CHAPTER 10.

WRITING PROGRAMS WORLDWIDE: ONE CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE

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The history of writing instruction in Canadian universities differs markedly from the US experience. In Canada, first-year writing was never required and even today is optional. Further, it has evolved out of a literature/composition hybrid course that continues to be taught in many institutions, including the University of Alberta. The key moment at the University of Alberta occurred with the establishment of the Writing Task Force in 2005. The task force made three major recommendations: a new Writing Centre; a Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Program (WAC); and a Writing Studies Program. These new initiatives joined three existing writing centres at Campus Saint Jean (the French-language campus); the Augustana campus, located 100 kilometers from Edmonton; and the existing writing tutorial service located in Student Services. The directors of all these units come together regularly at the University Writing Committee meetings to coordinate plans, share ideas, and listen to the concerns of faculty from across the institution.

The University of Alberta (enrollment 37,000; 18 faculties; established 1908; $500 million in research per year) has a long-standing commitment to improving student writing, but because this commitment arose out of the history of teaching writing in Canadian contexts, that commitment took form in ways unlike the pattern in the United States of America. Johnson (1988) summarized the differences, chief among them being the lack of first-year writing in Canada:

> In contrast to the much documented rise of the "Freshman Composition" course in English departments in the United States, the twentieth-century Canadian academy has never

> embraced the curricular concept of the "Comp" class per se; and, with remarkable hegemony, has persisted into the present decade in offering introductory English courses founded on a synthesis of composition instruction and training in critical analysis—a synthesis which was the distinctive legacy of nineteenth-century Canadian adaptations of British-style belletristic rhetoric. (869)

According to Johnson, an eighteenth-century British rhetorical education focuses on developing mental discipline, and the application of rhetorical principles to literature ("belles letters") results in the development of mental acuity and moral discipline. This combination of writing instruction in the context of literary analysis came to define the first-year literature course in many English departments in the early twentieth century, including the department at the University of Alberta (Graves 1994; Hubert 1994; Johnson 1991). This fusion of the two elements continues to dominate this department today, as unlikely as that may seem to American readers.

This tradition has come under pressure in the last few decades. Other universities, such as the University of Western Ontario, have largely abandoned the literature/composition hybrid and developed a writing program outside of the context of an English department. At the University of Winnipeg, the writing program has now become a department, and it now offers both undergraduate and graduate degrees, mirroring a trend in the United States towards "independent" writing programs (Kearns & Turner, 1997, and essay in this volume). While only one or two universities in Canada require first-year writing courses (the University of Winnipeg is one notable example), many offer an optional course or series of courses in writing. Another factor affecting first-year writing is the trend toward students transferring into a university after having done one or two years at a two-year college. Two-year colleges in Canada very often offer and even require a writing course or series of writing courses. At the University of Alberta, many students attend Grant MacEwen College/University (a hybrid institution) or Red Deer College before transferring to upper-year programs at the University of Alberta. At Grant MacEwen students may take a two-course writing sequence, the second of which mirrors the literature/composition synthesis favored at the University of Alberta. The recent development of exclusively writing courses has created a problem with assigning transfer credit: until very recently when the new Writing Studies courses were developed, there was no equivalent course at the University of Alberta.

KEY MOMENT: WRITING TASK FORCE (2005-2008)

As part of strategic planning for the University of Alberta, the Provost and Faculty of Arts jointly sponsored a large, university-wide task force to assess writing instruction and writing competencies from across the university. The task force researched the status of writing both within the university and across the continent to identify models that it might draw upon when proposing changes. The committee researched the literature/composition first-year English courses, examined the needs of second language writers, studied how much writing was being assigned in courses across the university curriculum, and wrote many documents as part of this process. Many of these documents, including the interim and final reports, are posted on the web: http://www.writinginitiatives.ualberta.ca/Writing%20Task%20Force.aspx

The task force gained widespread recognition for writing on campus and to some extent across the province because of the ramifications any changes would have for transfer credit from other institutions. Indeed, through conference presentations and the research of the participants, other writing studies scholars across the country were aware of its work. The task force made three major recommendations: a new, full-service, university-wide Writing Centre; a significant Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Program (WAC); and an interdisciplinary Writing Studies Program with a teaching/research mandate.

WRITING COURSES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

While not officially a "program" (instead we are a "field of study") at the University of Alberta, Writing Studies offers a number of courses in writing through the Office of Interdisciplinary Studies (OIS), an administrative unit formed to house a number of programs, fields of study, and certificates in the Faculty of Arts, including Religious Studies, Comparative Literature, Humanities Computing, Middle Eastern and African Studies, and Science Technology and Society. These programs and fields of study are units housed in OIS for the purposes of administration, but all faculty who teach in these units are members of a "home" department; for example, faculty in Writing Studies have English and Film Studies as their home departments. A recent review of OIS raised questions about the future of this office, whether it should remain an administrative unit or be converted into something more, that is, whether it should be reconstituted as an academic unit.

