

## STUDENT LEARNING COMMONS Annual Report 2006/07

Elaine Fairey, Director, Student Learning Commons

May 17, 2007

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### Introduction

Officially launched in Fall 2006, the Student Learning Commons (SLC) is an academic learning centre with the mandate to assist and support students in their academic pursuits, with a focus on providing writing and learning support services across the three SFU campuses.

The SLC provides a visible and accessible gateway to a wide variety of student academic support services, both within the SLC and available elsewhere on the campuses. Services include writing and learning support, library research assistance, and computer assistance, and are provided through workshops, personal consultations, online resources and classroom collaborations with faculty and other instructors, with content delivered in the context of specific disciplines and to specific user groups. This report focuses on writing and learning support programs and services, while library research and computer support activities are reported by Library Reference and Academic Computing Services respectively.

The SLC is based in the W.A.C. Bennett Library on the SFU Burnaby campus, and coordinates services to the other campuses through the Yosef Wosk Student Learning Commons and Fraser Valley Real Estate Board Academic Library at SFU Surrey, and the Samuel and Frances Belzberg Library at SFU Vancouver.

During its first two semesters of operation, the Student Learning Commons met the core goals of delivering programs and services in 3 major areas:

- 1) applicable to the needs of the broadest range of SFU students, primarily undergraduates;
- 2) tailored to the conventions and requirements of specific disciplines;
- 3) targeted to the specialized needs of specific student audiences, including English as additional language (EAL) learners, graduate students, First Nation students, students with disabilities, and mature/returning students.

### Summary of activities

#### 1. Workshops

The SLC Coordinators presented 70 open registration workshops for 600 students in Fall 06/Spring 07. Attendance was very strong in the Fall semester, particularly at the Burnaby campus, and lower in the Spring semester. Among the most popular workshops were *Way to an A*, full day sessions targeted for new students in late August, *Reading University Textbooks*, *Academic Writing - Part 1 - Orientation to Academic Writing* and *Academic Writing - Part 2 - Planning and Building an Academic Paper*. In the Fall, most Burnaby workshops were full or even over-subscribed. Despite the large turnouts, all students who wished to attend were accommodated.

Lower workshop attendance in the Spring 07 semester was balanced by an increase in demand for individual consultations and speaks to the common second semester trend of students seeking more focussed and

personalized assistance. January “snow concerns” were also a factor. The SLC/Library also offered technology workshops for students on MS Office applications in the Spring semester. These workshops were co-ordinated by librarian Sandra Wong and presented by the Information Commons “Techs”. Despite late semester dates and relatively short notice, the workshops were popular and will be offered again in Fall 07.

## **2.English Conversation Groups**

The SLC Peers led English Conversation Groups to provide English language learners with opportunities to practice verbal language skills, an important key to improving both oral presentation skills and foundational academic writing competency. This program expanded to 2 weekly sessions in Spring 07 and covered both academic and social topics, as well as providing opportunities for attendees to practice formal and informal presentations. Although the SLC does not currently offer individual appointments for non-course-related language practice, students were offered the opportunity to meet individually with Peers to practice class presentations, but none pursued this more challenging option.

## **3. Integrated classes**

As well as providing services for students independently seeking assistance, the SLC welcomed requests from faculty and other instructors to deliver writing or learning content in course or program contexts and there has been significant uptake from instructors. To give a flavour of these activities, Learning Services Coordinator Donna McGee Thompson covered topics such as time management, exam preparation and learning assessment within first year CMPT and MACM courses, while Writing Services Coordinator Dr. Amanda Goldrick-Jones delivered academic writing sessions to FBA graduate and undergraduate students, ENG 103W, BISC graduate students, and students in the Explorations program. YWSLC Coordinator Cynthia Wright worked closely with many Surrey programs, especially Tech One and Explorations.

## **4. Orientations**

In order to increase awareness of SLC programs and services, the SLC Director, Coordinators and Peers participated in numerous orientation programs. These included presentations for students in Academic First! (Athletics), the First Nation Students’ Centre, the *Bureau des affaires francophones et francophiles* (BAFFA), Hot Chocolate Day in Surrey, start-of-term Student Services orientations and others. Faculty orientations included presentations to New Faculty Orientation attendees, Departmental Library Representatives, Chairs & Directors, and the Department of Psychology. The SLC Peers also participated in the Burnaby Healthy Starts Breakfast event coordinated by the central Peer Educator program in order to publicize all Peer areas, including the SLC.

## **5. Consultations**

The SLC offered 465 individual consultations for students to discuss their writing or learning concerns and questions, and the service varied slightly from campus to campus. At Burnaby, undergraduate students booked appointments with the Peer Educators; honours and graduate students with the SLC Coordinators, and both Coordinators and Peers were also available to all students during designated drop in times. At Surrey, undergraduates booked with Peers, and both graduates and undergraduates also booked with the YWSLC Coordinator. Drop in times were also available. At SFU Vancouver, the SLC Coordinators from Burnaby met with students at Harbour Centre on request, and in a Spring 07 pilot project, a Peer was available for drop in consultations one hour per week at Harbour Centre. This service will be expanded in Fall 07.

