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Volume 13, Number 2, Winter/Spring 2003

The Writing Centre Project: A Progress Report

Bryan Tinlin, Project Manager

Foreword by Madeleine Lefebvre, University Librarian

In April, 2001, Senate established a Task Force on the English Requirements for all Undergraduate Programs, which was chaired by Dr Keith Vaughan, Department of Chemistry. The Task Force quickly established that the real issue was not English requirements, but student literacy, and recognized that it was not the English Department's responsibility, alone, to address this problem. The subsequent Report of the Task Force on Literacy was approved by Senate in June 2002. One of the recommendations in that Report was the establishment of a Writing Centre. A Writing Initiative Committee, consisting of Dr. Esther Enns, Margaret-Anne Bennett, Madeleine Lefebvre and Dr. Brian Bartlett, was struck to develop a proposal to the Strategic Initiatives Fund. This Committee was successful in their request for funding for a pilot project to develop a Writing Centre, a cornerstone of the Initiative.

Bryan Tinlin was appointed in January, 2003, to develop the pilot project and Janet Renou subsequently appointed in February to coordinate the student tutor training component. In the following article, Bryan Tinlin gives an overview of the pilot project and related activities.

It has only been eight weeks since I began my position as Project Manager for Saint Mary's proposed Writing Centre, and I'm pleased to have this opportunity to report on the progress made to date.

Consultations with Stakeholders

During the term of this project (January 6 – early May, 2003), I am responsible for developing a framework for a Writing Centre and submitting a report, with recommendations, to the Writing Initiative Committee. In order for a Centre to be as effective and efficient as any new service in its infancy can be, I was asked by the Committee to gather as much information as possible through consultations with key stakeholders: undergraduate and graduate students, teaching assistants, full and part-time faculty, and academic support services. To date, consultations have taken place with the Atlantic Centre for Students with Disabilities, the TESL Centre, Continuing Education, the Library, and SMUSA Executive. These groups have put forward excellent suggestions which will be included in my final report to the Committee. Also included in that report will be feedback from faculty, teaching assistants, OPTAMUS



(Organization of Part-Time and Mature University Students), and Student Services.

Learning From Existing Centres

While consultations with stakeholders continue, I am also gathering information on the practices of other university Writing Centres across the country. Obviously, there are many lessons to be learned from those that have been in existence, in some cases, for over thirty years. I have been pleased with, and very thankful for, the level of cooperation I have received from other universities who are sympathetic to the challenges faced by a

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Teaching and Learning at Saint Mary's

A forum on teaching and learning sponsored by the Quality of Teaching Committee and produced by the Office of Instructional Development. Articles and responses by faculty, students and administrators are welcome.

Quality of Teaching Committee Members, 2002/2003

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The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the Quality of Teaching Committee. The editor reserves the right not to publish a submission.

Referencing Sources: Teaching by Example

Diane Crocker, Sociology

With all the talk of plagiarism and academic integrity this past month, I came to a startling realization: some of my lectures were plagiarized! OK – that's a bit of an overstatement, but here's the situation. I teach a survey course in criminology called "Crime and Society" that covers a wide range of topics. Naturally, I turned to the literature to guide and inform my class preparation. This semester, as I thought more about plagiarism, I realized that I was breaking my own rules! I was failing to acknowledge the literature that I had used to help me prepare for the course.

I decided to rectify the situation by writing the name of the author and date of publication on the overhead whenever I drew from a secondary source. This process has helped to alleviate students' concerns about using sources – several students told me they were afraid the professor would think they didn't do enough of the work themselves if their paper was full of references. It has also helped me

teach them about documenting and using sources over an extended period of time, rather than overwhelming them in one class. Also, they love to catch me without a reference! This has had the interesting effect of opening up discussions on why I do not need to reference certain pieces of information. I have also been able to show them the difference between types of sources (e.g., internet, journal, book) in the context of providing them with information rather than in an abstract discussion.

Overall, I am very pleased with how my efforts have helped highlight some of the difficulties that students have with understanding how, when and why to provide sources in their papers.

If you have a Teaching Tip or Bright Idea that you would like to share with colleagues, please submit to oid@smu.ca for future editions of Teaching and Learning at Saint Mary's.