In 2010, the Writing Studies unit offered a total of thirteen sections of six courses that were taught by four tenure-track or tenured faculty and one instructor—a very small program for an institution of 37,000 students. These courses included nine sections of the elective first year writing course (made up of seven sections of WRS 101, Exploring Writing, and two sections of WRS 103, Introduction to Writing in the Sciences); one section of a combined undergraduate- and graduate-level course that is a practicum for training tutors in the Centre for Writers (WRS 301/603); and three graduate level courses, Academic Writing for Graduate Students (WRS 500); Composition Theory (WRS 601); and Writing and Disciplinarity (WRS 604). Composition Theory has been offered at the University of Alberta for a number of years as an English and Film Studies Course; only in the last year or so has it been converted to a Writing Studies course. The other three courses (Writing for Graduate Students, the practicum for the Centre for Writers, and Writing and Disciplinarity) are either brand new or developed and offered in the last four years.

This number of courses is typical of our offerings for the past three years. Although there is significant demand for writing courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels (we could probably fill a third section of WRS 103, An Introduction to Writing in the Sciences, and perhaps offer WRS 500, Academic Writing for Graduate Students, every term), the funding for offering additional courses is absent in part due to cost-cutting measures associated with the downturn in the provincial economy. Another factor is the cost of running 20-student courses in writing compared with the current 35-student literature/composition synthesis course; offering enough writing courses to replace composition courses would result in cost increases of about 40%. While we would like to see something like 30 or 40 sections offered each term, the additional costs will likely prevent that for the foreseeable future.

WRS 101: Exploring Writing

This first-year writing studies course, developed and supervised by Betsy Sargent (Director of Writing Studies), focuses on engaging students in the writing process using workshop and seminars in a small class (less than 20 students) setting. Students write often in class as well as following a process-driven approach to produce several larger documents that come together in a portfolio of writing that is evaluated at the end of the term. Part of the rationale for grading through portfolios is to delay finalizing the drafts students are working on; this then extends the time students spend drafting and revising—the invention part of the writing process.

The most novel feature of this course, however, is the focus on "writing about writing." This approach to teaching writing takes the stance that writing is the subject of study in a writing course; students read academic articles by composition scholars as their course material. Students here are both novices who are learning to practice the art of writing as well as students of a content area that focuses on knowledge about writing.

WRS 103, An Introduction to Writing in the Sciences

Writing Studies offered two distinct versions of first-year writing in 2010 because two sections of this course are reserved exclusively for first-year students in the Faculty of Science who are enrolled in Science 100. Science 100 is an innovative, interdisciplinary re-thinking of first-year science that was in its third year in 2010. The Faculty of Science consists of seven subject areas: Biological Sciences, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, Physics, Computing Sciences, Mathematics and Statistical Sciences, Chemistry, and Psychology. This configuration of areas is an artifact of institutional history. Several years ago faculty in Science reconceptualized their first year curriculum into Science 100, a year-long, 27-credit course, in which they take an interdisciplinary approach to science, introducing students to all subject areas over the course of the year and taking an experimental/experiential approach to the various topics. The website describes the course like this: "SCIENCE 100 uses an integrated and interdisciplinary approach and employs the expertise of top science professors to deliver material from all seven Faculty of Science disciplines. The focus in SCIENCE 100's small classes is on in-depth teaching, conceptual understanding and practical mastery of the fundamentals": http://www.science.ualberta.ca/ProspectiveStudents/SCIENCE100/HowItWorks.aspx . In addition to Science 100, these students also take WRS 103, a three-credit course, in the fall term, which teaches them some of the concepts of writing that will contribute to their success over the course of their undergraduate education.

In 2008, the first year that Science 100 was offered, students took a modified version of WRS 101, Exploring Writing, a course developed for the general population of undergraduates at the University of Alberta; it has students read academic journal articles in writing studies and reflect on the implications this theory has for their own writing practices. WRS 101, Exploring Writing, was not well suited to the needs of undergraduate science students because the course's overt focus was on invention—helping students figure out what to write about in a given assignment. In fact, the assumption that students need help deciding on a topic is unwarranted with much science-related writing because it is experiment- and data-driven. Writers in science come to a text know-

ing what to write about--their interpretation of their findings. Consequently, faculty in writing studies developed a version of the first-year writing course that was tailored to the needs and interests of students in Science 100.

