Recent Trends in Undergraduate Writing Courses and Programs in Canadian Universities

Tania S. Smith
University of Calgary

As in the United States, undergraduate writing programs and courses in Canada (in the English language) have been traditionally associated with English departments, but in Canada they are currently more widely dispersed among other faculties and departments according to the genre and professional context of the texts produced. Canadian English departments have historically tended to focus on interpretation (reading) more than textual production (composition), thus placing the study and teaching of written composition in a traditionally subordinate position to literary study and literary writing, so that composition in professional and academic genres is seen as “remedial” instruction occasionally offered to non-English majors. But recent shifts within literary canons and the emergence of new disciplines within English studies have opened up some English departments, and many other departments and interdisciplinary units, to devote more serious attention to non-literary writing instruction.

In this chapter, I examine various units in the university, not just English departments, where we can see different types of resistance or acceptance of these recent developments in writing instruction in the “non-literary” genres. But it is appropriate to begin with the traditional home of writing instruction, the English department. Composition and English are actually two related modern branches of the ancient tradition of rhetoric, as T. Miller (1997) outlines in *The Formation of College English*. In contrast with literary scholars, composition scholars are more strongly allied with the discipline of rhetoric and have tended to focus on the theory and teaching of composition in the genres traditionally neglected by literary scholars. Therefore, composition focuses on the genres that are seen as politicized, practical, or utilitarian: advanced academic and professional writing—namely the everyday, academic, and workplace genres of prose that are written in organizations and professional, academic, and public life. These are the genres of writing instruction covered in this chapter. Although composition studies often includes journalistic and creative genres, I do not examine journalism or creative writing programs since these are often separate from academic and professional writing programs.

Overview of Recent Trends

---

Writing instruction in Canada has been changing rapidly between 1995-2005, moving in the direction of inter-disciplinarity and toward the development of professional writing and rhetoric programs housed in various departments. In many Canadian universities, writing instruction thrives in departments of English, communication, and engineering, in writing centres, and in continuing education departments. In recent years, technical and professional writing programs have been blooming more frequently in community colleges, technical institutes, and the smaller universities, and they have also expanded into “Rhetoric and Professional Writing,” “Rhetoric and Discourse,” or “Rhetoric and Media Studies” programs in both large and small universities and colleges. At the same time, many traditional English departments, especially those at the largest medical-doctoral universities, have remained resistant to these changes in comparison to smaller universities that focus more on undergraduate study. Miller (1997) also notes this resistance in British universities and “the most respected English departments in America” (277), but in Canada the resistance is much greater because of the much smaller proportion of rhetoric and composition scholars and teachers north of the border.

A distinctive feature of the Canadian context is that a significant proportion of Canadian writing instruction has been, and still is, carried out in a variety of disciplinary settings outside of first-year English courses, and indeed often outside of English departments. Canadian composition does not share a unified site of research, inquiry, and teacher training like the “first-year writing course,” which is still the most common site of composition instruction among most American institutions. In the state universities in the U.S. where large composition programs exist, the majority of English graduate students receive formal training and practice in the teaching of composition courses, often in the form of a credit graduate-level course in composition theory and pedagogy during their first term of teaching a first-year composition course on their own. In Canada, M.A. and Ph.D. graduate students in English are usually taught very little, if anything, about composition theory and pedagogy. [Editor’s Note: See Jacobs’ and Dolmage’s essay in this volume for one notable exception]. Canadian English departments, therefore, have far fewer faculty members and graduate students interested in promoting university-level writing instruction and studying writing theory and pedagogy. In the U.S., the yearly Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) is often attended by more than 3,000 higher education faculty. In contrast, the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Literature (CASLL)/Inkshed group, the rough equivalent of CCCC north of the border, usually has 40–50 presenters of research papers annually and is attended by 50–60 persons, many of whom do not work in English departments.