SMUSA Establishes Excellence in Teaching Awards

The Saint Mary's University Students' Association has announced the establishment of five Excellence in Teaching Awards designed to recognize professors, teaching/lab assistants and university personnel who have made an exceptional contribution to students' learning and life experience, both inside and outside the classroom. These awards, to be given annually, are:

Three Teaching Awards (an Arts, Commerce & Science Award open to full and part-time faculty)

- One Teaching/Lab Assistant's Award
- One University Staff Award (yet to be named.)

Nominations for the awards closed on March 14, 2003. The selection of winners for the inaugural year will be made by a committee of SMUSA and ratified by the Students' Representative Council before Charter Night on April 5, 2003. Recipients will be invited to attend Charter Night where they will be formally presented with their award citations.

For further information on SMUSA's Excellence in Teaching Awards, or Charter Night visit www.smusa.ca or e-mail Jon Kincade at vpacademic@smusa.ca.

new student service. When all is said and done, we hope to borrow from the best while tailoring the services of a Writing Centre to the unique needs of Saint Mary's students.

Tutor Training Program

Another major initiative during the planning phase of the Writing Centre is the development and testing of a training program for student tutors. At the helm of the training program is Janet Renou, a PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Ottawa, who brings a wealth of experience and enthusiasm to the project. Her task is to develop a training program and train eight student tutors so that they can, mid-way through this semester, begin working with students who are in need of writing assistance. The challenge is to ensure that students who seek assistance understand that the Writing Centre will provide support and guidance to help them work through the writing process as opposed to acting as a remedial centre where writing problems are given a quick fix. According to other Centres, student writing success is best promoted through a developmental rather than a remedial approach, and that is one that we will strive to provide.

Writing Centre Website

At the same time that the training program is underway, so too will be the construction of a prototype web site. This site will be easy to navigate, accessible to users of low and high-speed internet connection, and, most of all, functional. The site will have a modest beginning but is expected to evolve as the Centre evolves. You can expect however to find information about the Writing Centre's mandate, services, electronic resources, appointments, hours of operation and contact information.

The Writing Centre web site will eventually be housed within the larger Writing Initiative web site that will contain, in part, the recommendations of Senate to improve written communication skills among Saint Mary's students. Other web pages containing information on the Writing Initiative will include: Writing Across the Curriculum, Online Resources for Faculty, Library Services and Information Literacy, and Advocacy with the School System to name a few.

A Writing Centre on Campus

One of the last tasks of this project, but certainly not the least important, will be identifying a suitable and permanent location for a Writing Centre. Current research suggests a central location as the ideal and research also suggests that Centres be located near the library given the critical relationship between academic writing and research. Since unused or unallocated space is virtually non-existent at Saint Mary's, this issue will present us with one of our greatest challenges.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have contributed their ideas, comments and suggestions during the planning phase of the Writing Centre.

Please contact me if you wish to discuss this project or offer comments or suggestions.

Tel: 420.5074

Email: bryan.tinlin@smu.ca or drop by the office in Sobey 325.



Bryan Tinlin (centre) and Janet Reno (right) in a training session with student tutors.

The Writing IDEAS Bank

Margaret-Anne Bennett
Office of Instructional Development

As we look to the creation of a Writing Centre to assist students in the development and enhancement of their writing skills, the Writing Initiatives Committee is also looking for ways to support faculty. One recommendation was to assemble an IDEAS Bank to act as a resource for faculty who intend to, or are looking for ways to incorporate writing instruction into their own curriculum. This Writing IDEAS Bank would be a resource developed by faculty, for faculty.

Students in all disciplines need to know how to write, in general terms, as well as within the specific demands of the discipline. Students learn to write a laboratory report, a market survey or a critical analysis of text by being taught to write, by actually writing and by having their writing assessed as part of the course work.

We are, therefore, asking you to reflect on your courses – your curriculum, methods of teaching, learning activities, and your assessment practices and contribute to the IDEAS Bank by telling us:

- how you promote writing, in-class and in homework assignments;
- ways you assist students to develop their writing skills;
- ways in which you give students feedback on their writing; and/or
- how you assess your students' written work.

