

Student Learning Commons
ANNUAL REPORT 2011/2012

By Donna McGee Thompson (Head, SLC)

In 2011-2012 the Student Learning Commons celebrated its fifth year of delivering consultations, workshops, and online resources to support SFU undergraduate and graduate students' academic writing, communication, and learning skills. The year was marked by a steady demand for services that are tailored to the unique needs of individual students (for example, see Read-Ahead consultations and English Conversation Partner program). The demand also remained strong for workshops developed for a particular course, discipline, or program (see the Academic Enhancement Program, FLCs), while the attendance for more generic services levelled off (for example, see Open Workshops).

1. TEACHING & LEARNING; RESEARCH SERVICES SUPPORT

Consultations

The SLC delivered 3272 one-on-one **consultations** in 2011-12, a 9% increase over 2011-12. Table 1 shows the distribution by consultation focus, level of study, and campus. Consistent with previous years, the most highly sought area of focus by far was for help in Writing (3083; 94.2%) followed by Learning (110; 3.3%) and the newly added Speaking (79; 2.5%).

Included in the figures for both Writing and Graduate Students is the 57 **Read-Ahead** consultations delivered. The Read Ahead service provides intensive and extended support for graduate students writing theses, projects or any piece of writing with a longer deadline. Graduate students using this service submit the piece of writing they wish to discuss prior to their first appointment for pre-review by our Writing Services Coordinator, Renee McCallum, or one of our carefully selected **Graduate Peer Writing Facilitators**.

Table 1. Consultations by focus, level of study, campus. April 2011 - March 2012.
N = 3272

	Writing	Learning	Speaking	Undergraduate	Graduate	Read-ahead
Burnaby	2723	98	75	2679	217	31
Surrey	240	4	4	209	39	24
Vancouver	120	8	0	109	19	2
	3083	110	79	2997	275	57
%	94.2%	3.3%	2.5%	92%	8%	

Open Workshops

The SLC offered 127 open workshops on such topics as Creating an Effective Study Schedule, Academic Integrity, and Top 10 Things to Know about University Writing. Over the year 957 students attended SLC open workshops. Table 3 below gives the workshop breakdown by campus.

Several of these workshops were tailored to graduate students, offered through the new Research Commons, sometimes co-facilitated with Librarians. Topics included *Writing and Researching Your Literature Review*, and *Time Management for Graduate Students*.

Integrated Workshops

The SLC answered 106 requests to deliver workshops tailored to specific courses, disciplines, or programs within class time, reaching 3180 students. Many of these workshops were delivered by Writing Services Coordinator, Renee McCallum, on writing topics such as Critical Reading for Critical Writing in Molecular Biology and Biochemistry, Evaluating Sources for Writing in Business Writing, and Top Things to Know about Writing in Communications.

Dal Sohal, Tim Mossman, and Renee McCallum also delivered integrated workshops at SFU Vancouver, as did Cynthia Wright at SFU Surrey for such programs as FLCs (pronounced “flicks”) and Tech Teams.

Donna McGee Thompson continued to collaborate with Dr. Diana Cukierman, Senior Lecturer Computing Science, for the sixth year, co-coordinating and co-delivering the **Academic Enhancement Program** which integrates workshops and other activities into core first-year Computing Science. Plans began to expand the AEP to Engineering Science in 2012-13.

Table 2. Workshops and orientations by campus. Total = 280

	Open workshops	Integrated workshops	Orientations
Burnaby	79	71	20
Surrey	20	30	25
Vancouver	28	5	2
	127	106	47

English as an Additional Language (EAL) Services

The ***English Conversation Partner*** program enjoyed a second highly successful year, receiving increasing demand beyond its capacity. The ECP offers students for whom English is an additional language (EAL) one-to-one conversation partner meetings with a trained volunteer EAL Peer every week for one semester to improve oral fluency, build confidence, and make connections to the SFU community. Over the year 27 EAL Peer Educators were paired with 1 or 2 students each, serving a total of 78 students. At the end of the year, there were 100 students waiting on a list to be matched with a Partner in upcoming semesters.

EAL Peers also delivered the ***English Conversation Group (ECG)*** twice weekly on the Burnaby campus and once weekly on the Surrey campus throughout the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 semesters, and once per week at Burnaby in the Summer 2011 term, totalling 594 visits.

Starting mid-Spring 2012, the SLC piloted ***Speaking Consultations***, bookable single appointments with an EAL Peer to improve spoken English. 79 speaking consultations were held from February to March 2012.

“[The Peer] cares a lot about how she can ...help me to improve... I really enjoyed the talk every week. She...took notes on what mistakes I made during the conversation and taught me how to use a word in an appropriate way.”

Tim Mossman, SLC EAL Coordinator, offered 30 individual ***English Language Learning Plans***. These 50-minute student consultations include a written and oral assessment, techniques and strategies for improving English, and recommended resources.

2. STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Peer Education

27 ***EAL (English as an Additional Language) Peers*** and 34 ***Learning and Writing Peers*** served as Peer Educators for between one and three semesters. Ruth Silverman, Learning Services Coordinator, was the primary training-coordinator and ongoing supervisor for the Learning & Writing Peers at Burnaby, and Tim Mossman, EAL Coordinator, provided these supports for EAL Peers. Peers at SFU Surrey were supervised by Cynthia Wright, SLC Surrey Coordinator.

Peer Education is designed to be a professional development opportunity for the students who volunteer in these roles. Not only do they receive in-depth and ongoing training on topics relevant to their responsibilities, but they also receive support for the development of Core Competencies, personalized goals on a professional skill or personal area of development such as public speaking or project management. Support for Core Competency development is offered by ***Peer Coaches***, experienced Peers who advance with training into this role. 4 EAL and 5 Learning & Writing Peers assumed the coaching role this year.

I just thought I would email you to let you know I was accepted to UBC teacher's college for the fall. Thank you so much for your guidance and reference, it has really made a difference in my life just as you have over the past few years.

To keep you updated, I've been accepted into UBC Medicine for this fall... Thank you for facilitating such a fantastic volunteer experience! I'm confident the skills I gained through consultations helped me at the interview. :)

Back on Track Program

The Student Learning Commons continued to be one of the major partners in the SFU Back on Track program. The three-semester program offers student who have been required to withdraw from the University a second chance to achieve academic success in an environment offering a high level of support and accountability. Table 2 provides an overview of SLC-BOT activities.

The SLC BOT team delivered 895 **Learning Plan** consultations in 2011-12. Learning Plans are one-hour long, one-on-one meetings with students entering the Back on Track program that identify the particular challenges and relevant strategies and resources for the individual student. **Graduate Peer Learning Facilitators** delivered the majority of these consultations with Learning Services Coordinators at Surrey and Burnaby also participating as needed. Coordinators were also responsible for training new Graduate Facilitators coming into this role and for offering ongoing support.

Graduate Peer Learning Facilitators also delivered 34 **Getting Started** sessions. These sessions are for groups of approximately 24 students each and include group discussion of relevant topics and facilitation of two self-assessments.

SLC Learning Coordinators at Burnaby and Surrey co-instructed, with colleagues from Health and Counselling Services, a total of 29 **BOT 120** courses, and 11 **BOT 140** courses. These 12-week courses guide students through a series of topics and self-management strategies associated with student success.

Table 3. SLC Back on Track Activities 2011-12						
			BOT 120		BOT 140	
	Learning Plans	Getting Started	Sections	Student Count	Sections	Student Count
Summer 2011	376	14	6	160	3	62
Fall 2011	295	11	14	374	3	62
Spring2012	224	9	9	247	5	118
Total	895	34	29	781	11	242

"I believe that ... the most useful [thing] I have learned out of these seminars is improved confidence. I think my improved confidence is a result of many of the things we have learned such as learning to manage our time, identify our weaknesses, gain new learning strategies etc. All of these things have helped my overall self-confidence when it comes to both school, work and otherwise. I am not so shy to ask for help or to participate in classes or tutorials. It has also helped that this relieves a lot of my stress when it comes to school and I find myself attending more classes and being more motivated to succeed. I would also like to THANK both of the teachers I had this semester for the amount of help I have taken away from this class and things I have learned about, not only my school environment, but myself from these sessions the past 12 weeks."

3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The SLC participated in 47 orientations including the Services Fairs at Burnaby and the Orientation Tours at Surrey. Table 3 above shows the number of orientation events at each campus. A sampling of other community engagement activities includes the following:

EAL Peers participated in two SFU-student outreach events: *Peer into Your Career* and *Tips and Tricks for Student Leaders*.

Several SLC Coordinators delivered workshops for Fall and Spring TA/TM Days.

Learning and Writing Peers staffed a booth at the *Economics Reception* for new ECON majors.

Dal Sohal and Ruth Silverman co-facilitated a workshop, "Time Management for Liaison Librarians," on their professional development day.

Ruth Silverman gave a 45-minute "SLC Orientation Plus" to 22 graduate students enrolled in the TLC's Certificate Program in Teaching and Learning, introducing them to services and resources available through the SLC and Research Commons.

The SLC team began preparation for participation in SFU's Open House to be held in May 2012.

4. STAFF CHANGES

The SLC welcomed Dal Sohal as Learning Services Coordinator. Dal assumed responsibility for coordinating SLC services at SFU Vancouver and for instructing in the Back on Track Program. We also said farewell to Learning Services Coordinator Kathryn Ricketts who joined the SFU Teaching and Learning Centre as Educational Consultant. Donna McGee Thompson became Head of the SLC, as we said goodbye to Elaine Fairey who re-focused her attention on the duties of Associate University Librarian, in the expanded portfolio of Learning & Research Services, after serving as SLC Director for five years.