These differences north and south of the border can be seen as both disadvantageous as well as advantageous to Canadian composition scholarship and programs. To the extent that Canadian composition does not have a unified disciplinary context of inquiry and work, it lacks a strong institutional presence among Canadian universities and often flies under the disciplinary radar screen. When compositionists struggle to establish writing courses, programs, graduate degrees, and research projects in Canada, this is a distinct disadvantage. It is difficult to find the language with which to communicate concepts that are foreign to many colleagues’ university experiences. However, there is a strong advantage to having a lack of an established “centre” for writing instruction and scholarship. It means that the small number of Canadian scholars in the field of writing instruction cannot isolate themselves in only one branch of composition scholarship nor, for that matter, a single discipline such as English studies. As a result, the Canadian field is interdisciplinary, teeming with fresh ideas on how to teach various types of academic and professional writing.

Canadian compositionists often look south of the border to find precedents and patterns for the growth of their field. However, given the context mentioned above, within the Canadian
composition community there is a lively debate about the benefit of such imitation. Many humanities faculty at Canadian universities, including compositionists, staunchly refuse to imitate (or to even seem to imitate) American models of writing instruction such as “writing programs,” claiming that the usual American first-year composition course is too focused on personal expression and devoid of subject-area content. Even if this stereotype is false, the negative association is strong enough that it creates the necessity of innovating in ways that do not follow the American model.

In Canadian university English departments that focus on literature and cultural studies, the continued resistance to required “first-year composition” (composition-only, not composition and literature) courses and programs has created a compensatory trend of increases in the numbers and size of writing programs outside of English departments and in writing across the curriculum (WAC) initiatives such as engineering writing programs and writing centres, as well as at colleges and technical institutes. At the same time, some English departments have partnered with professional and technical writing programs.

**Features of strong postsecondary writing instruction**

Writing instruction in the past few decades has developed various institutional configurations in the U.S. and Canada. What kinds of institutional features constitute strengths in university writing instruction?

First of all, it is a desirable feature in a university that academic writing instruction, not limited to grammatical and formal concerns, be a major emphasis (i.e., 50% or more) of an early course in the majority of students’ programs. Wherever possible, there should also be one or two higher-level writing courses that focus on advanced writing in a student’s chosen discipline or profession. Since good writing cannot be learned in a single course, a writing course or series of courses has a long-term focus: it is meant to enable all students to pay attention to writing processes and written products as an integral part of the research process in their future academic program and professional careers. Not only less advanced or struggling students, but all postsecondary students, even at the Ph.D. level, require more advanced and specialized writing instruction as they take on new identities and discourses as students, scholars, and citizens (see, for instance, Bartholomae, 1985; Kamler & Thomson, 2004). These courses should be small enough to provide instructor attention and peer interaction around a series of writing assignments on serious academic subject matter (the CCCC recommends no more than 20 students in a writing course [Statement of Principles, 2005], although this goal has rarely been reached even in the U.S.). For courses that focus on writing, there should be strong teacher qualifications or training and support for writing instruction since effective writing pedagogy is not simply a matter of knowledge transference through lectures, imitation of models, and correction of errors.

