

CWCA/ACCR NEWSLETTER

March 2009 Volume 2, Issue 1

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Submissions

The CWCA/ACCR newsletter is made possible through contributions from CWCA members. Submissions for the next newsletter must be received by June 1, 2009 to meet a summer edition deadline. Please email your ideas or submissions to:

tyler.tokaryk@utoronto.ca

C'est très important pour l'association canadienne des centres de rédaction (ACCR) d'avoir le contenu qui s'applique pour le centre d'écriture francophone. Ne hésitez pas de m'envoyer vos commentaires et vos articles:

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From the Editor's Desk . . .

This third edition of the CWCA / ACCR Newsletter is an eclectic mix of analysis, research, and personal reflection: Theresa Hyland's incisive book review asks some important questions about what a Writing Handbook ought to provide and why; Christina Archibald and Alison McLaren offer some invaluable observations and ask some tough questions about the daily challenges facing writing tutors; Sheena Wilson provides a fascinating analysis of her bilingual writing centre in Alberta and the socio-political landscape that it negotiates; and Martin Holock writes a fascinating account of his work setting up a writing centre in India. I'm confident that you will find each of these articles a useful addition to the increasingly complex conversation we are having about the different roles writing centres play in our academic institutions.

I hope that many of us will be able to attend the CWCA annual general meeting at STLHE this year. In addition to holding elections for a number of important Executive positions, I would like to have a conversation about possible directions to take the Newsletter. In particular, I would like to discuss some "themes" or "issues" for forthcoming editions.

It's been a pleasure interacting with you while putting this edition of the Newsletter together. I look forward to seeing you in Fredericton in June and elsewhere throughout Conference season. Till then, keep the ideas and submissions coming.

Tyler Tokaryk is the Coordinator of Writing Programs at the University of Toronto Mississauga and a Lecturer at the Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre (UTM). His current interests and research include writing in the disciplines, Critical Discourse Analysis, post-colonial literature, and the relationship between globalization and academic integrity.

CWCA Mission:

The Canadian Writing Centres Association is a national community of Writing Centre professionals who share resources, ideas, questions and concerns in both French and English.

Mission: To bring together as a bilingual community the people and groups interested in Canadian Writing Centres, their administration and their services, in order to enable sharing of resources, experiences, ideas and scholarship with the aim of enriching the services provided to students in higher education across Canada.

Message from the Chair...

This may (or may not) be the last message I write to you from this chair. I've taken on an exciting opportunity here at the University of Ottawa, made doubly interesting by the fact that I get to "try it on" for a few months before committing absolutely. Let me explain.

For the last few years, I've held the position of Communications and Projects Coordinator at the Academic Writing Help Centre (AWHC), where I've been at the helm of several promotional campaigns and many interesting projects, best of all, the formation of this Association and the connections and relationships that have stemmed from it. I've come back from every meeting, from individual encounters with other members to executive committee meetings to our big AGMs at STLHE, inspired and refreshed, ready to take on new writing centre challenges with refreshed energy.

A month ago, the Communications Officer from the Student Academic Success Service (SASS), which administers many support services including the AWHC, left. Because of my experience and my familiarity with SASS, I was asked to fill the position. And that's where you'll find me now.

But because of the University's system, I'm technically "on loan" from the AWHC until the spring, which puts me in the fortunate position of choosing, at that time, which of the two jobs I'd like to retain. So while I'll be away from the WC world for a while, I might well be back.

It's a big year of changes for the Association. Liseje de Burger is retiring this year as well, which is fitting, as both her position of Vice-Chair and mine of Chair are due for reappointment in the spring. I sincerely hope that some of you will throw your hat in the ring. Unlike so many responsibilities in the academic world in which we have all chosen to live, these positions offer enormous gratification for relatively little work.

We also have a constitution in place, an executive committee, and a possibility of having a real presence at several conferences next year. Depending on how the spring unfolds, I may not be able to see you all in Fredericton for the next AGM at the STLHE conference. If I don't, I'll be quietly sending my thoughts out to you from my new office.

Whatever happens, I have enjoyed my time in the Writing Centre immensely and I have appreciated getting to know you. As a community, I believe that we have the strength and momentum to continue and thrive. And though I will now fade a little more into the background, I intend to take the post of past-president of the CWCA, and I will of course keep you posted on any other significant decisions.

Keep on keepin' on, and I'll see you down the road,

Martin

Chair of the Canadian Writing Centres Association (CWCA)

CWCA/ACCR Listserv Registration:

<http://www.sass.uottawa.ca/writing/centre>

CWCA/ACCR Website:

<http://www.usask.ca/ulc/writing/cwca>

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This edition of the CWCA / ACCR Newsletter would not have been possible without the technical assistance and support of Eva Jansen, the *Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre* Coordinator.

Book Review

Scholarly Writing Worthy of Print

By G Patrick O'Neill & Robin P. Norris, 2006, Althouse Press

Reviewed by Dr. Theresa Hyland

Every Writing Centre has a myriad of writing handbooks on its shelves for students to peruse. Mostly, they are meant for the same undergraduate audience and therefore follow the same patterns of form and content. Writers who aim to write a readable book about writing must struggle with the twin problems of audience and purpose: for whom are we writing and what does that audience need to know about this issue? O'Neill and Norris acknowledge this struggle in their introductory headings "Why this book?" and "Why write?". In the introduction to *Scholarly Writing: Worthy of Print* O'Neill and Norris cite three reasons for writing the book: (1) to help inexperienced writers get published; (2) to clarify issues that are misunderstood by all writers; (3) to model good writing (pp.1-2). The book, then, is intended to bridge the gap between writing in the academic classroom and writing for knowledgeable peers in the wider academic community. This is a laudable purpose, and some of the material covered serves this purpose well. The choice of how to approach material hinges on an understanding of who is likely to read this type of book. If the audience is undergraduates or very new graduates who wish to publish, there may be a need to lay out the basics of writing as well as instruct on how to publish that material. For writers who are about to move from writing for graduate seminars or a thesis committee to publishing for the wider academic community, however, the book oversimplifies the writing process and does not sufficiently cover those aspects of writing for publication that are different from or built upon graduate writing.

