



Writing, Learning, and EAL Services ANNUAL REPORT April 2020 – March 2021

The Student Learning Commons delivers a variety of academic co-curricular student programs and services in four primary subject areas:

- English as an Additional Language (EAL)
- Learning
- Undergraduate Writing
- Graduate Writing (delivered through the Research Commons)

This report provides highlights and statistics for each of these areas, as well as staff highlights, for the 2020-21 fiscal year. As the report will show, many of the activities for this period were shaped significantly by larger global and institutional events. Just prior to the start of the reported period, in mid-March 2020, the university made a swift pivot to remote-only instruction as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While some of our services were already delivered remotely, most were rapidly converted to an online format starting late March 2020. Many of the activities described here also reflect the SLC's strong support of SFU's priority to create an equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment, and our commitment toward Decolonization, Reconciliation, Indigenization, and anti-racism.

The Writing, Learning, and EAL Team for 2020-21 included these members:

- Head, Student Learning Commons: **Donna McGee Thompson**
- Student Learning Commons Assistant: **Peggy Fung**
- English as an Additional Language (EAL) Services Coordinator: **Tim Mossman**
- Learning Services Coordinator: **Dal Sohal**
- Learning Services Coordinator: **Ruth Silverman**
- Surrey SLC Coordinator: **Cynthia Wright**
- Writing Services Coordinators (undergraduate writing services): **Julia Lane** and (starting September 2020) **Hermine Chan**
- Writing Services Coordinator (graduate writing services): **Robyn Long**
- Graduate Facilitators (10 – 15)
- EAL Peer Educators (15 – 20)
- Writing and Learning Peer Educators (15 – 20)

PROGRAMMING HIGHLIGHTS for 2020-21

Together with many other areas of the Library, the SLC made a quick transition of all its services and programs to remote delivery starting in March-April 2020. Learning, Writing and EAL workshops were delivered as live webinars and, in many cases, workshop recordings were produced to allow students to view them at their convenience. All one-on-one meetings with students were also shifted online.

English as an Additional Language (EAL)

Core EAL services include:

- Conversation Partner Program
- Academic English Coaching
- Open-enrollment workshops and workshop series
- *Let's Talk* and *Plurilingual Café* conversation groups

[The Conversation Partner Program] has helped me a lot:

My English conversation skill has improved a lot

Having someone to talk to while studying from home is a relief during the pandemic

Getting to know Canadian culture more

~Conversation Partner Program Participant

EAL Program Highlights for 2020/21:

EAL Workshop Series EAL Services Coordinator, Tim Mossman, introduced a series format to EAL workshops, developing and delivering four new workshop series:

- Grammar Brush-Up
- Grammar Choices for Graduate and Professional Writers
- Language Strategies for Multilingual Writers Series
- Structuring Ideas Through Grammar

EAL Peer Educators Collaboration with Ritsumeikan University (February 2021). Tim Mossman organized an online meeting between the EAL Peer Educators and a colleague at Ritsumeikan University, Japan, Kanae Murayama, and her student volunteers (17 in total) in the “Beyond Borders Plaza” (Osaka-Ibaraki campus). Together they discussed racism: “How we feel about it”, and “How it may impact our volunteer work.” Tim captured a visual representation of the discussion using Jamboard.

Academic English Coaching saw a sharp increase in the number of visits, due in large part to students returning for multiple repeat visits.

Really thanks for your help. This is the best English coaching I've ever had. I believe that my English would improve a lot as long as I could make the best use of the resources you sent me.

~Participant in Academic English Coaching

Learning

Learning programs and services focus on a variety of academic strategies topics including Time Management, Academic Reading, Critical Thinking, Exam Preparation, and Presentation Skills.

Core Learning services include:

- Learning strategies consultations
- Open-enrollment workshops and workshop series
- Course- and program-integrated workshops
- Back on Track Learning Plans
- Back on Track course delivery

Learning Program Highlights for 2020/21:

Back on Track (BOT) – The BOT program is a multi-departmental collaborative program administered by Student Engagement and Retention. The SLC delivers several components of the three-semester program, including Learning Plans, Getting Started sessions, and BOT 120 and BOT 140 courses. This year the SLC BOT team re-worked all these components for remote delivery. Ruth Silverman developed and piloted a fully asynchronous version of BOT 120. Ruth also developed an asynchronous "Pre-Module" on Success Strategies for Online Courses during COVID-19, with an associated reflective quiz, which was used in all sections of BOT 120, 140 and 145. Dal Sohal developed "Tips for How to Succeed in BOT (in the remote learning environment)" and "Tips for Preparing for Remote Learning." An Extenuating Circumstances provision was also introduced for COVID-related absences and late homework.