A second basic principle is that the flagship of any university’s value for writing instruction and the source of disciplinary support for effective introductory writing instruction is not just having one or a few courses, but an academic program or a degree specialization devoted to the academic discipline of writing, such as a “Rhetoric and Professional Writing” program. Such a program, whether situated in an English department or elsewhere, not only furthers serious scholarship and teaching expertise in the area by gathering writing scholars together but provides intensive education for students who desire to become effective communicators, researchers, teachers, and theorists in historical and contemporary public and organizational writing, including writing in new media that involve computer literacy and visual literacy.
Thirdly, looking at the wider scope of writing instruction at a university, a healthy
landscape of writing instruction at English-speaking universities (and colleges) includes not only
strong writing courses and writing programs *per se*, but an institutional culture that values the
advanced literacy development of all its students and puts sufficient resources behind such
endeavours. Adapted to each institution’s context, there should be appropriate credit courses
and support services for English-as-a-Second Language/English-as-a-Foreign Language writers
(ESL/EFL) and free tutorial assistance for all students. Universities should acknowledge that
after introductory writing instruction, more advanced and discipline-specific writing instruction
is a responsibility of every department and program, and that “writing to learn,” using writing as
a mode of inquiry and crucial to research processes, is as important as “learning to write.” To
this end there should be interdisciplinary committees providing university-wide support and
policy development to work toward sustaining strong systems of academic and professional
writing instruction and the integration of writing assignments within some courses in all
programs, all disciplines, and at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Undoubtedly this vision of a strong integration of university writing instruction has a
very wide scope and is quite a challenge. If composition teachers and scholars at any institution
are well supported by their institutions and enabled to focus on the first feature, that of
developing and strengthening specific writing courses for credit within programs, it is likely that
they and their collaborators across the university will directly and indirectly nourish the other
important features of writing instruction within a given institution.

**Canadian English Departments and Writing Instruction**

The traditional literature-focused English department once played a defining role in
forming the landscape of writing instruction in Canada, but for the past five to ten years it has
not played a central role. Increasingly over the years, some English departments have limited
their growth to literature, creative writing, and cultural studies, and they have maintained
minimal focus or have reduced focus on composition. This is quite unlike the strategy of many
American departments of English who have strengthened their departmental status through
academic and professional writing programs. Other disciplinary and interdisciplinary academic
units have been much more welcoming to academic and professional writing instruction than
traditional English departments. Nevertheless, many compositionists in Canada still call English
departments their home, and sometimes confront traditional attitudes and inhospitable
bureaucracies when they attempt to widen the borders of writing and composition studies in
their local contexts.

A survey of English department first-year courses was sponsored in the late 1990s by the
University of Victoria’s English department and Canadian Association of Chairs of English
composition courses, although some offer composition only as a component of a combination
composition/literature course” (Canadian Association, Survey, 2000, Question 2). However, as I
discuss below, even in 2005 there are usually serious limitations placed on enrolment and/or
program credit for composition-only courses, and “composition and literature” were still more
often combined than separated at the first year level. Nothing is said about the size or emphasis
of the “component” of writing instruction within combination composition/literature courses,
which could be as limited as a single class session outlining tips on grammar and essay
formatting or comments provided on graded papers. As well, there was a serious limitation in
the researchers’ and respondents’ definitions of composition instruction. This survey still
unquestioningly associated the term “composition,” with writing skill deficiency and “grammar-
intensive courses” (Canadian Association, Survey, 2000, Question 1). Discussion regarding the 1999/2000 survey on the CASLL email list turned to the fact that if these surveys were not limited to the English department context and its usually narrow definitions of “composition,” they would have revealed more of the recent growth in the field of university writing instruction. For instance, would respondents have included Professional Writing courses or Creative Writing courses as “composition” given this term’s common usage in Canadian English departments?

For a very long time in many English departments, writing instruction carried on much like the way it had been done in the United States before the days when open admission gave birth to composition studies. Even though Canadian university enrolments boomed in 1945, “no move was made to staff first-year composition classes” in Canada, says R. Graves (1995) because of an attitude that “exams should bar the door against the barbarians,” an attitude influenced by British emphasis on exams and streaming (p. 112). The Canadian first-year literature and composition course in these English departments remains primarily a course in the reading and criticism of literature or other creative media, with a minor component in the basic writing skills needed to write a good critical essay for an English instructor.