In WRS 103 students take a process approach to writing, and the central focus of activities is on analyzing audience, purpose, and genre. Audiences are not exclusively academic, with students writing for non-specialist and lay readers as well. Regarding purpose, the course focuses on two major purposes for writing in science: to inform and to persuade. Finally, assignments in WRS 103 are not exclusively essay-based, since undergraduates in science in Canada almost never write an essay of the variety routinely assigned in first-year composition courses in the US (a research essay). Instead, students in WRS 103 write one essay (a position argument) that uses explicit argument (in place of writing a grant proposal, which is the genre in which scientists argue most explicitly), two reports (that both argue for an interpretation and inform readers), and a newsletter article (writing for a non-specialist or lay reader). By discussing the varying requirements for structure, content, and style in these three different genres, students gain a greater awareness of how these elements shape writing as the writer moves from one genre to another, which is more useful to them in their academic careers than mastering the persuasive essay. There is some collaboration among instructors in Science 100 and the WRS 103 instructor to ensure connections are drawn between the writing done in both the writing and the science classes.

THE PHD PROGRAM PROPOSAL IN WRITING STUDIES AND RHETORIC

Rather than develop an undergraduate writing program, the faculty in Writing Studies decided to develop a PhD program because there are few doctoral programs in Writing Studies in Canada. Many writing-related programs in Canadian universities are staffed by non-academic faculty offered through Student Services. This situation is partly due to Canadian post-secondary administrators who continue to view writing as a "skill" that students can acquire with one or two hour-long workshops on academic writing or a handful of sessions with a poorly-paid writing tutor who works on a cost-recovery basis. It is also partly due to the lack of qualified academic faculty who could provide leadership and intellectual depth to the teaching of writing at Canadian post-secondary institutions.

To attempt to address the issue of limited qualified personnel for writing-related positions in Canada, the faculty in Writing Studies at the University

of Alberta decided to create a doctoral program that would develop tenure-line professionals with expertise in three areas: Writing Centre research and administration; Writing Program research, development, and administration; and research and program development in writing in the disciplines/writing across the curriculum. When writing centres are housed in Student Services, administrators in charge of Student Services tend to lose sight of the fact that teaching writing has a strong intellectual and research foundation. When tutors and instructors are not equipped or rewarded for conducting research and expanding the field's understanding of the intellectual development entailed in the activity of writing, they obviously do not do it, to the detriment of the students they are charged with helping. Writing instruction that is drawn from cutting-edge knowledge in the field will be much better equipped to make a difference in students' lives than uninformed obsession with correcting grammar and punctuation errors in students papers. The proposed program will attempt to redress this ongoing issue in writing instruction in Canada.

Faculty in Writing Studies also decided to capitalize on the support at the instructional level for writing at the University of Alberta by developing options for graduate students to conduct research into writing in the disciplines. Recent research suggests that generic writing courses, such as are offered at the first-year level in composition, are not effectively generalizable across the academic disciplines, at least in Canadian universities and colleges. Research that explores the requirements for writing in various academic disciplines can help the field to offer instructional resources that better meet the needs of their students who come from disciplines across the university.

Early in 2010 Writing Studies faculty learned that the budget crisis at the University of Alberta would slow the funding of any new programs at any level of the university. It therefore appears that there is no money for developing this doctoral program in late 2010. This situation may change as the provincial, national, and global economies improve, however. In the meantime, the proposal is going forward with the hope that it might be approved and in place if and when funding becomes available.

CENTRE FOR WRITERS

When the student union presented its request to the Provost in 2006, he asked them to identify the one request they wanted most. They identified the Centre for Writers as their top priority. Now in its third full year of operation, the Centre for Writers is an established presence on campus. This success came despite some adversity, a fact that many writing centre directors might see as

unremarkable. Now in its fourth year of operation, it has had three directors. The first director set up the office, hired an administrative assistant, taught the first peer-tutor training course, and oversaw the first term of tutoring sessions in Winter 2008 with about 180 students and 300 one-to-one sessions. After her resignation in the summer of 2008, Roger Graves served as interim director for the first full year of operations. Over 1300 students participated in a total of over 2500 one-to-one sessions. A staff of over 20 undergraduate peer tutors and graduate student tutors worked in the Center, which was relocated to a new, larger space for the 2009-10 year. During this first year, another permanent director was hired for the Centre, Lucie Moussu. In her first year as director and the second full year of operations, the Centre conducted over 4500 one-to-one appointments for over 1700 students. The web site for the Centre continues to add resources for students, and the tutoring desks in the Centre all have computers and print resources (handbooks, style manuals, dictionaries). It has become the vibrant, well-run, and important resource envisioned by the Writing Task Force.

