the Health Sciences.

Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering (1995). Jane Griesdorf, Language across the curriculum: A proposal:

If the importance of literacy becomes a critical factor for all aspects of the Engineering curriculum, our students will learn to communicate more fluently and have greater confidence to work with others. And with commitment from a range of faculty and with support from specialized instructors, students will come to see that good communication is a practical tool for both academic work and future employment.

University of Toronto at Scarborough (1998). Final report of task force on writing:

[after considering and rejecting post-admission testing] The



Task Force therefore turned its attention to what is often referred to as 'writing across the curriculum': the incorporation of writing—its evaluation and improvement—into all programmes so that students have the opportunity to graduate as competent writers. The major thrust of this report is that we should focus our attention on the improvement of writing as an integral part of the learning experience and develop a College culture of good writing.

Faculty of Arts and Science, General Committee (1999). Resolution on writing:

- a) That every major and specialist program in the Faculty of Arts and Science (FAS) integrate writing components into its program requirements.
- b) That the FAS assist in the re-design of key first-year courses so that they incorporate writing components.
- c) That the FAS develop criteria by which to approve and evaluate existing or proposed writing components in programs.
- d) That the above be implemented incrementally during the period 1999-2004.

Faculty of Architecture and Landscape Architecture (2000). "Aims of writing across the curriculum programme," Academic plan:

- To use language as a way of learning Architecture and Landscape Architecture, not as a subsidiary subject or requirement.
- To prepare students for the professional life of architects and landscape architects, especially the need to articulate visual ideas in words.
- To counterbalance the tendency of visually oriented people to neglect their capacity for using language.
- To pay special attention to the needs of students learning English as a second language.

- To maintain high standards of learning, and to monitor our students' progress.
- To support both students and faculty in this enterprise.

The sequence of excerpts here makes evident the shift in perspective since 1991 about writing as a topic in divisional planning. The new Provost, Adel Sedra of Engineering, read the Steering-Group Report of 1992 with respect. At the start of the 1995-2000 planning cycle he made it known that he intended to fund initiatives demonstrating the commitment of professional faculties to curricular change that included writing instruction. The discourse about writing in the documents that responded to his invitation now uses the type of language and approach introduced by writing centres in their discussions of their own work. In their own ways, these documents all affirm the value of writing as part of learning. At first relying on such general terms as "proficiency" and focussing on grading rather than instruction, the statements gradually become more precise about the position of writing as a means of knowledge generation in their own disciplines. The University of Toronto at Scarborough report of 1998 is dramatically different from the 1991 memos quoted earlier in its confident assertion that writing should be part of "all programmes." Influenced no doubt by the Boyer Commission Report (1998) and the currents in US writing instruction that it reflects, Arts and Science and Architecture make sweeping promises about integrating writing instruction across their curricula. All these documents now specifically position writing centres as the key resources for learning and teaching writing, whether in terms of individual instruction or the "writing across the curriculum" method cited in the later documents.

## INFLUENCING APPOINTMENT POLICIES

At the same time that they began to participate in divisional planning and its implementation, writing instructors also became active in another aspect of university governance, the University of Toronto Faculty Association (UTFA). The 1991 termination at Scarborough College was again the precipitating event. The non-certified Faculty Association was not able to save Adele Fisher's Senior Tutor job in 1991 (she took up a tenure-stream position in the State University of New York), but it was galvanized into attending to the insecure nature of its other Tutor positions. In 1991 this group encompassed about 150 teaching-specialized faculty across the university, including the three remaining full-time Tutors and the six part-time Tutors in writing centres.

The major advances since that time in faculty appointments at writing centres have been shaped by writing instructors' strong record of speaking up and active engagement in UTFA—the same combination of assertive talk and concerted action that was also winning them their place in the curriculum. As in so many other Canadian universities, writing instructors have played key roles in the Faculty Association Executive. Guy Allen (now director of the Professional Writing and Communication Program at the University of Toronto Mississauga) was chair of the Tutors' Stream Committee in the early 1990s, using his eloquence to inform and persuade other faculty members of the urgency of policy changes for Tutors. I served from 2000 to 2005 as chair of what was by then called the Teaching-Stream Committee, helping implement an arrangement in 2001 that changed a further 100 positions (including those of at least 10 writing-centre instructors) from “casual” part-time jobs into Lecturer positions, mostly full-time. Cynthia Messenger—in 1992 the Teaching Assistant who called for a writing-centre representative on the Steering Group on Writing and now the director of the Innis College program in Writing and Rhetoric—served for two years as the chair of the UTFA Teaching-Stream Committee and is currently the Vice-President of Grievances.