Scholarly Writing Worthy of Print is divided into two main sections. Chapters 1 through 5 deal with all the commonplaces found in most writing skills handbooks: defining scholarly writing, preparing to write; the research process and writing and revising tips. Chapters 6 to 9 deal with publishing scholarly writing and navigating through the stages of that process. This section does, I think, fulfil the needs of new writers who pick up this book because of its title.

There are two main problems with the first part of the book. First of all, this section consists of little more than lists of do's and don'ts culled from other writing handbooks. There is no discussion about which basics will help the readers revise their understanding of writing in order to get published. Moreover, the authors blur the distinction between "how to" write and "how to define" writing, and offer simplistic explanations of style guides, literature searches, and outline creation. Publishers have their own inhouse style that may or may not conform to APA, MLA or CPE style. New writers need to pay attention to each journal's preferred style. There is a discussion about how to do manual searches. Who does manual searches anymore? New writers need to distinguish between legitimate and spurious sources on the internet. New writers need advice on how to stay current with their research interests through the subscription to listservs, through conferences, or through membership in professional associations which publish journals. New writers need recommendations of books that problematize issues involved in the research process within the writer's field.¹

Apart from these problems with the content of the first part of the book, I found that the chapters on writing were not sufficiently grounded in writing theory, or references to rhetorical or linguistic traditions to provide useful insights into academic genre and writing in the disciplines. For example, the generic definition of the term "good writing" along with the list of 8 principles (pp.17-32) ignores how the various schools of rhetoric outside of the classical, Aristotelean school (e.g. neo-classical, scientific and modern pragmatics) underpin the working assumptions about form and content of writing in different disciplines. In other words, good writing in one discipline may be seen to be unclear, disorganized and based on spurious evidence in another because it is based on a different rhetorical tradition.

The second half of *Scholarly Writing* deals more successfully with the nuts and bolts of publishable writing. The definitions of the different types of journal articles are useful for inexperienced writers. The list of "good reasons" for writing a paper are also invaluable. Figure 6-1 on page 106 can aid metathinking on scholarly writing. Appendices A (a list of 420 Canadian Periodicals) and H (a list of Directories and Guides) are good resources for the unpublished writer. Useful too are the exemplars of an abstract, acknowledgements pages, submission letters, and follow-up letters that are found in this section of the book. Here again, the authors should be careful that their information is not out of date. For example, many journals accept manuscripts via email attachments today. Speaking as someone fairly new to the publishing process, I found the sections about how long to wait for a response, the reviewers checklists, and the responses to reviewer comments provide a welcome, common-sense approach to these issues. Unfortunately, the final chapter has many of the problems of the first part of the book. There is no clear distinction made between what the copyright laws are and the issues these laws raise for someone about to be published for the first time. Again, this is an issue of clarifying audience and purpose and shaping the material accordingly. Finally, the questions and answers that end the book should, perhaps have formed the backbone of the book and not its conclusion. Take, for instance, the last question of the book "What is the difference between a primary and a secondary source?" Surely, this question provides the opening for a chapter, and not the last phrase for a book about writing.

For undergraduate students who have the opportunity to publish before they graduate, or new graduate students, the book will be entirely useful. For those who are seriously embarking on academic publishing, the latter half of the book provides useful insights into this murky territory. I will keep it on my shelves for my Writing Tutors to use as a reference book but not as a "need to read" handbook on publishable writing.

1. For example, Silva and Matsuda's book *Second Language Writing Research: Perspectives on the Process of Knowledge Construction* deals with problems of research design, situated knowledge construction and data collection and analysis in 2nd language research.

Dr. Theresa Hyland is Director of Writing and Cross-cultural Services at Huron University College, which is a small liberal-arts college affiliated to the University of Western Ontario. She teaches writing classes for second-language students and for Canadian students, directs the Writing Skills Centre and helps international and exchange students adjust to a Canadian academic and social environment. Her research interests include the study of referencing strategies of novice writers and the assessment of writing proficiency in a timed environment.

A Tutor's Perspective I: Different students, Different Strategies

By Christina Archibald, Queen's University Writing Centre

During the final month of the fall term, working as a tutor at Queen's University Writing Centre, I found myself engaging in an increasing number of particularly challenging writing tutorials. While the term started with a flood of first-year students who often needed sessions that focused on the basic foundations of academic writing, the end of term presented a different challenge in the form of upper-year students' multilayered, often abstractly-worded assignments, and the associated writing problems of clarity and focus. What writing concerns are prevalent for students at all stages of their education, and how can we, as writing tutors, best understand the particular needs of both first-year and upper-year students?

Thesis development is one of the primary aims for many students attending a Writing Centre tutorial. This can sometimes be a hard goal to achieve, as the tutor is often unfamiliar with the particular subject or topic at hand. Consequently, being able to assist a student in the development of a thesis statement depends very much on successful communication between tutor and student. *Why, what* and *how*-based questions can stimulate thinking, as can a regular reflection back to the students of the ideas they are expressing. With a particularly complex assignment it can be helpful to work with the students to draw out the salient points, highlighting and discussing key words and phrases until a stage is reached where the students feel confident they understand what is being asked of them. Sometimes it can be helpful to consider a source of tension in the assignment. What, if anything, strikes the students about this topic? Are they bothered or perturbed by anything? Is there any aspect they wish to explore in more detail? It's always worth emphasizing the need for a clear thesis statement even if students have been told they do not require one. The limitations a focused thesis statement imposes on writing are often just as useful as the direction it indicates.

Next to thesis development, another central concern for students is the organization and structure of a paper. Frequently, problems in logical or coherent organization stem from either confusion regarding the assignment requirements, writing churned out with only a nebulous thesis in mind, or gaps in the student's knowledge regarding the structure of an academic essay. In cases like these, it can be helpful to check the strength of the basic foundations. There are a number of different visual representations of the basic essay structure—the oft-used hamburger analogy, for example—and often these can go far in clarifying for students where some of their problems are stemming from. The technique of reverse outlining can also be extremely helpful in assessing the structural integrity of essays, as well as being a quick and easy technique for a student to learn and utilize in any subsequent writing.