Getting Ready for Academic Success is a workshop sampler of selected learning, writing and research strategies offered to incoming students in the week before classes start in the Fall term. The pre-COVID format was a one-day five-hour workshop offered twice in Burnaby and once in Surrey. This year a new version was developed that included five afternoons with synchronous and asynchronous components. A panel of course instructors participated in a Q & A session on what to expect in the remote learning environment. An asynchronous Canvas-based version was offered for attendees to review later and for students who did not attend the live version.

I would like to thank the whole team of individuals who played a role in running this program. What a scary and strange time to be in, but I looked forward to these meetings everyday and I am full of information and tools to help me succeed in my new journey. thank you!

~Participant, Getting Ready for Academic Success

Kick Start: A spinoff of Getting Ready for Academic Success, Kick Start is offered every year in January. It is open to all undergraduate students, but personal invitations are sent to students on academic probation. A fully online version of Kick Start was offered across three evenings in January 2021.

Academic Success Kits (ASKs): Cynthia Wright launched a full pilot of these discipline-specific Canvas-based Academic Success Kits (ASKs), to provide undergraduate students new means of accessing academic support and study strategies.

Academic Integrity Tutorial: SFU's Academic Integrity Coordinator, the Library, and the SLC collaborated to develop a Canvas tutorial that instructors can easily embed into a course, or that students can self-enrol in. SLC Graduate Learning Facilitator, Sabrina Ngo, worked on the project as Online Tutorial Developer. The tutorial provides an overview of academic integrity values, expectations, and policy in the university context.

Undergraduate Writing

Core Undergraduate Writing services include:

- One-on-one consultations
- Online, asynchronous writing tutoring through WriteAway
- Open-enrollment workshops
- Course- and program-integrated workshops
- Online Writing Groups, including VOWeL

Undergraduate Writing Highlights for 2020/21:

Virtual Consultations All consultations were held synchronously online. For the first time, the SLC was able to offer writing consultations 7 days a week, from 9 am to 9 pm most days, owed to the increased flexibility of delivering services online.

WriteAway saw far heavier demand than any previous year. SFU students submitted 1085 requests for feedback to the service, up 35% from 2019-20. SLC staff who had not previously worked on the platform completed training to offer additional support. SLC Writing Services Coordinator Julia Lane served as the **WriteAway Institutional Coordinator** for SFU and on the **WriteAway Advisory Committee**.

I am so grateful for all the amazing tutors! I get so excited when I receive the email with feedback, the tutors are always encouraging and kind while also extremely helpful. I love the simple, concrete methods of teaching by offering links and explaining areas of weakness with depth and detail. Thank you!!

- SFU Student using WriteAway, Spring 2021

Inclusive and Antiracist Writing guides: Julia Lane developed a 50-page suite of connected writing guides, including resources and exercises. The downloadable PDF, [available from the library](#), includes a glossary of inclusive and antiracist writing terms and guides focused on writing related to gender identity and sexual orientation; Black Peoples, Indigenous Peoples, and People(s) of Colour; as well as ableism, disability, mental health and neurodiversity. An Instagram campaign, as suggested by Writing & Learning Peer Educator, Emily Lam, brought a lot of attention to the guides from SFU and beyond.

Fraser International College (FIC) Cornerstone (CNST) Online Writing and Research Modules- Julia Lane, with SLC Graduate Facilitator, Daniel Chang, and Teaching and Learning Librarian, Hope Power, completed a project assessing the effectiveness of online modules the SLC and Library had developed for FIC replacing classroom-based workshops. They presented the findings to a joint meeting of the Library Instruction Interest Group (IIG) and Research Interest Group (RIG). Learning of the modules, colleagues from the Centre for Educational Excellence reached out about creating other Canvas content to support multilingual learners at SFU.

Write OUT! Provided drop-in writing support through Out On Campus, using Discord. Graduate Writing Facilitator Kate Elliot created a series of 2-minute videos called "Take 2 Write-a-mins." These "vitamins for your writing practice" are part micro-grammar lessons and part writing prompts for inspiration. A core group of OOCers started their own autonomous writing group, with ambitions to put together a student-led publication.