The main policy improvement affecting writing-centre instructors was a revision in 1999 to the Policy and Procedure on Academic Appointments (University of Toronto Governing Council, 1999/2003) that secured continuing status, the equivalent of tenure, for Senior Lecturers. Promotion to that rank comes after a rigorous review procedure parallel to the tenure review. Before 1999, Senior Tutors had to undergo a review every five years in order to obtain another five-year renewal, and even then there was no guarantee that a renewal would result from a successful review. This crucial change came about only after UTFA refused for nine years in a row to implement revisions in any negotiated policy until the university administration agreed to improve the policy for Tutors.

The revised Appointments Policy was phrased carefully to include writing-centre instructors, who by 1999 constituted about 20 of the 150 or so people in the Tutor rank as well as an equal number working part-time without that rank. Its wording recognizes that they contribute to students' earning of degrees whether or not they teach courses. The stiff legal language and the careful choice of “may” rather than “should” conceal the heated discussions within UTFA and between UTFA and the administration that went into this formulation:

The ranks of Lecturer and Senior Lecturer are to be held by faculty members whose duties normally consist of teaching students who are in degree programs or the Transitional Year Programme, and related professional and administrative activi-

ties. Lecturers may have independent responsibility for designing and teaching courses or significant components of courses within their departmental and divisional curricula.

... Performance will be assessed on teaching effectiveness and pedagogical / professional development related to teaching duties, in accordance with approved divisional guidelines on the assessment of teaching. Administrative service will be considered, where such service is related to teaching duties or to curricular and professional development.

Though this new policy provides the security and protections for academic freedom of a faculty position, not to mention entitlement to sabbaticals and recognition for good work in terms of merit pay, it is far from perfect in that it still divides faculty members specializing in teaching from those specializing in research. In stating the criteria for promotion and merit pay, the odd collocation “pedagogical / professional development related to teaching duties,” substitutes for references to scholarship in the tenure-stream section of the document. The narrow interpretation of that language in some departments has been the subject of a group grievance by the Faculty Association, still unresolved in some details. Research work is not excluded from Lecturers’ activities, but it is not always mentioned in job descriptions even as an option, and some contradictory language remains in the reporting documents used to award merit pay and grant sabbatical leaves.

Despite such ambiguities, the new procedures have given writing instructors more chances to demonstrate within the university what they do and how well they do it. Hiring and promotion committees for the newly formalized procedures, for instance, consist of divisional faculty members along with writing-centre colleagues, meaning that many more people now see writing instructors’ application packages, annual activity reports, and teaching portfolios—genres that give writing specialists a chance to show their achievements. Committees repeatedly express surprise and admiration for what these documents reveal about the quality of writing-centre work. Writing-centre instructors have thus been able to raise the status of their type of teaching by demonstrating its high quality through some of the key ritual displays of academic identity.

## REMAINING CHALLENGES

At the University of Toronto, as in many other universities in Canada, then, writing centres have clearly expanded and established their roles within the uni-

versity. We now have the critical mass to look after ourselves. But it is also clear that by responding to crises and opportunities in the situations outlined above we have accepted limitations on our roles as faculty members and perhaps even distorted our development as teaching units. Here is a summary of the challenges that writing centres at this university are still facing. I suspect that similar challenges also exist in other writing centres:

*The Need to Maintain and Display Expertise in Recognizable Forms*

Full-time writing-centre instructors hold faculty appointments now, but are we real faculty in the terms of a research-intensive institution? The standard teaching load of a Lecturer appointment (typically equivalent to three courses a term, usually with summer work expected in addition) does not leave much room for research, especially for large-scale funded projects with rigid reporting schedules. Lecturers are eligible for SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council) and other external grants if they can produce an official letter saying that their appointments allow time for research, but I can say from experience and observation that it is nearly impossible to follow through large research projects within a Lecturer's usual workload. For writing-centre directors, the multiplication of administrative duties in the 14 decentralized units also adds to the load. Writing-centre instructors occasionally brainstorm about forming an institute or other loosely linked unit, but our relative lack of research record makes that an unlikely outcome—a confining vicious circle of cause and effect. Writing-centre instructors are active in internal professional-development activities and in attending and presenting at conferences, and we have no lack of interesting teaching experiences and questions to analyse and study. However, in the absence of major crises such as the one that made us suddenly become experts on Grammatik, much of our effort now goes into learning about the disciplines in which we work rather than continuing to invent our own.