Please send your submissions to oid@smu.ca, subject Writing IDEAS Bank. We'll put your ideas together in a resource manual as one of our early efforts to support faculty within the Saint Mary's Writing Initiative.

Quality of Teaching Committee 'Large Project Grants'

Creating a **Departmental Video Library** (2000/01)

Michele Byers, Sociology and Criminology

About eighteen months ago, I started working with my Research Assistant, Greg Nepean, on a project funded by a Grant from the Quality of Teaching Committee. The idea for the project was born out of the frustration

I experienced every time I tried to find a video in the McNally South fourth floor closet that serves as our department's video library. While the videos were numbered and ordered, most had little more than a title by way of providing information about content. Like most faculty, I do not have time to screen dozens of videos in the hope of stumbling upon one that will act as an appropriate pedagogical aide for my class. Thus the idea of creating a video library was born.

The first step was to locate all videos and have them screened by Greg who then wrote one-page synopses including production information and running time. Eventually we created several binders which now hold the video library information in its entirety and which are held in the central office of the Sociology and Criminology department.

But this turned out to be not the most innovative part of our project. Greg made the excellent suggestion that the library might be uploaded to our Departmental website. The reasoning was that, online, the library information could be accessed by students and faculty, easily, from home as well as from school. The site can be found in the menu options of the Sociology website, under departmental video database, or directly at: www.stmarys.ca/academic/arts/sociology/medialog/soccrim_video_list.htm.



photo: Sandor Fizi

The web site (like the binders) divides the videos according to areas of teaching and/or research interests (such as body and society, or corrections and parole). Each is listed according to its file number, title, date of production and running time. Each title is hyperlinked, so when it is clicked on, the synopsis of that particular title is opened.

The video library project had added benefits besides providing comprehensive and easily accessible information about departmental video resources. For example, it allowed us to identify the videos which were very dated and/or of poor sound or video quality; it allowed us to identify areas of interest to faculty and students where our resources were lacking; in

responding to feedback from faculty, we developed a new library system which allows us to more closely track the status of departmental videos; and adding more information to the system (both in print format and on-line) is now relatively straightforward and systematized.

It seems thus far that the video library project has been successful, and I hope it will provide a model for other departments. I use the system regularly and find it extremely helpful to be able to access information from home when I am doing my class preparation. I hope that my colleagues in Sociology and Criminology, and well as throughout Saint Mary's University, will take advantage of it.

I would like to thank the Quality of Teaching Committee for providing me with the Instructional Development Grant that made this project possible.

The New SMU Physics-Demonstration Web Site: **Videos, CDs, Outreach and more!** (2001/02)

Dr. Adam Sarty, Astronomy & Physics

Scenario #1:

The professor stands at the front of the lecture theatre with his back and head pressed against the wall. He holds a bowling ball directly against his nose; the bowling ball is attached to the ceiling high overhead by a long tether. The professor releases the bowling ball, which then swings (quite rapidly) all the way to the opposite side of the theatre, and then back again – directly towards the profes-



photo: Sandor Fizi

sor's nose! The professor stands motionless, and the bowling ball stops just short of his nose (to the relief of the students and the professor) before turning around again on its swinging journey.

Scenario #2:

One-hundred mousetraps are arranged on a table-top in a 10x10 array – each spring loaded, and with one ping-pong ball set on each trap. A plexiglass cover is placed over the top of the array of mousetraps. A student drops one “trigger” ping-pong ball through a hole in the top of the cover – and this one trigger ball releases a chain-reaction that causes an extremely rapid explosion of mousetrap firings. One second later, all but 2 mousetraps have “fired” as a result of that one trigger ball.

These two scenarios are examples of “in-class demonstrations” used in the introductory physics courses at Saint Mary's (Phy235 and Phy236). Such visual, physical demonstrations are done to reinforce concepts covered during lectures (the first demo presented above reinforces the idea of “conservation of mechanical energy”, the second presents the idea of a “nuclear chain reaction”). The demonstrations have a definite impact on learning: rather than learning through relating in an abstract way to mathematical equations formulated in writing, the students have the concepts presented in a way that confronts their senses in a more immediate (less abstract) manner. Students remember the swinging bowling ball long after they have forgotten the mathematical relation “ $0 = KE + PE$ ”, and so they have remembered something about physics! So, the more demonstrations that can be included in an introductory physics course, the more effective the course can be at achieving its learning objectives.