The widespread Canadian belief that academic writing instruction is a basic literacy matter and thus only necessary in high schools and not in universities is largely due to the fact that Canada has not yet had a serious crisis in university students’ writing skills. The demographics of first-year courses are different from those of American universities, with generally fewer students arriving with inadequate writing skills, with the notable exception of some recently-arrived international ESL students. The majority of university students come out of Canadian publicly-funded high schools. Canadian high schools are generally of very high quality regardless of their location, unlike in the U.S., where inner-city high schools are traditionally of lower academic quality, and better education is only available in richer neighbourhoods or private schools. Although there are no international statistics on advanced writing skill proficiency, an international comparison of the advanced (or “reading to learn”) reading literacy of 15 year olds in 31 countries in 2002 placed the U.S. in the range of 10th to 20th place, and Canada in the range of second to fourth place, outdone only by Finland in first place. In Canada, 45.5% of 15 year olds have a reading proficiency level of 4 or 5 while in the U.S., only 33.7% are at level 4 or 5 (OECD, 2003).

However, the “high school teaches composition” belief often contradicts the reality of high school curricula, which mirror the traditional university emphasis on literary criticism and the composition of the criticism essay rather than composition in a variety of genres. In the province of Alberta, the 2003 advanced high school courses (English 10-1, 20-1, 30-1), which are required for university admission, emphasize literary analysis and the writing of critical essays, and they deemphasize the study and production of professional and non-literary genres (Alberta Learning, 2005). While high school curriculum documents do describe how students learn writing and reading through exploratory writing and peer review, they still discuss writing primarily within the traditional English literature paradigm. Student writing in high school is supposed to consist primarily of their analytical or personal “responses” to assigned readings—responses to “texts” or “performances” and their “contexts” (the word “response” occurs 29 times in 66 pages and always refers to the function of student writing) (Alberta Learning, 2005). These emphases and hierarchies in language arts education reflect the strong influence of traditional university English departments’ opinions about the most desirable topics and purposes of student writing.

Historically, many English departments in Canadian universities offered first-year English “literature and composition” courses that were required for all students, or at least required for students in the Bachelor of Arts and other specific faculties and programs. Canadian
first-year English “literature and composition” courses combined literature and writing, focusing on the reading and criticism of literature with a secondary emphasis on writing essays of literary criticism. While traditional Canadian English departments have argued in the past that they were doing more than enough to teach writing, composition scholars have argued that English departments tend to teach only the literary criticism essay rather than interdisciplinary and professional writing and that they have placed writing studies at the outer margins of English studies through the “service course” model. In 1994, R. Graves explained that Canadian English departments have traditionally marketed their first-year literature and composition courses to students and other departments as if they were “universal guides to clear writing,” but in reality these courses are only “introductions to reading and writing within the discipline of English studies” (p. 56). L. Steven (1994) explained further that English departments had acted in the past as if they were the cure-all for the university’s ills in writing, while on the other hand they had scapegoated high school English programs, holding them responsible for first-year students who are not capable of university-level writing. There are pressures that push English departments to increase the relative importance of their department in their university by the appearance of the broad utility of their first-year courses, while keeping such courses relatively easy for literary scholars to teach by limiting the amount of composition instruction in them. Other faculties and departments often lay entering students’ academic writing skills at the door of English, resulting in enrolment and curriculum pressures which make the “composition” aspect of the first-year and service courses seem even more burdensome to its teachers, and indeed writing is more and more difficult to teach well in larger classes.

However, despite some resistance, English departments are continually encouraged to teach writing more often to more students, both by forces external to the department and university, and by the arguments of composition scholars within English studies. R. Hunt (1981), both a literary scholar and a composition scholar, the manager of the CASLL (Inkshed) listserv and an English professor at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, did a survey of writing instruction in 1981 when he was secretary of the Association of Chairs of English Departments. His study concluded by expressing the inevitability of change and implied the impending encroachment of composition on traditional literature studies:

If nothing else is made clear by the variety of the situations indicated in the responses to this questionnaire, one thing is plain: the growth of writing courses and programs is going to change the configuration of our discipline. The change has already begun, and although its outlines are not apparent, it seems probable that its growth will be at the expense of what we have been calling “the traditional concerns of the English Department” (paragraph 10).