Undergraduate Writing Contest The 4th annual and first fully virtual version of the writing contest received a record number of submissions this year, in both the lower division and upper division categories. Submissions were pre-screened by several Graduate Writing Facilitators, along with Writing Services Coordinator, Hermine Chan, before being sent to the judges for deliberation. The judging panels included current and retired faculty, as well as retired Associate Dean of Libraries - Learning and Research, Elaine Fairey, and retired SLC Writing Services Coordinator, Amanda Goldrick-Jones.

Undergraduate Writing and Learning Collaborations

Procrastination Avoidance Week (PAW): Julia Lane and Ruth Silverman, together with colleague Sandra Smith of the University of the Fraser Valley, coordinated Procrastination Avoidance Week (PAW), an online national collaborative event with participation from 19 Writing Centres, Libraries, and Learning Commons from across Canada (BC, Alberta, Ontario and Quebec). PAW supported students in the remote learning environment by offering a week of comprehensive support online, including a full suite of workshops on academic strategies; a quiet, supervised study hall; and a social space where students from across the country could connect with each other. Plans are underway to deliver the event again next year.

Virtual Library Drop-In (in the Indigenous Student Centre): Provided an opportunity for students using the Indigenous Student Centre to drop in for support related to research, writing, and learning strategies, or to simply use the space as a supervised study hall. SLC Coordinators and Indigenous Initiatives and Instruction Librarian, Ashley Edwards, were available to answer questions and offer consultations upon request.

Study Hall @ Home – In collaboration with SFU Peer Programs, the SLC piloted this online peer-supported study hall. Students were offered a virtual supported space in which to study alongside other students, with the goal of increasing focus and a sense of connection. SLC Writing & Learning Peer Educators, together with Science & Math Peer Tutors, and Computing Science Peer Tutors were on hand to provide academic support at students' request and point students toward other campus resources. Sessions started with a short goal setting exercise and study tips. Writing Services Coordinator, Hermine Chan, coordinated and provided orientation and support for the SLC Peers staffing the space.

Graduate Writing (delivered through the Research Commons)

Core Graduate Writing services include:

- Read-Aheads
- Open-enrollment workshops
- Course- and program-integrated workshops
- Open Writing Labs

- Online Writing Groups

Graduate Writing Highlights for 2020/21:

The Graduate Writing Online Community Canvas site was created and launched in summer 2020 for the transition to online learning. Initially used as a space to provide online writing consultations, the space was expanded to provide a collection of graduate writing resources, including asynchronous pre-recorded workshops, such as “Thesis Writing During a Pandemic” and “Finding Voice”, as well as opportunities for students to interact in asynchronous discussions and Q & A forums, and opt in to receive notifications, information, and updates about graduate writing related workshops, events, and resources. 72 students had enrolled by December 2020.

Graduate Writing Group in Interdisciplinary Studies (INS) This writing group was designed at the request of the INS program director and facilitated online. Three-hour sessions were offered once per week for 8 weeks.

Thesis Writing Group, conceptualized as an “online version” of Thesis Boot Camp, and based on successful INS writing group model, the Thesis Writing Group offered three-hour sessions, initially once per week for five weeks, and in Fall 2020, for eight weeks with an added midweek bonus session for the final three weeks, per popular demand. Sessions were facilitated by the grad writing team with the Research Commons Librarian and visits from Theses Assistants.

The Writing Group provided me with a sense of accountability and helped me carve out time dedicated to focused work on my project. It also helped me find ways to replicate a similar structure for working on my project at other times. I really appreciated the helpful guiding comments from the facilitators each week; they helped me stay realistic with my expectations but also learn to celebrate and appreciate the progress I was making.

Attendee, Thesis Writing Group

Orientation workshop on Graduate Writing and Research Commons services Writing Services Coordinator, Robyn Long, and Research Commons Assistant Head, Ali Moore, collaborated to create this brief orientation to research support and graduate writing services. They developed the pre-recorded workshop for new incoming graduate students as part of the online orientation offerings coordinated by Graduate and Post-Doctoral Studies. The recording explains graduate writing and research services and how to access them and gives students an idea of what sort of help they can receive in consultations and workshops.

STAFF HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2020/2021

- Dal Sohal received a [2020 Staff Achievement Award in the category of Diversity and Inclusion](#). Dal was also a member of SFU’s EDI Advisory Council.