And this is where the Office of Instructional Development, and the Quality of Teaching Committee at Saint Mary's have played a major role in ensuring these demonstrations continue to be an integral part of our introductory physics courses (and more!). During the summer of 2002, I was awarded a Quality of Teaching Committee Project Grant to hire a student (Joshua Bray, honors Physics) for development of a physics-

demonstration web site (more properly, “An OnLine Resource Tool for Physics-Concept Demonstrations”). The project was to develop a web site to fulfill many functions related to maintaining these kinds of demonstrations. The web site contains a list of demonstrations done in our intro course. For each individual demonstration, the following details are presented: the theoretical underpinnings relating to the demo (i.e. the mathematical relations attempting to be reinforced!), the equipment needed to perform the demonstration, assembly instructions as appropriate, photographs of the setup and the demonstration in action, video clips of the demonstration in action (high and low resolution, and normal and slow motion as appropriate). Some of the benefits we hope to achieve with this extensive web site are:

- To provide a lasting list of demonstrations that can be done at Saint Mary's, along with instructions for assembly and use. This is very important to ensure that students can continue to benefit from these demos even if the instructor changes, or if the department technician (the person who actually prepares the demos!) changes.
- To provide students in the class with the ability to review the demonstration again after class; this ensures opportunity to review the demo with relation to the concept attempting to be reinforced (slow motion video and extended explanations assist in this goal).
- To provide the instructor with a video that could be used in-class to supplement the actual “live” demonstration (useful in the event that the live demonstration fails – which does indeed happen from time to time!).
- To provide an “outreach” resource for regional high school physics teachers;

there is great overlap with the concepts covered in the introductory physics courses at Saint Mary's and the Nova Scotia Grade 12 Physics curriculum.

Note that, to assist in achieving this outreach goal, the site is designed to be easily “burned to CD”, so that we can provide local area high school physics teachers with CD-ROMs (thus avoiding the need for an internet connection in their high school classroom).

This project is now well underway, and is the result of the hard work of a few people in the Department of Astronomy & Physics. Design of the web site itself, and management of all the demonstration equipment, has been led by Physics technician, Shawna Mitchell. During the summer of 2002, Shawna provided the day-to-day oversight of the Project Grant student (Joshua Bray), as well as a second undergraduate student (Andrea Misner) who was partially funded through the NS Department of Education EAPD program.

Although not yet in its final form, the web site was “launched” by Shawna Mitchell in October 2002 via a presentation to the annual Association of Science Teachers Conference at the QEII High School in Halifax. Forty sets of CD-ROMs of “Version 1.0” of the web site were distributed to high school teachers at the conference. The web site can be viewed at www.ap.smu.ca/demos/

Thanks goes out to Shawna, Joshua, and Andrea for their wonderful work on this project - and to the Quality of Teaching Committee and the Dean of Science for providing the financial support needed to get the project off the ground.

Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences

Conflict and Cooperation

May 28-June 4, 2003

Dalhousie University

www.fedcan.ca/english/congress/congress.html

May 28-June 4

Academic Integrity

Survey Results

As most of you will recall, Saint Mary's, along with a number of other Canadian universities, participated in an online survey on Academic Integrity in early February. The final response rates were:

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------|
| First Year Students | 213 |
| Students | 868 |
| Teaching Assistants | 13 |
| Total Students | 1094 |
| Faculty | 127 |

We would like to thank the faculty and students who participated and who took the time to share their opinions, ideas, issues and concerns on this topic.

Over the next couple of months, members of Saint Mary's Sub-Committee on Academic Integrity will analyze the reports of the survey data supplied to us by the Center for Academic Integrity.

One-Day Symposium May 6, 2003

Dr. Donald McCabe, Rutgers University and Director, Center for Academic Integrity, will be visiting Saint Mary's and will be our keynote speaker.