*Temptations to Neglect the Unique Nature of Writing-Centre Instruction*

Individual teaching is the root of all writing-centre work. But a large university with a needy student population and limited funding requires many branches of this work. All writing centres at the University of Toronto now offer group instruction of some kind as well as individual student consultations. Most full-time instructors in writing centres also teach courses of their own or team-teach disciplinary courses, as well as managing complex administrative systems of scheduling, supervision, and reporting. They also take part in committee work and meetings like any other faculty member—or perhaps more so, since

their ability to speak and write clearly is much valued in these activities. Given the intensity and personal demands of one-to-one teaching, this diversification can be a welcome change of pace, but it also takes time and energy away from individual instruction. Developing new courses and, perhaps, co-teaching them with disciplinary faculty is stimulating and interesting in addition to carrying traditional types of prestige, all powerful incentives to put energy into classroom work. The cross-appointments to departments built into many new positions capitalize on this incentive, offering potential hires the challenges and rewards of classroom teaching and also some hope of continuing their discipline-based scholarly work. All full-time instructors in writing centres still offer individual instruction as part of their work. But one must now ask at what point the diversification from individual instruction will start to supplant or relegate to the margins the core work of teaching students individually.

### *The Strain of Adapting to Constant Change*

Writing centres now take part in curriculum reform and budget planning, but they are not big enough to be the main players. They need to speak and act in terms of supporting their division's overall aims rather than concentrating on their own. Now that writing centres exist in all of the university's divisions and colleges, writing support can no longer be the first planning priority for new funding, as it was for many professional faculties in the 1995-2000 planning cycle. If the Boyer Commission made "integration" a recognized term in the 1990s, government and public pressure may do the same today for "measurable outcomes" and "accountability," terms that tend to refer to short-term change in one or a few variables delivered cheaply, not to the long-term development of students and curricula that writing centres aim at. Central planning documents raised alarm among writing centres by using such terms as "delivery of services" and "co-curricular support," and by including writing along with computer literacy and time management as one of the generic skills that students should be "given" in order to succeed. It was probably more than just good fortune that the divisional faculties rejected many of these ideas and retained the emphasis on student support and integrated instruction established and reaffirmed during the previous planning cycles. University of Toronto, Faculty of Arts and Science (2007) in particular has committed itself in both words and action to a sequence of departmental initiatives that call on writing centres as a source of teaching expertise. But worrisome terms recur in other recent planning documents, especially those driven by the Ontario government call for outcomes measures as a necessity for continued funding. Writing centres and the curricular initiatives in which they take part face the new challenge of measuring instructional impact in ways that reflect their own values,

and making sure that their colleagues and supervisors understand their methods and results grounded in a research-based understanding of writing as central to knowledge production and learning in the university.

### *The Need to Mature and Develop New Leaders*

Writing centres and individual instructors have benefitted greatly from the expansion of the last 15 years, but the figures about writing-centre staffing (Table 1, above) contain a problem for future planning. Although there are many more faculty positions now than in 1991, the proportion of full-fledged faculty members to other types of positions within writing centres is only slightly higher than in 1991 (28% of the total in 1991, 36% in 2006). More than half of writing-centre instructors are still part-time and relatively insecure. Since 2005, most instructors in this situation have been represented by a new unit of the public-service union CUPE 3902, the same organization that represents Teaching Assistants. These Sessional Lecturers continue to receive a good rate of pay and have retained some access to benefits, but their first contracts contain almost no mechanism for encouraging professional development or research of any kind. Is this key group of writing-centre instructors still faculty? Do they have the impetus and scope to develop their teaching and their ideas about teaching that the earlier generation did? In a sense their representation by a different bargaining unit makes the current writing-centre directors into management, requiring them to use elaborate hiring and evaluation procedures designed by the union with hiring preference as the reward. Besides ensuring fairness in these procedures, writing-centre directors must also find ways to ensure that their junior and less privileged colleagues can develop into the next generation of leaders.

## FURTHER DISCOURSE, NEXT STEPS

This chapter has been a partial account of opportunities taken and choices made by writing centres at one university in a key time period. Under sometimes difficult conditions, multiple and diverse writing centres have developed across the university as participants in the university's teaching mission. By consolidating and capitalizing on their positions as faculty members, writing-centre instructors have been able to influence university discourse about the learning and teaching of writing. We are not yet, however, in a position to create much new professional discourse of our own, whether by investigating our own practices in more depth or by moving out into community-based research or theoretical investigation of the disciplinary practices which we now increasingly serve. One cannot wish for

another crisis to impel a sudden surge of self-awareness and daring leaps into new fields of expertise, but writing-centre instructors at the University of Toronto as elsewhere cannot rest on the facts of size and contract security. Both our history and our current situation demand continuing reflection and action on the large, but sometimes conflicting, potentials of writing-centre work as vital to both the university mission and the disciplinary development of Writing Studies.

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