- Hermine Chan joined the SLC, as Writing Services Coordinator (for undergraduate writing), for the period from September 2020 to March 2022.
- Julia Lane was co-chair of the 2021 Undergraduate Research Symposium and helped to successfully design and deliver the first fully virtual “flipped” model of the symposium, with students recording their presentations so that the gathering could focus on discussion and Q & A.
- As a member of the BC Writing Centre Association (a regional affiliate of the Canadian Writing Centre Association), Julia Lane helped to draft a [series of commitments to antiracism](#), which include ensuring that antiracist and decolonizing practices are actively incorporated into tutor training, actively recruiting BIPOC staff, and critically evaluating resources to ensure antiracist, decolonial and Indigenized approaches and content.
- Ruth Silverman was accepted to participate in the "New Ways of Teaching, New Ways of Learning" program, offered by the Institute for the Study of Teaching and Learning in the Disciplines (ISTLD), and received a Library Assessment Grant to assess her pilot of an asynchronous version of a Back on Track course, BOT 120.
- Tim Mossman received a Library Assessment Grant to assess the Conversation Partner Program.
- An initial agreement for SLC Graduate Facilitators (GFs) was reached between Simon Fraser University and the Teaching Support Staff Union (TSSU) in November 2020, which was subsequently ratified by the TSSU membership. GFs were certified into TSSU in June 2019.
- SLC staff were active members of several Library groups and committees, including the EDI Working Group; Decolonizing the Library Working Group and Interest Group (DIG); Instructional Interest Group (IIG); Library’s Slack Team Challenge; and the Wellness Committee.
- All SLC team members completed extensive training and professional development activities, particularly in these areas:
 - Using various technologies for online instruction (e.g., Zoom, Canvas, BB Collaborate)
 - Teaching practices for the online environment (synchronous and asynchronous) (e.g. Liberating Structures - online)
 - Practices and tools for improving learner accessibility (e.g., closed captioning)
 - Antiracism and antiracist practice, particularly in the writing and learning centre context, including a series of workshops focused on developing an SLC statement on anti-racism
 - Decolonizing & Indigenizing curriculum

SUMMARY STATISTICS FOR 2020/2021

The following tables provide statistics for Writing, Learning, and EAL services delivered April 2020 - March 2021, with comparisons to April 2019 – March 2020. For 2020-21, all services were delivered online, whereas in 2019-20, most were in-person (except for WriteAway, online writing groups, and many graduate writing consultations.) Notable changes in demand occurred across services during the pandemic. There was strong demand for WriteAway, open-enrollment undergraduate workshops, and online undergraduate and graduate writing groups. There was reduced demand for synchronous virtual consultations, course-integrated undergraduate and graduate workshops, conversation partners, and conversation groups. The sharp decline in registration for Back on Track

services was largely related to changes in university grading policies, which resulted in far fewer students entering academic probation.

ONE-ON-ONE SUPPORT	2020/21	2019/20	% CHANGE
Writing & Learning Virtual Consultations (SLC; primarily undergraduate)	1271	1708	↓ 35%
WriteAway Submissions (SFU students only; undergraduate)	1085	806	↑ 35%
Conversation Partner Visits (grad/undergrad)	831	1087	↓ 24%
Academic English Coaching (grad/undergrad)	195	116	↑ 68%
Back on Track Learning Plans	193	541	↓ 64%
Graduate Consultations (through Research Commons)	416	379	↑ 10%
TOTAL VISITS	3991	4637	↓ 14%

WORKSHOPS & GROUPS	# Workshops			# Attendees		
	2020/21	2019/20	% Change	2020/21	2019/20	% Change
SLC Open-Enrolment Workshops & Series	245	180	↑ 36%	2328	1386	↑ 68%
SLC Integrated Workshops	112	186	↓ 40%	3720	4839	↓ 23%
English Conversation Groups	49	47	↑ 4%	100	210	↓ 52%
SLC Online Writing & Study Groups	113	97	↑ 16.5%	313	197	↑ 59%
BOT Getting Started Sessions	n/a	32	n/a	182	576	↓ 68%
Graduate Open Workshops	28	84	↓ 67%	268	791	↓ 66%
Graduate Integrated Workshops	7	19	↓ 63%	93	299	↓ 69%
Graduate Writing Groups	45	72	↓ 37.5%	559	196	↑ 185%
TOTALS	608	717	↓ 15%	7843	8844	↓ 11%