In a similar vein, but worded in a less threatening manner, Steven (1994) suggested productive kinds of transformations whereby composition could be integrated in English programs without sacrificing their academic autonomy:

English needs to embrace writing instruction as the legitimate university discipline of thought and discovery it has been for thousands of years. Courses in rhetoric in the upper years need to exist side-by-side with and/or integrated into literature courses, and they should supplement revamped first-year composition offerings. Departments of English should teach composition at the first-year level on their own disciplinary terms, not those dictated by clients they feel obligated to serve. (p. 121)

Steven advised that the problematic “service course” situation be abolished, the system in which “other disciplines . . . keep sending their ‘problems’ to English,” a system which meant
low-paid, part-time, non-tenure stream instructors and over-enrolled sections (p. 122). The new attitude that English should take, said Steven, was to “help students to be inquirers more than technicians” when learning to write in a variety of disciplines (p. 124).

Hunt’s and Steven’s predictions and suggestions point out some of the institutional and disciplinary challenges that faced English departments in the 1980s and 1990s, and they help to explain some of the transformations that had already occurred by 2005. In Canada, the demand for writing instruction was, and often still is, perceived largely as a pressure from outside the discipline rather than growth from within. Because the first-year English course is such a limited venue for writing instruction in Canada, some departments have developed larger-scale majors and minors in writing, while others refer students to other departments, writing centres, or non-credit courses for the instruction that they themselves do not provide.

Since 1994, some Canadian English departments, perhaps in the face of limited staff and financial resources, have apparently decided not to take part in this period’s developments in composition studies and the teaching of writing. They have increasingly focused on competing with and imitating other high-status English departments for dollars, status, and the best Canadian students in literature, creative writing, and cultural studies. As such, English departments strive to become elite, research-based centres of traditional literary study; their faculty have reinforced the traditional view of composition as a distraction from literary study and largely outside their disciplinary mandate. Their programs and course information also reveal a limited sense of responsibility to teach composition to students of other faculties, struggling writers, ESL students, as well as a reluctance to develop composition as a serious area of research.

There is still a widespread belief among English departments that writing skills do not need to be taught as explicitly as critical reading skills, thus absolving English departments from the responsibility to support courses that focus primarily on writing. For example, the University of Toronto’s English department web site claimed that “The critical skills developed in sensitive and imaginative reading will carry over to [students’] own writing” (University of Toronto, Undergraduate, 2003-2005). While reading and writing are obviously interrelated skills, there is an assumption here that critique of well-written literature will automatically result in the improvement of one’s own writing; they don’t mention a convincing theory of pedagogy whereby this transference is facilitated. We rarely if ever see the opposite argument developed, namely that students will become more sensitive readers and critics as they focus on developing their writing skills. However, an increasing number of English faculty in Canadian departments admit that the arts of writing in disciplines other than English, in various professions, and in non-literary genres may require different teaching techniques, learning practices, and theories of discourse than those that exist within the boundaries of traditional literary study. This is revealed in program descriptions, such as Brock University’s B.A. Major in English and Professional Writing:

This program combines study in English literature with training in professional writing, and is designed for students planning to seek work in areas which require demonstrated proficiency in writing for the workplace. (Brock University, English, 2005; See heading “The Department offers the following degrees and programs.”)

By 2005, due to social and institutional pressures and developments within and between disciplines, many Canadian universities had shifted away from the “required first-year English course” model. A survey of writing courses offered in a small sample of Canadian universities and colleges shows the developments in the largest and most comprehensive universities. In 2005, among the twelve English-language universities categorized by *Maclean’s* (2005) magazine
as “medical-doctoral,” only four of them still required first-year courses offered by English for students outside of English. These universities included the University of Alberta, University of British Columbia, University of Saskatchewan, and University of Ottawa. In contrast, English department courses were not required by non-English majors at the University of Toronto, McGill University, University of Western Ontario, Queen’s University, McMaster University, Dalhousie University, University of Calgary, and the University of Manitoba.