## **6. Online Services**

Recognizing the challenges of three campuses, as well as the mobile and commuter nature of the SFU student body, the SLC is committed to providing comprehensive and innovative online services to reach students wherever and whenever they require academic support. As a first step towards this goal, the SLC implemented online registration and booking software packages which allow students to register for workshops or book consultations from anywhere at anytime. Both systems have been very popular and effective.

The web site was the SLC's "front door" during the lengthy office space renovations, and the very high numbers of workshop registrations and consultation bookings despite the lack of visible office space throughout much of the Fall demonstrates its critical and effective role. With the change to the University's "brand", the SLC's look and feel, including the web site, will be revised and this will also be a good opportunity to address structural and organizational issues on the web site.

Writing Services Coordinator Amanda Goldrick-Jones experimented during the Fall semester with e-tutoring techniques in working with individual graduate students, and the SLC will continue to explore this possibility for extended service provision, as well as the use of social networking software to facilitate study or dissertation support groups.

## **7. Staffing**

The SLC services were provided by Writing Services, Learning Services, and YWSLC Surrey Coordinators, specialists in their respective fields, and responsible for developing the content of the services, for providing direct service to graduate students and other specialized groups, and for the selection and supervision of a team of carefully prepared student volunteers, known as the SLC Peers. With some attrition and the addition of new several Peers in January, a core group of twelve SLC Peers were based at Burnaby and three at Surrey. The majority of Peers were available for consultations with undergraduates on either writing or learning topics, with a few preferring to focus on learning topics only. A new staff category was created beginning for Spring 07, with the addition of a temporary Graduate Peer Writing Facilitator (GPWF) position. This is a part-time paid position for a graduate student working one-on-one with both undergraduate and graduate student writers, and assisting with other forms of student writing support, such as workshops or study groups. Sarah Paynter, who has recently completed her MA in Geography, is the first GPWF.

## **5. Space**

The Student Learning Commons Office opened mid-November in the NW corner of the main floor of the Bennett Library in Burnaby. SLC services were offered in a combination of private and open spaces in and adjacent to the SLC Office, with workshops in Room 7200 on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of the Library. The Coordinators met with students in their offices, and there is also a private consultation room where Peers met with students. The open area immediately outside the Office was also used very successfully for Peer consultations. When not in use for consultations, this space was very popular with students for reading, relaxing or working with laptops.

At SFU Surrey, the Yosef Wosk Student Learning Commons has a dedicated space and, with some renovation, will be more closely integrated with the SFU Surrey Library by the creation of a connecting door. Creating visible SLC service space at SFU Vancouver has been more challenging but proposed renovations at the Belzberg Library will create improved opportunities. Space for SLC workshops at Harbour Centre was coordinated by Belzberg librarians, and the Belzberg Library also served as a "home base" for the Burnaby-based Coordinators and Peer while at the Vancouver campus.

## 6. Internal Relations

Student Learning Commons' services are based on partnerships between diverse yet complimentary academic and student support areas. The SLC Director and Coordinators met with numerous individual faculty and with faculty groups, such as new faculty, to explain and promote SLC services, as well as to develop course and program integrated programs. These outreach activities also included liaison with faculty and staff from the Writing-intensive Learning Office, the Foundations of Academic Literacy and Foundations of Academic Numeracy courses, staff from Student Services areas such as Academic Advising, the Centre for Students with Disabilities, the First Nations Students' Centre, and many others.

The SLC Advisory and Articulation Committees, which include members from a variety of campus constituencies, met in Spring 07. The YWSLC Advisory Committee at Surrey is chaired by the YWSLC Coordinator and the SLC Director is a member along with representatives from Surrey constituencies.

The SLC Director is a member of the Senate Committee on Academic Integrity & the Learning Environment (SCAISLE) and the Senate Committee on University Teaching & Learning (SCUTL). The SLC Learning Services Coordinator is a member of the organizing committee for the May 07 Symposium on Innovative Teaching.

## 7. External Relations

The SLC Director and Coordinators participated in professional associations such as the Learning Specialists Association of BC, the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA), the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) and the Canadian Association for Teachers of Technical Writing (CATTW), including monitoring and participating in discussions on related listservs, and attending conferences such as the first annual Canadian Learning Commons conference, held at the University of Guelph in June 06. Due to strong interest in SFU's Student Learning Commons among attendees at this conference and others, a major project during Spring 07 was to plan and organize the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Canadian Learning Commons Conference, April 29 – May 1, in partnership with the UBC Library / Irving K. Barber Learning Centre. In November 06, the SLC Director and Writing and Learning Coordinators attended the CRLA conference where they were pleased to note that the SLC programs and services benchmark very well against similar programs at other North American colleges and universities. The Writing Services Coordinator also attended the Conference on College Composition and Communication in March 07, and hosted a follow up discussion of emerging themes for members of the writing services group and others at SFU.

## 8. Summary Statistics Fall 2006/Spring2007

<b>Activities</b>	<b># of sessions</b>	<b># of attendees</b>
Workshops	70	600
Course/program integrated classes	29	1050
Orientations - students	41	3134
Orientations - faculty	4	150
Consultations	n/a	465