The Centre for Writers is one of four independent (funded and run separately) writing centres at the university. Bilingual Writing Centre/Centre d'écriture bilingue (Campus Saint-Jean) works with French-language students at the French campus of the University of Alberta. The Augustana Writing Centre works with students at the Augustana campus, which is located approximately 60 miles from the main campus. Writing Resources (Academic Support Centre, Student Services) offers a similar tutorial service to the Centre for Writers as well as workshops for both undergraduates and graduate students. Writing Resources existed prior to the establishment of the Centre for Writers, and differs in that it is a fee-recovery unit: it charges students $20 per half-hour appointment and various amounts for workshops.

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

The Writing Across the Curriculum program at the University of Alberta has engaged in four efforts: teaching about writing to classes in various disciplines (about 25 in 2009); one-to-one consultations as well as workshops and presentations for instructors, both faculty and graduate (18 workshops or presentations in 2009); research investigating the kinds of writing students are asked to engage in at the University of Alberta (5 studies completed or under way).

In an effort to engage and demonstrate how to teach students about the writing tasks set for them in courses, Roger Graves has visited classes to teach the session on getting started on the writing assignment. These sessions gener-

ally last 50 minutes (or whatever time the professor can allot to this activity) and involve parsing the assignment description; brainstorming topics for the assignment; drafting sample thesis statements; constructing evidence-based arguments in support of those thesis statements; writing summaries of research to include in essays. During these sessions, which are frequently held in classes of over 100 students, instructors and students talk back and forth about the nuances of the assignment—a conversation that might not take place outside this exchange or, if it did, sometimes too late in the writing process. Our goal at the end of these sessions is that students have a good understanding of the assignment; they know what kinds of strategies produce better writing (adopting a process approach; getting feedback; revising); and they know where to get help (at one of the four writing centres).

Invitations to visit classes for those kinds of presentations often come from writing-across-the-curriculum workshops and one-to-one conversations with faculty members. These sorts of activities are typical of WAC programs for faculty development. In addition, we have tried to work less on the broad scale of campus-wide workshops and more on a focused effort with specific curricular groups. The Faculty of Science has been an enthusiastic supporter of initiatives undertaken in Writing at University of Alberta. In additional to the collaboration between Writing Studies and Science 100 instructors, the science faculty has also been receptive to introducing more writing into some of their undergraduate science courses. Each department, for example, has a senior capstone course that involves a research project with a large writing component such as a senior honors thesis (e.g., earth and atmospheric science) or a work report following an Industrial Internship Program placement (e.g., computing science, biological sciences) or research report (e.g., biological sciences, including microbiology). In 2009, five faculty members in science consulted with Writing Studies faculty about ongoing capstone courses (two in biology, one in earth and atmospheric sciences) or during the process of developing a capstone course (mathematics and statistical sciences). In addition, a series of six workshops on writing-related topics (creating good writing assignments in science; grading rubrics for writing assignments; teaching writing in science classes, etc.) for faculty and graduate students in science in winter 2009 were well attended, with between 20 and 40 individuals at each one.

The third major component of our WAC work has been research into the writing assigned to students in various programs. Because most students do not take an extensive liberal arts component—many enter directly from secondary school into their major program of study—and very few have a writing or composition course, the writing they do is very much discipline-based. We have conducted studies here based on a previous study at another university where

we collected every writing assignment from every course (Graves, Hyland & Samuels, 2010). We have replicated this study methodology for the Faculty of Nursing; Faculty of Physical Education, Recreation, and Leisure Studies; Faculty of Pharmacy; Department of Political Science; and Community Service Program. These data provide profiles of the writing that students in a particular program must do (Anson & Dannels, 2009). For example, we know that students in the RN program write 79 assignments in the required courses over the four years of the program, and we know which genres appear at each year in the program. The Nursing faculty has found this research to be extremely useful as a curriculum reform tool, and it has galvanized interest in writing and turned that interest into specific outcomes: re-written assignments; more and better scoring guides; workshops for instructors; writing workshops for peer research groups among the faculty.

STRATEGIZING FOR IMPACT

Much has been accomplished in the short time since the final report of the Writing Task Force in 2008. The Centre for Writers is established, effective, and growing. The WAC program teaches thousands of students about writing in their courses each year. The Writing Studies program has established writing courses at the University of Alberta. These new programs join the other writing centres at the university—at Campus Saint Jean, Augustana, and in Student Services—when we all meet once a month at the University Writing Council meetings to discuss strategy and coordinate efforts. In addition, a new group from across the province has been formed for professional development and to exchange program development news: the Campus Alberta Writing Studies group meets twice a year. Ultimately, each of these groups draws its funding from the government of the province of Alberta. Our hope is to coordinate our efforts in ways that magnify the impact of our individual efforts, from sharing costs for professional development events to sharing resources that we develop for our own writing centres.

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