While issues such as thesis development and structural organization can arise at any time and are of concern to students across the board, sessions with first-year students and with upper-year students can often present a significantly different tutoring experience. The beginning

of term often brings a number of first-year students through the doors of the Writing Centre who are struggling to adapt to the specific demands of university-level academic writing. In addition to the intellectual demands of the assignment, including effective research and the development of a clear thesis statement, students at this stage often lack both the confidence to argue with conviction, and the knowledge of essay design that allows them to present their ideas in a clear and logical manner. It is usually easy to find out how much a student knows about the writing process—from free-writing and brainstorming, to the crafting of clear topic sentences and the inclusion of subtle transitions—and based on this assessment the tutor can decide where to start and how much information to include. Ideas and insight develop with time and experience; first year, however, is an ideal time to develop an understanding of the foundations of academic writing.

While a tutoring session with a first-year student can often produce a relationship more akin to a traditional teacher-student dynamic, with the tutor imparting knowledge and advice regarding writing techniques, sessions with upper-year students can often plunge a tutor into uncharted waters, both intellectually and emotionally. All students are in the process of developing expertise in their own field, but this can be particularly apparent with students who are in their third or fourth year, or even working on their Master's dissertation. They have been immersed in their subject and specialities for some years, and, consequently, their sense of ownership and responsibility is often greater. However, along with this increase in ownership and responsibility can come the pressure—internal or external—to produce a brilliantly conceived and executed piece of work; sometimes it can help to encourage positive, but more realistic, expectations.

At this more advanced stage, students are often contending with a great deal of knowledge, research, and investment in their subject. This background can be helpful, allowing some students to deftly incorporate a multiplicity of influences into their arguments, but it can be a stumbling block for others. With more complex topics more skillful writing is required in order to communicate ideas effectively. Sometimes students' writing abilities will not have developed at the same rate as their knowledge and thinking, and the result can be a paper with a lack of clarity and focus, as well as a lack of structural organization. It can often be helpful in this situation to spend some time thinking about the context of the course and any expected learning outcomes— as well as harking back to some pre-writing techniques— as a way of introducing some potential focus.

The impressive range of skills, experience and knowledge that students bring to their Writing Centre appointments is one of the most enjoyable aspects of being a writing tutor. You never know who might walk through your door, or what problems and concerns they may bring. Being prepared with a number of strategies and techniques can help writing tutors feel ready to rise to most challenges; however, an additional, indispensable skill for any tutor is an open-minded willingness to learn from, and adapt to, the great diversities of their students.

Christina Archibald recently moved from Scotland to Canada, and now works as a writing tutor at Queen's University, Kingston. She is also a freelance writer and copy editor.

A Tutor's Perspective II: Changing Our Thinking about Writing

By Alison McLaren, Laurier Brantford Writing Centre

Up until this year, I shared the assumption many students have that the Writing Centre on campus was a resource for people who were struggling: for those who did not know how to properly place a comma, appropriately break down their paragraphs or distinguish between *their*, *they're* and *there*. In essence, this service was of no use to me, because I was a strong, skilled writer. Or so I thought.

I have been working as a tutor at the Laurier Brantford Writing Centre for approximately two months now, but it took me all of two days to realize that my prior assumptions about the purposes and target users of writing centres could not have been more wrong. Of the students I have assisted thus far, approximately 80% of them have been what I would consider 'struggling writers'. For the purposes of this reflection, I will define a struggling writer as one who makes relatively consistent errors in the areas of both structure and form, as well as in spelling and grammar. While I would have expected the remaining 20% to be 'average writers', writing B or C level papers, this has not been the case. My time here has shown me that the individuals who use the Writing Centre range dramatically, but do not seem to fall on a continuum. I was not surprised to learn that many struggling writers use the Centre, but I was extremely surprised that a number of strong writers make use of it, while very few 'average writers' do the same.

In a sense, I feel as if I have two separate roles in the Writing Centre. Take for example Anne*, a first-year student struggling with the organization and flow of her essay. As a tutor at the Writing Centre, my role was to assist Anne by working through her paper and pointing out areas for improvement. Strategies used in this case were reading the paper out loud, encouraging her to rephrase sentences to gain a higher level of clarity, help her understand how to restructure paragraphs, and so on. We did not go into depth on any ways to make her essay excel, but rather worked to make it clear and logical.

Now, if we look at a second example, Lynn*, we see an entirely different situation. Lynn was a strong third-year writer who brought in an already revised copy of an essay. After reading only the first few sentences, I could tell that Lynn would not need the typical 'reading out loud' or 'paragraph restructuring' strategies that I commonly use. I had to look at Lynn's paper like I would look at one of my own: break it down and tear it apart, looking for every possible means of improvement. I questioned whether or not this would be a good way to deal with another person's writing (not knowing how they might take it on an emotional level), so I decided to ask her about it. I explained to Lynn that her writing was already quite strong, and that if she wanted me to, I was willing to go through it with her in this way. She agreed, and together we broke her essay down, paragraph by paragraph, sentence by sentence, with Lynn contributing to the discussion in a significant way. I felt that my role in this case was to be less of a 'tutor' and more of a facilitator; I facilitated Lynn's critiquing of her own paper.

Despite the differences in skill level, both of these individuals left the Writing Centre satisfied with the

assistance they had been given and with many changes to be made to their papers. Struggling writers come to the Writing Centre because they need help with their writing; they *know* they need help, and they know where to go to get this help. Strong writers on the other hand either lack confidence in their own abilities, or recognize that there is always room for improvement and work to constantly develop their skills. They understand that no matter how strong their writing skills are, a second set of eyes on a paper will always be beneficial. So why is it that average writers do not feel the same way, and what can we, as tutors, do to change this mentality?

Perhaps one of the reasons that average writers do not make use of writing centres is because they are achieving the grades and feedback they desire; they are coasting through, satisfied with Bs and Cs. Or, perhaps they do not see a problem with their writing, or see the Writing Centre as a remedial service. One tutor in our Writing Centre gave an example of a time when she saw this: her friend approached her for help with a paper, and when she recommended making an appointment with the Writing Centre, her friend responded with "But I'm not a bad writer... I just need help." She recognized that she needed help, but to go to the Writing Centre would, in her eyes, make her a "bad writer." Average writers seem to be more concerned with the stigma that writing centres have than struggling or strong writers are.

It would be wonderful if we could convince the entire student population that they can use our help, but how do we go about doing this? I have begun to promote the Writing Centre to friends of mine, many of whom are average writers that have now made appointments and are starting to spread the word as well. When it comes to an organization like a writing centre, word of mouth is essential. In order to get over the idea that these centres are havens for struggling students, we must inform people that this is not always the case, and that there is something for each and every writer to gain from booking an appointment with a tutor.