As well, by July 2005, five of these English departments had begun to differentiate first-year composition courses from first-year literature courses (University of Toronto, University of British Columbia, Queen’s University, University of Ottawa, University of Manitoba), but in each case they warned their own English majors or honours students that first-year composition courses would not count toward their program of study or would not count as a prerequisite for second year English courses—only the first year “literature” courses would count for these purposes. This stipulation expresses the presumption that English majors or honours students would receive little benefit from writing instruction, and/or that it is more important to begin early to learn the basics of literary history and criticism than to focus on learning to write well.

In addition, three of these twelve English departments clearly stated qualifiers about the limited scope of writing instruction in some or all of their first-year courses. For instance, McGill University’s English department stated “While the English Department does not offer writing and composition courses, these are provided by the English and French Language Centre in the Faculty of Arts, and by the Centre for Study and Teaching of Writing in the Faculty of Education” (McGill University, Notes, 2005, “Instruction in Composition, Writing Essays and Research” section). The University of Alberta (as discussed below) and the University of Manitoba strongly advised ESL students about the advanced language skills expected of students who enrol in first-year English courses. This development highlights the sense that departments feel pressured to offer writing instruction that they are unable or unwilling to offer. However, despite these significant transformations and concessions, the majority of these twelve universities still combined literature with writing instruction in some or all of their first year courses.

A few English departments have for a long time offered separate courses in composition only to students in specific faculties such as Education, Business, or Engineering (often called “service-courses” because the department is serving students of other faculties or departments). As well, some offered special English courses to ESL (English as a Second Language) students, sometimes for credit and sometimes not for credit. Some departments offered a few intermediate or advanced composition courses in non-fiction or academic prose. First-year or more advanced prose composition courses are still often considered optional or excluded from credit within English majors, except when the courses are about creative (literary) writing.

Despite the recent growth and proliferation of advanced academic and professional writing instruction in the programs that I describe below, some educational institutions in Canada, generally those at the upper echelons, have further entrenched the traditional attitudes 1) that writing instruction is always something basic that should be limited to less advanced students, and 2) that literary reading and response are more intellectually advanced and/or more disciplinarily relevant activities than studying and composing the written genres that are commonly used in organizations, business, and political life. These beliefs are sometimes due to an uncritical conformity to nineteenth- and twentieth-century hierarchies of knowledge and genre within English studies and research universities. In this era of reduced university funding from provincial governments and differential budget cuts among university faculties and departments, such beliefs occasionally reinforce the political and economic arguments that defend resources given to traditional aspects of disciplines. Such protectionism against writing
instruction in English departments and universities denies the genuine need to educate our changing society in advanced writing skills of the type that powerfully influence our economic, political and cultural life. A low value for writing instruction in any Canadian university reinforces our culture’s ignorance of the democratic benefits of an education system that empowers all students to participate in actively and thoughtfully composing (not only reading and critiquing) their scholarly, workplace, civic, and private discourse.

Departments and universities should seriously reconsider the academic and social implications of their approach to writing instruction. Those institutions and departments who devote more institutional resources and equal academic status to the integration of writing instruction across the disciplines and professions, and its consolidation in programs of study focused on writing instruction, may find that the traditional disciplines that house this movement are strengthened, not weakened, by such diversification. Resistance to advanced writing instruction is more likely to be entrenched in universities whose administrators and faculty are less aware of the richness, strength, and ancient roots of the discipline of composition studies, and less aware of how important are strong academic and professional writing programs to the growth and sustainability of postsecondary institutions and western democratic states.