Sessions will also include a presentation of the survey results and workshops designed to focus on the issues raised by faculty and students.

More information will be available in early April from the Office of Instructional Development.



Coming to a **Computer Near You!**

Beginning in May 2003, the Quality of Teaching Committee will be distributing an electronic version of *The Teaching Professor* to all Saint Mary's faculty. Until now, a single hardcopy of this publication had been sent to each Department Chair to be circulated to faculty and posted to departmental bulletin boards.

The rising cost (in American dollars) of paper copies of the newsletter encouraged us to investigate a) whether anyone at Saint Mary's was reading *The Teaching Professor*, and b) whether there were other options for distribution.

We were pleasantly surprised at the feedback from departments. We understand that copies are indeed passed around (some) departments, posted on departmental bulletin boards, articles copied for individual reading or collections, etc. As a result of this feedback, we investigated the option of obtaining a site

license that will enable us to make an electronic version available to all faculty in PDF through the use of a common password. Again we were very pleasantly surprised to find that this option was much less expensive.

We are therefore pleased to inform faculty that, as of May, 2003, you will receive an email notice with the release of each new issue of *The Teaching Professor*. Each notice will include the password and the link to the site. This site can be visited as often as desired and the electronic newsletter can be printed by faculty or by departmental secretaries who may still wish to post the issues.

Look for an email with the first electronic issue early in May.

If you have questions or comments on this service, please contact Mary Brooks, Office of Instructional Development: 420.5088, email oid@smu.ca

Accessible Benefits: One Professor's Journey into Web Accessibility

Nadine Legier, English

Saint Mary's University is nationally recognized for its advances in technology support for students with disabilities and its first-rate services for these students. Over the past several years, Saint Mary's University has also been developing and offering a growing number of online courses. One obvious issue then for a university with a commitment to supporting students with disabilities is in ensuring that these online courses are accessible to this student population. And by accessible I'm not referring to access to a computer – but in ensuring that the instructional

design of the online courses recognize and support the learning capabilities of students with disabilities.

Most professors recognize that students with disabilities often approach learning slightly differently than other students in the classroom and we are usually able to accommodate these differences. It is therefore important to understand how these learning differences can also be accommodated in our online courses or modules.

During the summer of 2002, Stefani Woods, Web Course Technician, Division

of Continuing Education, and I began our journey into the world of accessible web design and instruction with great trepidation. We evaluated the online courses offered by Saint Mary's University using the guidelines for accessible web design from the IBM Accessibility Website, while I was also able to evaluate them from the perspective of a faculty member who teaches a fully online course, English 201. Our interest in this project was in ensuring that Saint Mary's courses met the accessibility guidelines while, at the same time, maintained a professor's creativity and vision for his/her course. Stefani and I found that what, at first, seemed like a dauntingly large endeavour, was actually easy and logical in its implementation. The most practical aspect of our project was the development of a set of criteria for new web courses being developed at Saint Mary's. This criterion outlines ways that instructional designers and faculty can keep their online courses accessible while maintaining content integrity.

Although this article does not allow for a complete discussion of the project, I am interested in conveying to readers that accessible web design is really quite straightforward.



Nadine Legier

Most of the suggestions I offer here are logical and actually represent sound design principles for all students. These are not the only ones appearing in our document for designing new web courses at Saint Mary's but they are some of the most easily implemented tips. The full list can be obtained from the Division of Continuing Education:

- Include a beginning module or workshop that explains the way the course is navigated. Use this module to tell students about the different elements of the course and explain how to use the various tools.
- Words that are associated with your discipline should, of course, be used in

your content. However, it is a good idea to include a glossary of all the discipline-specific terms you will use. These specific words can appear as links to the glossary within your content. As students read through the content, these specific words will appear as links or be read as links by a voice reader.

- Use a standard template when designing your content modules and design each module to conform to the template. This allows students who cannot see some of the visual cues to grasp the way the course is laid out. This also helps students without a disability; all students appreciate structure!

- Create an excellent syllabus and be sure that the content of each module follows it closely. This can be beneficial for students with visual impairments or cognitive disabilities by providing a sense of order and logic. Of course, this is good practice for any student.