Convincing other students that it would be beneficial for them to use the Writing Centre also comes down to the idea that *you cannot change the world before you first change yourself*. As tutors, we are not trying to change the world *per se*, but the principle still works. I changed the way I think about writing centres, and if tutors serve as an example to show that we can use assistance with our writing, it is hopeful that slowly but surely, the notion that writing centres can help all students, even the average writer, will begin take hold on our campus.

**Names have been changed for confidentiality purposes*

Alison McLaren will be graduating from Wilfrid Laurier University/Nipissing University's Concurrent Education program in April 2009 with a double major in Contemporary Studies and English and a minor in Psychology. She has been working for the Laurier Brantford Writing Centre and Study Skills Resource Centre for six months now, and describes it as an excellent experience. After graduation she intends to pursue a career either working in a University setting such as a Writing Centre, or teaching English and music in a public school.

Writing into India: Setting up the first Writing Centre in the country

By Martin Holock, University of Ottawa

On Friday, June 27, 2008, we step off of our fifteen-hour flight in Mumbai, my boss and I, and immediately feel the weight of our endeavour. It is not only the heat and thickness of the air, but the realization that we have finally arrived to start work on Monday, in a country and an educational system that neither of us have ever been exposed to. And this after months of strenuous preparation, all while trying to keep the writing centre at home running as close to normally as possible. Just last week I was in Windsor, presiding over the Canadian Writing Centre Association's annual meeting as its current president.

The story really starts on May 2007, when Marie-Lise Blain, who is the manager at the University of Ottawa's Academic Writing Help Centre where I work as Coordinator, received an email from Ashoke Dange at a college in India asking if we might be willing to share our online resources for their new student academic support service. In her usual style, she replied saying of course they could use them, as long as they acknowledged their source. A year later, she received another message saying they had been trying to get a writing centre going, but something seemed to not be working. Would she like to come and show them how it was done? They would pay for her flight and accommodations.

After a few squeals of disbelief, she accepts the offer, and asks if they could also use the services of her assistant, who has expertise in the technical side of operations, namely database maintenance and the monitoring of student progress, which is one of the priorities named in that invitation email. They agree, which is how I ended up being included on the voyage.

Three months later, we're here. We spend one night in the big city before heading down to Goa, where the college we'll be working in is situated. We think we're stronger than jet lag, but by Sunday afternoon, we're both nestled in for long naps in our extravagant hotel rooms, trying to adjust to the 9.5 hour time change and 9.5 degree climate change. Between the monsoon rains, Goa is a sweaty place at the end of June.

On Monday we're off to campus for the first time to start work. Turns out it's a gorgeous college of 800 students not

far from the main street of Margao, but a 45-minute drive through wet, green rice fields from our hotel. The Smt. Parvatibai Chowgule College of Arts and Science is just one of the many initiatives of the Chowgule (pronounced Chow-goo-lay) family, starting with iron ore mining, leading into shipping, car dealerships, real estate and ultimately, education.



Marie-Lise Blain in front of the library at Chowgule College

Determined to give their students the advantage in everything they do, the college offers a wide array of extra-curricular programs to supplement the high-quality, government-approved curriculum. The required degree courses in English literature, geography, botany, zoology, and many more, fill the days from Monday to Saturday and run from about 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. In the afternoon, students can choose from certificate courses in travel and tourism, journalism, surveying, environment auditing, and Portuguese, among others, or take advantage of the facilities at the brand new sports centre, which boasts the best football

(that's soccer for you North Americans) field in South Asia and a fitness room that rivals ours back home at uOttawa.

Rounding out campus life, strange to the eyes of foreigners like us, are the stray dogs and migrant labourer families that wander unacknowledged. Children in dirty clothes help their parents move dirt and assemble interlock brick, while teenage boys weld handrails onto the new steps in front of the library, where the writing centre is situated. It's a cliché, but the strange mix of new and old that permeates the entire country is in plain evidence here: every building is outfitted with Wi-Fi, but when we ask to see samples of student writing on our first day, exams and reports arrive wrapped in manila paper and tied with burlap string.

We get the grand tour of the college and its many classrooms, labs and computer centres. Each of the 5 buildings is painted in its own bright colour, one of the ways the school's business backer has integrated students directly into campus management: he let them choose the colours. As a result, the edifices burst with fruity life – green, red, orange and yellow explode all over. The library is adorned with a magnificent mural, a brilliant blue background with multicolour figures surrounded by birds, flowers and trees. A nearby statue scene recreates the tradition of guru-style teaching, with

Holock... Writing into India (continued)

a large character sitting in the grass surrounded by eager listeners.

On the second day, we are escorted directly to the boardroom to meet the teachers. Fifteen faces stare up at us as we enter the room, waiting for us to tell them all about their new writing centre and how their students will magically transform into fluent communicators, hopefully overnight. Over the next couple hours of discussion, they begin to see how the centre will work, and how it's just not going to be quite as simple as they initially hoped.

Thankfully, the staff at Chowgule College is very dedicated open to innovation and new approaches, and unlike the experience of many North American writing centres, they are more than willing to do their best to make this new initiative work from the start. One cynical math teacher has his doubts, but the rest are receptive, even excited.

Marie-Lise and I spend the rest of the week putting together a training package for the teachers, who will be staffing the writing centre along with a few outstanding students, emailing home and to the office (apparently life doesn't stop when you're away...who knew?) and preparing to meet students by getting familiar with their writing through the samples of exams and reports. The training is closely based on our own tutor training from last September, with obvious adjustments to the Goan context.

Studying the writing, two potential problems become apparent. The first is that students at the college don't have assignments of the type we're used to working on at the university at home. The second is that Indian English is a nearly-unwieldy beast of its own, a *mélange* of British history, American influence and homegrown hybridism.

The first challenge would be relatively simple to overcome: students who are initially "voluntold" to go to the writing centre will write a short piece of their own, in any style they chose. The second is a little more difficult: there is no Indian English dictionary that could compare with the Canadian Oxford, despite the regular usage of Indian-only terms like *lakh* and *crore* (numerical terms meaning one hundred thousand and ten million respectively) and the persistence of Victorian constructions, for example, the suffix *-wise*, as in "Passengers are asked to board the plane row-wise," meaning "by row" (which will be used at the Mumbai airport while I wait for my flight home). They are also partial to terms like *thus*, *hereabouts*, *thereof* and *whereafter*. Grammar is another complication, as they often skip or misuse articles (*a* and *the*) and comma use seems almost random, both problems that are apparent even in national newspapers.

An aside: this is carried over everywhere, and signage is often more wordy and complicated than we're used to. Instead of a simple "Caution: Work Overhead" a sign will say something like "The pedestrians, are asked to be careful whilst walking through this area as repairs are currently undertaking on the floors above." "Don't pick the flowers" becomes "Visitors are requested not to pluck the foliage."

Many stop signs include the obvious follow-up directive "...and proceed." And then there is the frightening warning at the train station: "Do not accept eatables, or drinkables from any stranger. It may contain poison and you may loose your money camera or valuables."

When I say that students are "voluntold" to come to the writing centre, it's because many of them are eager to come, either because they knew their English needed improvement, or they are very high performers who want to excel even further. Their schedules, though, are so packed with lectures (around twenty-five hours a week), activities and homework, that the appointments are made for them by their teachers who sometimes have to excuse them from class to attend.

In the second week we start meeting students. At first, they are a little shy and awkward, which is understandable as individual instruction and error identification on their behalf is an entirely new pedagogical model. Having their teachers there to observe the new method added to the strangeness, but in general, the students reply favourably. The weak performers are able to get down to the specific issues that, with improvement, will enable them to become better communicators. Stronger students find ways to become stronger, and the strongest are very pleasantly surprised when the director turns the tables on them and asks if they would like to become peer tutors.

Much of what we work on is predictable, to a degree. Although their education is entirely in English, much of the students' writing displays typical second-language issues. That's because English is not the first language of either the students or the teachers, as many of them use Konkani, or another Indian language, with family or friends, and most Indian popular culture, like Bollywood films and pop music, is in Hindi.

This, Ashoke explains to us, is why he chose us to come and work with them on this project. We had been wondering why the college had not contacted any other writing centre and invited them to come. After all, they could have had pretty much anyone they wanted, so why not pioneers like Indiana's Purdue University or the University of Toronto with its 14 separate writing centres?

Turns out the reasons are quite logical. Most importantly to them, we work in a bilingual writing centre, with an array of second-language experience, not only with international students learning the academic standards, but, more in line with the context at Chowgule, with students working in both official languages of their home country, namely French and English in Canada.

So working with student writing, though it contains a smattering of "Hinglish" (Hindi + English), is no different in the end than working with students at our own centre. In a few cases, it was just a matter of reviewing the rules for comma and article use and little else. In others, we had to begin with the logical structure of ideas, before whittling down to the sentences and grammatical issues. One young man had put together a very well-organized essay on economic issues and relevant solutions, despite being a

Holock... Writing into India (continued)

science student. His ideas were wonderful, but his expression needed more than a little tweaking.

Ultimately, they all appreciate the praise and positive feedback that comes in any appointment, as well as the deeper exploration of the particular issues that need work. They all understand the need for clear communication, and are eager to achieve the success that is possible with writing centre work. They, like the teachers, quickly realize this is not a quick-fix method, but after most students come a couple times, they are relieved to see that the issues we identify in the first appointment are already changing for the better by the second, due entirely to their own efforts. They could do it, and they would.

Midway through my time in Goa, we are asked to participate in the inauguration of the writing centre, and Marie-Lise is invited to say a few words. She writes the speech and I worked with her on editing it in the evenings leading up to the event. We have no real idea what to expect, which makes the task a little strange for her, but we do our best.

On the day of the event, we walk into the auditorium and were asked to sit at the head of the room, the only foreign faces in a row with three college officials and one other honoured guest, the head of the English department at the University of Goa. Because the organizers want to ensure that both the ceremony and the writing centre are launched on an auspicious note, the proceedings open with a group of students beatifically singing Hindu prayers, hands clasped and eyes closed. If the cultural differences weren't obvious enough yet, they certainly are now.

After the principal's introductory remarks, the financial manager of the college talks about the changing tide in the employment market where communication skills are becoming more important than technical. He claims to do more than a hundred interviews a year as part of the Chowgule group, and he has stopped looking at resumé's – now he just asks candidates to talk about themselves and their experience. If they can't communicate, they are shown the door.

The English professor, who has clearly studied rhetoric and oratory as he has quite the flamboyant

style, discusses the importance of English as the lingua franca of the modern business world. He has recently read in the Washington Post that "American children in the fifties and sixties were told to eat all of their dinner because people in China were starving. Today, students are told to do well at their studies because their future jobs may be taken by Indians," which he takes as proof-positive that India is becoming a global player. Indians had better master the English language, despite the reluctance in the face of their colonialist past, if they want to take part in the brave new world.



From left to right: Our host, Ashoke Dange, Martin Holock (the author), and College Principal R. V. Gaonkar in the newly-inaugurated writing centre.

Marie-Lise speaks more specifically about the writing centre. Letting the students know that this is a unique, ground breaking opportunity for them, as it is the first writing centre in India, is an eye-opener. I can see some students perk up and start paying attention. The journalist from the India Times Goa edition, who is also involved in educational counselling, is visibly impressed (she later comes by the centre to interview Marie-Lise and I). Marie-Lise goes on to cover a few of the points of the other speakers, especially about good communication as the key to future employment, and then puts the onus on the students. She tells them that although the centre would be staffed with strong instructors, it is the students' own efforts that would lead to their

success, and, in turn, that of the centre.

To mark the occasion, all of us in the "official" panel are asked to gather to the side at the front of the room. We are handed a small oil lamp that we each use to light one arm of a larger Hindu lamp to commemorate the intellectual illumination that the centre will bring to the college and its students. Photos have since been posted (*continued from page 10*) on the homepage of the college's website (www.chowgules.ac.in/), and it's a disembodied, schizophrenic experience looking at them from my desk when I return. It was only three weeks ago, but it seems like another planet in another age.

I left at the end of the second week to explore some of South India on my own, and Marie-Lise stays for another week and a half to meet students and supervise the instructors as they take on their new roles in the writing centre. It's not a simple task to change the way a college looks at education, and the writing centre model is light years away from traditional instructor-led, passive education. But in a rapidly-modernizing country like India, it's incredible that this small college is leading the way ahead of much larger universities in much larger cities.