Identify exactly how you are going to evaluate students before you design the course. Web courses are advantageous because the professor has the ability to add material and quizzes very easily. This can often be problematic for students who are using adaptive technology if the new material

does not conform to accessibility guidelines.

- If you quiz or test students on a regular basis, perhaps in every module or workshop, make it a habit to assign these quizzes or tests at the same point in each module. This will assist students in recognizing the organization of the course.
- When you are conveying auditory information, remember that some students might not be able to hear the text. Therefore, it is good practice to include the text equivalent to all auditory information.
- A surprising number of people in North America and the world have colour deficiencies and experience difficulties dis-

tinguishing colours. Therefore, do not be tempted to make statements in your course such as "the answer is seen in red." If you are going to reveal an answer to students, you might as well tell them rather than relying on colour to convey it.

- Be conscious of, and make note of, what doesn't work throughout the semester. You can use this information when designing future courses.
- Contact the office for students with disabilities at your learning institution. They are an excellent resource and should be able to explain particulars about any adaptive technology with which you might be unfamiliar.

Stefani and I are very pleased with the outcomes of this project and we believe it will have very obvious benefits for the university community. Simple attention to the above suggestions can mean the difference between an online course that reaches some of your students and a course that has the potential to reach the entire student population.

**7th Annual Dalhousie
Conference on University
Teaching & Learning
May 7-9, 2003
Dalhousie University**

Saint Mary's full- and part-time faculty interested in submitting a presentation, can see the Call For Presentations online at www.dal.ca/~oidt

May 7-9

**23rd Annual Conference of
the Society for Teaching &
Learning in Higher Education
(STLHE/SAPES)
June 11-14, 2003**

University of
British Columbia
[www.ubconferences.com/events/
stlhe/index.html](http://www.ubconferences.com/events/stlhe/index.html)

June 11-14

CAT Tales

Mary Brooks, Office of Instructional Development

The Center for Academic Technologies has been purring along nicely this semester. Regular visitors to the CAT will notice a new face among our Technology Teaching Assistants. Subin Upadhyay has joined Zoë, Richard and Vagarro and will be contributing his skills and experience to help with our increasingly busy schedule.

During the semester, some of the requests from faculty and staff for technology assistance and support have included:

- In-class WebCT student orientations at the beginning of term.
- Retrieval of archival data, both from 5 1/4" and outdated Mac formatted disks.
- Uploading of WebCT files for faculty teaching WebCT supported classroom based courses.
- One-on-one introductory instruction in Access, FrontPage, PowerPoint and WebCT.
- Digitizing and editing audio and video clips for uploading to web sites.
- Converting text and image files to PDF files, and editing PDF files with Adobe Writer.



Teaching assistants (left to right): Richard Alfred, Zoë Oliver, Subin Upadhyay, and Vagarro Willie.

Both a digital video and a digital stills camera are available for use by faculty on a sign-out basis, and we continue to offer in-lab use of our multi-purpose scanner and specialized multi-media software.

Although drop-in assistance is available, to ensure assistance is available when you need it, it's best to call ahead and book an appointment. For development or enhancement of your technology skills, call 496.8168 or email cat@smu.ca.

Please note that the CAT will be open and our Student Technology Assistants available throughout the spring and summer to assist you as requested.

WebCT Workshops

WebCT is the course management tool used at Saint Mary's to deliver web-based courses and to support Web applications for classroom courses.

Faculty considering using WebCT in the future are invited to attend an introductory workshop to learn more about WebCT and on-campus support services.

An Introduction to WebCT:
May 13, 9:30 – 11:30am OR
May 14, 1:30 – 3:30pm

Mark your calendars if you are interested in attending.

Registration information will be sent to full- and part-time faculty in late April.

If you require technology assistance in the meantime, please contact the Office of Instructional Development oid@smu.ca or the student technology assistants in the CAT: cat@smu.ca

**NAWeb 2003
9th Annual Conference
on Web-Based Teaching
& Learning**

October 18–21, 2003

University of New Brunswick
<http://naweb.unb.ca>

October 18-21

**8th Annual AAU
Teaching Showcase
October 25, 2003**

University College of
Cape Breton

October 25