Campus Saint-Jean's Bilingual Writing Centre

A Portal to Multiple Cultures and Cosmopolitanism Citizenship

By Sheena Wilson, University of Alberta

Introduction

Campus Saint-Jean (CSJ), the University of Alberta's French faculty and campus, has a mandate to promote French language and culture in Alberta, while assuring that as a French campus at a leading English-Canadian institution it graduates students proficient in both official languages. The goal to train students in their discipline(s) as well as in spoken and written English and French, within the same four-year time-frame required to complete a regular degree program that does not include language training, demands dedication from students and a commitment of resources at the institutional level. In an effort to provide sufficient support to students, CSJ introduced a student resource centre in 2006 called *La Centrale: le centre d'appui à la réussite des étudiants*. The name makes allusion to Grand Central Station in New York—which has historically been a site of arrival and diffusion of cultures—and this is not far from the reality, since our small campus offers peer-guided support in not only French and English, but also in chemistry, physics, biology, economics, psychology, math, and technology. La Centrale is a reference point for all students and has become a hub where the various disciplines intersect.

The Historically Francophone Writing Center Becomes Bilingual

For over 20 years¹ CSJ (formerly known as Faculté Saint-Jean or FSJ) has run a French writing centre, to offer support to all students,² but most specifically FSL (French as a second language) students. By 2006, 20-odd years after the original French writing centre was opened, and two years after a new administration had come to Campus Saint-Jean, La Centrale opened its doors. This new CSJ administration, in collaboration with the University of Alberta's Provost's Office, saw Campus Saint-Jean's future potential as a bilingual institute. La Centrale, as part of that vision, is a more broadly focused student resource centre, which includes language services in both official languages. This was a significant shift from the historical vision of the writing center and the campus as locations designated as French-only sites of exchange. Realities of the current social climate dictate that CSJ graduates must be able to speak sufficient English to be employable after graduation, especially since our students are graduating with a University of Alberta degree. Whether the degree is issued from the French campus or not, there is an expectation from other academic institutions, society at large and future employers that a U of A degree indicates English proficiency.

Given its location as a French campus in a now Anglophone region of Canada³ and given that graduates—whether Francophile or Francophone—typically seek employment in Alberta or in the neighboring provinces in predominantly Anglophone employment-sectors, the rationale behind promoting CSJ as a bilingual institution is fundamentally pragmatic if CSJ is looking to serve the best

interests of its students. However, our local students come to CSJ from two very different educational backgrounds: French-immersion and Francophone schools. French-immersion education was established in order to promote bilingualism, as the ability to communicate in both official languages provides a space of negotiation beyond the two solitudes. Francophone education, on the other hand, was achieved through a long-fought battle for the recognition of minority language rights in the province of Alberta; Francophone education is now governed through the Francophone school boards, which have as their objective to maintain and promote French language and culture.

These historical antecedents are now represented in CSJ's student body, which reflects Canadian population dynamics. Therefore, the promotion of academic English (language and writing) at the campus through the writing centre, in an English province, at a historically French institution struggling to preserve minority culture(s) through ethnolinguistic vigor, has yet to overcome historical cultural tensions. While acquiring proficiency and even mastery of English is arguably necessary to prepare students for their future careers, it is perceived by certain groups with a specific critical approach as undermining French education in Alberta. Correctly or incorrectly, the assumption is that mastery of English can only be achieved at the detriment of Francophone education. Nevertheless, the realities of the looming job market, combined with increasing numbers of immersion students and an influx of immigrant Francophones from either France⁴ or former French/French-speaking⁵ colonies further complicate this historical perspective in relationship to the practicality of being able to function in both official languages in a bilingual country. This background necessarily leads to specific questions. Who are our writing centre constituents? If they are not Franco-Albertan or Quebecois, why do these particular histories carry such weight and authority? Whose purpose and politics are being served?

CSJ's Various Constituencies:

The constituencies of students at CSJ are not homogeneously Franco-Albertan⁶ or Quebecois. A significant number of CSJ students, ranging from 50% up to 65% over the last eight years, are French immersion students⁷. Of the remaining percent, a number of students are Franco-Albertan, educated in the Alberta Francophone school system. Typically, their identities are grounded in their allegiances to French language and culture(s). Some of these students, who often socialize together, feel affronted at both a personal and political level by the accented French of immersion students and other traces of Anglophone presence and influence in their milieu.

Another percentage of the students are Quebecois transplants to the province, either because their parents relocated here for work when they were still school-age or they came here as a result of their own choices. These students have variable English language skills dependent on what age they were when they moved to Alberta, whether they had a certain level of English proficiency before arriving, how many years they have lived in the province, whether they ever

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attended school in Alberta or worked in an Anglophone environment, and other variable linguistic experiences. All of these experiences constitute multiple identities.

Yet another contingent of students is international, coming predominantly from either France or former French-speaking colonies. Their relationships to the French language and French/French-Canadian culture(s) are entirely different based on international histories and relationships. Students from France are usually at CSJ on exchange programs, perhaps working as student tutors in the writing centre, while hoping to learn some English through immersion in the wider Anglophone community. This can present a challenge when they live near the CSJ campus in the Bonnie Doon neighborhood where many residents are Francophone: here, they often make friends who speak French, they are able to accomplish most tasks in French at local business and they are able to access most services (doctors, dentists, etc.) in French, as well.

French students (from France), if they stay for an extended period of time, have a number of social routes to take: they can socialize within a small network of students with similar backgrounds, they can immerse themselves in the Francophone community and take on partially or wholeheartedly the cause of Franco-Albertans and French Canadians concerned with preserving and promoting French language and culture outside Quebec, or they can become involved with other ethno-cultural groups (Francophone or not), or finally, they can immerse themselves in the Anglophone community and commit themselves to learning English.

The relationships of other international Francophone immigrant students vary from person to person, depending on their politics and the country and national history that they come from. International CSJ students often come from former French colonies and many are allophones. French is not necessarily their maternal language, but an official language in their countries of origin. The French language and associated European cultures have historically been imposed on them through colonialism; therefore, some students maintain a critical stance toward French language and French culture(s). They may have chosen to attend CSJ for a number of different reasons, including but not limited to the fact that they need to study in French since it is the language in which they were primarily educated and thus the language in which they have the greatest proficiency. Many, however, have chosen to study at CSJ in the hopes of learning and mastering English in order to improve their employment opportunities. Furthermore, some students study at CSJ because they prefer to live in Western Canada, since living as a minority-Francophone in Quebec culture comes with its own set of complexities that reflect on the students' displacement.

The Writing Centre and its Relationships to these Diverse Constituencies

CSJ is a small community. Its size thus allows the

writing tutors/coaches at La Centrale—called *moniteurs* and *monitrices*—the added benefit of being able to understand where the variable needs of the diverse student constituencies intersect and diverge. Where each student fits into the various CSJ student constituencies is crucial to understanding how peer-tutors and writing centre staff can guide them. Furthermore, the writing center staff tries to remain cognizant of the various faculty constituencies that exist as counterparts to the student body. Students, especially first and second year students, struggle to adjust to university writing standards; further complicating their situation, they are faced with a variety of educational-cultural expectations that vary from discipline to discipline and instructor to instructor, depending on which constituency/ies a particular faculty member belongs to. Franco-Albertan, Quebecois, European and other international professors all come from different national and/or educational cultures and from different disciplinary cultures (each with its own writing culture) and therefore each professor's expectations for student writing differ.

Beyond navigating the diverse educational cultures in the classroom, almost all students face language hurdles. It is not always the case that students come to CSJ with a full proficiency in both languages, a reality that the writing centre staff faces on a daily basis. Therefore, some students come to the centre with lower/later-order and intermediate-order concerns in French and higher-order concerns in English; for others the opposite is true. In terms of French writing guidance, an Anglophone-French-immersion-educated student, a Franco-Albertan, a Quebecois, and an international student will all come to the writing centre for French peer-tutoring with different linguistic abilities and writing help needs. In English, those same students will also have varying needs; however, what all CSJ students share is a general lack of writing experience in English, due to the fact that almost all CSJ student constituencies complete their secondary education in French.

Writing in English at a French Campus/Faculty: Low, Intermediate and Higher-Order Concerns

Aside from either an English Language Arts (L.A.) course or an English Second Language (ESL) course, students will have limited experience writing in English in the various disciplines and employing a broad spectrum of English disciplinary language and style. Students often transpose French writing expectations into their English writing assignments. This does not serve them well. The most obvious outcomes are low/later-order concerns about French-informed usages of punctuation, citation styles, capitalization rules and other concerns, in English writing, that can be dealt with at a technical/technological level using a handbook or computer program. Then, there are concerns that deal with false cognates, double-entendre, idiomatic usages of language, and irony as a culturally embedded code, intermediate-order concerns not always addressed in unilingual writing-studies theories that frequently categorize writing issues into high-level and low-level concerns. This intermediate stage is a linguistically formative phase, since it

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combines both the technical and the cross-cultural nuancing of language. Then, there are higher-order concerns often caused by a lack of understanding about the different expectations between a French “dissertation” and an English essay/ research paper. When French “dissertation” processes are applied to English essay writing, the students’ efforts are lost in translation.

At La Centrale, we first encourage an engagement with higher-order concerns that allows, through discussion and dialogue between the students and moniteurs/trices, for a verification of contexts: From what cultural context is the student approaching the assignment? From what cultural and/or disciplinary context is the instructor assigning the written work? How can these two contexts be bridged by the transitional context provided at La Centrale by moniteurs/trices aware of the various complexities informing and forming the educational process? In approaching each piece of writing through a discussion about the assignment, peer-tutors/coaches can deal with higher-order concerns that position students to understand issues of voice, audience, and reception with a cultural sensitivity that allow them to best communicate their ideas and intentions through writing and to achieve greater academic success.

Apprenticeships in Cross-cultural Negotiations Toward Cosmopolitan Citizenship

A writing centre must respond to practical, material demands, given the many different sources of cultural origins of a diverse student population. The students are the experts on their experience and it is the responsibility of writing centre staff to listen to the observations that students make about their classroom experiences. How that translates into practice at the writing centre is in our ability to respond in ever more sophisticated ways to the students who come to us for guidance. At CSJ we can work with professors to understand their expectations, but it is not the job of writing center coaches and tutors to impose theoretical abstractions and predetermined results on students or instructors: there is no one correct approach, but through collaboration comes communication and learning.

At Campus Saint-Jean, students receive not only an education in their chosen discipline(s), as well as in English and in French, but also in a multiplicity of cultural expectations and experiences that, of course, reflect on the broader cultures from which these expectations derive. In this way, CSJ students have a chance to develop cross-cultural communication skills that will enable them to malleably and fluidly navigate the global world as represented in Canada. CSJ becomes a successful site for these cross-cultural negotiations, because of the campus’s displacement away from tensions that reside at the political fulcrum of Canada. Within this context, the writing centre at La Centrale, therefore, becomes a space for cultural mediations that

must occur when bilingualism is put into practice by the student body. Furthermore, facilitating English language and writing at what has historically been a French writing centre is not a cultural imposition but rather a horizontal engagement that can help better nuance student experiences and nurture cultural communication and understanding. At CSJ and to some degree at those universities with a diverse cultural demographic, the writing centre—as the hub where disciplines intersect—is also the intersection of multiple cultures and thereby an apprenticeship toward cosmopolitanism citizenship.

Notes

1. The institutional memory does not go back as far as the writing centre. Therefore, the details of its inception are uncertain.
2. CAF (Centre d’aide en français) was established in the late eighties and it was originally run by a team of dedicated sessionals who volunteered their time to help students. Later, in approximately 1991, the centre began receiving institutional funds to hire tutors. In 2001, Normand Fortin resituated the centre, moving CAF out of its theoretical and physical position, as a “proofreading-shop-in-the-basement,” to a more central location on the campus and renamed it as CCOÉ: Le Centre de la communication orale et écrite (North 444). No longer a remedial language/writing centre, in its new incarnation CCOÉ placed greater emphasis on providing academic-level support for writing and oral expression. Then, in 2006 La Centrale: le centre d’appui à la réussite des étudiants opened. The centre now offers help in both English and French as well as group workshops in a number of other disciplines.
3. French was the first European language spoken in Alberta.
4. In 2008-09, CSJ also has one student from Belgium.
5. In 2008-09 we have students who list Canada as his/her country of origin but who list his/her maternal language as Kinyarwanda, Kirundi and Swahili: languages of Burundi and Rwanda. These countries are part of la Francophonie due to their historical relationships with Belgium.
6. As the only Francophone post-secondary institution in western Canada, CSJ attracts students from other provinces, as well. In 2008, in addition to students from Quebec, we welcomed students from British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and the Northwest Territories. Some were Francophones. The majority of these students were French-speaking immersion students. For the purpose of this investigation, students from the other Canadian provinces are grouped with their linguistic peers. For example, the one Franco-Manitoban students and the six Francophone students from New Brunswick will be considered as part of the Franco-Albertan contingent. The immersion students from B.C and elsewhere will be considered as part of the French-immersion population.
7. These statistics represent the student body divided according to maternal language. (Please note that these

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(7. continued) statistics do not include students in joint programs registered in other faculties such as Nursing or Business.) Students educated in the French immersion school system are typically represented by those students with English as a first language. Of course, there are exceptions. Occasionally, a Canadian student with French as a first language will be educated in the French immersion school system as opposed to the Francophone school system, and sometimes French immersion students will speak another first language, other than English, at home. Furthermore, sometimes a student lists French as their maternal language because it is the official language in their country of origin. However, the percentage of students with English as a mother-tongue closely represents the percentage of immersion students on the campus in any given year. Below, I have provided the campus statistics starting in 2001-02, since this was the year that CCOÉ first opened.

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	FRENCH	ENGLISH	OTHER	NON DECLARED	TOTAL
2001-02	205 (44.9%)	225 (49.2%)	23 (5.3%)	4 (0.9%)	457
2002-03	182 (37.6%)	272 (56.1%)	29 (6%)	1 (0.2%)	484
2003-04	180 (36.5%)	288 (58.4%)	24 (4.9%)	1 (0.2 %)	493
2004-05	167 (30.4%)	356 (64.7%)	22 (4%)	5 (0.9%)	550
2005-06	177 (29.6%)	375 (62.7%)	36 (5.8%)	10 (1.6%)	596
2006-07	211 (32.7%)	391 (60.6%)	39 (6.0%)	4 (0.6%)	645
2007-08	200 (32.5%)	372 (60.4%)	39 (6.3%)	4 (0.6%)	615
2008-09	201 (35.5%)	326 (57.5%)	39 (6.8%)	0	566

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Professional Organizations

The following organizations may be of interest to those of us working in or with writing centres:

CASLL (aka Inkshed)

The Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning (CASLL) is also known as "Inkshed" which is, according to its website, "the name of the annual working conference which has been held in various locations across Canada every year since 1984, and which gave rise to the organization." For more information or to join the listerv, visit <http://www.stthomasu.ca/inkshed/>

The International Writing Centers Association

According to its website, the International Writing Centers Association is "a [National Council of Teachers of English](http://www.ncte.org) (http://www.ncte.org) affiliate founded in 1983 [which] fosters the development of writing center directors, tutors, and staff by sponsoring meetings, publications, and other professional activities; by encouraging scholarship connected to writing center-related fields; and by providing an international forum for writing center concerns."

For more information, visit <http://www.writingcenters.org/>

Conference Announcements

CCCC Annual Convention

March 11-14, 2009

San Francisco, California

According to its website, "CCCC sponsors a convention every spring where more than 3,000 higher education faculty from across the nation come to converse, share, network, and learn about issues that influence the scholarship and teaching of composition."

"The program sessions cover such topics as the composing process; grading and assessment; issues of gender, race, and class; the use of contingent, adjunct, and part-time faculty; the tenure debate; intellectual property; and the way technologies are reshaping the teaching of rhetoric and composition - in other words, all aspects of the profession."

The theme of this year's conference is "Making Waves."

To register or for more information visit <http://www.ncte.org/cccc/conv>.

CASDW at Congress 2009

May 24-26, 2009

Carleton University (Ottawa, ON)

CASDW/ACR will hold its annual conference in conjunction with the 2009 Congress of the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences. The theme of the conference this year is "The Territoire/Places of Writing Studies in Higher Education: Canadian and International Perspectives."

According to its website, the "Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing" (CASDW) is a bilingual scholarly association dedicated to advancing the study and teaching of writing in academic and non-academic settings—higher education, business, government, and nonprofit organizations. Established originally as the Canadian Association of Teachers of Technical Writing in 1982, CASDW is a member of the [Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences \(CFHSS\)](#). As a CFHSS member, CASDW regularly organizes scholarly conferences in conjunction with the CFHSS sponsored Congress."

To register or for more information, visit http://cattw-acprts.mcgill.ca/en/about_casdw.htm

STLHE 2009: Between the Tides

June 16-20, 2009

University of New Brunswick (Fredericton, NB)

CWCA/ACCR will be meeting at the annual Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) conference. STLHE is a national association of academics interested in the improvement of teaching and learning in higher education. Its members comprise faculty and teaching and learning resource professionals from institutions of post-secondary education across Canada and beyond.

This year's conference, **Between the Tides**, will explore various tensions and debates that pull instructors and faculty in different directions. Information regarding CWCA/ACCR events at STLHE will be distributed through the listserv.

Registration for STLHE 2009 will be available online from February 10, 2009 through June 10, 2009.

To register or for more information, visit <http://www.mcmaster.ca/stlhe/>

Fourth Annual Learning Commons Conference: Open Access Learning

June 11-13, 2009

University of Saskatchewan (Saskatoon, SK)

The Fourth Annual Canadian Learning Commons Conference, "Open Access Learning," will be hosted by the University of Saskatchewan through the collaborative partnership of the University Learning Centre, University Library, Information Technology Services and Disability Services for Students.

Following on successful conferences in Guelph, Vancouver and Fredericton, the fourth Canadian Learning Commons Conference welcomes participants who are involved in planning, creating, developing, and operating a Learning Commons. As a place for learning, collaboration, research, technology, and academic help, the Learning Commons is central to enhancing the learning experience in any university. The theme of this year's conference is "Open Access Learning", a timely and important topic for anyone whose focus is on library, learner support, faculty development, technology, or disability services.

To register, visit <http://www.usask.ca/learningcommons/conference.php>

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