The root discipline of written composition studies is rhetoric, whose general history is described well by Bizell and Herzberg (General, 1990). Rhetoric, the art of persuasion and eloquent discourse, once held the position of the “capstone” of ancient higher education when Greek and Roman democracies flourished, enabling citizens to participate in critiquing and building the arguments that constructed knowledge and society, although its association with democracy and ethics has always been contested and can never be assured. As Plato’s dialogue Gorgias pointed out, rhetoric can be used to oppress and lie, but as Plato’s dialogue Phaedrus pointed out, it can also be used for ethical persuasion and education (Bizzell and Herzberg, Plato, 1990). The revival of classical rhetoric in the Renaissance, and the combined study of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (literate learning) in the Enlightenment, along with the rise of new scientific rhetorics, were important cultural supports to the concurrent rise of economics, philosophy, and science in Western Europe from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. In literate societies like modern Canada, a liberal education including the composition, not merely the interpretation, of written and other mediated discourse is important to a healthy civic culture and the development of ethical and creative scholars and leaders.

A Case Study: The University of Alberta

Although each university is unique, a close look at the University of Alberta can help to illustrate both the traditional limitations placed on writing instruction, as well as the pressures and openness to increasing and strengthening writing instruction, both within and outside of an English department. In this English department, first-year “Literature and Composition” courses have traditionally been eight-month long surveys of post-1800 world literature in English in which students write academic essays. In 2003, English 101, the first-year course with the largest enrolment, was described thus in the “Blue Book” guide to undergraduate courses:

The goals of English 101 are to teach critical writing, critical reading, and critical thinking. Each section of English 101 will combine the study of works of literature with instruction in writing and rhetoric, with a view to enabling students from different backgrounds, and with a wide variety of interests, to express themselves better in writing and to appreciate literature. (University of Alberta, English 101, 2003-2004, p. 6)
In 2004-2005, the first-year program was revised to offer a larger variety of course subject matter, but courses still combined literature and composition. From 1990 to 2003, the descriptions for the two full-year introductory courses said that 20 percent (English 100, intended for English majors) or 30 percent (English 101) of class time “will be devoted to writing instruction” (University of Alberta, English 101, 2003-2004, p. 6). In 2003 there were “at least four essays, . . . [all student writing totalling] 6,000 words” (p. 6). Occasionally, instructors assigned up to 6 essays. In 2005, the enrolment per section was 40 students, which was above average for this type of course across Canada, and twice the enrolment CCCC recommended in writing courses (Conference, 2005). Due to this amount of student writing, the heavy reading load, the focus on literary criticism, and the large class sizes, there was little time for critical discussion and analysis of the rhetorical features of assigned writing, discussion of the structures and purposes of students’ own writing samples, or time for the process of drafting, peer response, and revision of student writing. The pressure on instructors and students was high.

Another limitation on the quality and quantity of writing instruction in these courses was the minimal training and support for graduate TAs or part-time instructors, the majority of whom were, of course, students of literature, not of composition. With the rare exception of one optional half-year credit graduate course in composition theory offered in 2000 to 12 graduate students, training in writing pedagogy and theory was neither required nor accorded full status as a regular full-credit graduate course. Nevertheless, the 1994 English Graduate Guide (University of Alberta, 1994-1995) boasted “Our graduate teaching assistants have sole charge of their classes; the course in first-year teaching we offer them has been cited as a model by other departments” (p. 34). The graduate teaching seminar in 2003 was part of a comprehensive system of 10 “proseminars.” English graduate students who were teaching English 101 were required to take a 6-hour proseminar called “Introduction to the Teaching of First-Year English.” In 2005 this was a five-day seminar offered two weeks before class, and part of one day was devoted to the teaching of writing. Two other 12-hour proseminars were offered as optional: “Theory of Pedagogy” and “Teaching Writing.”

While a graduate student in 1994 and 1997, I voluntarily attended training to teach English 101 at the University of Alberta, a very small portion of that training was devoted to “writing instruction,” “composition,” or “rhetoric,” which at that time seemed to be interpreted narrowly as grammar instruction, grading, and the “marking” of student writing. The focus of the seminar was on syllabus design and leading discussions about literature. As a result, I and my peers were led to believe writing instruction was just that simple, and since there was no way to enforce it, in my peers’ courses far less than 1/3 of class time in English 101 was actually spent “going over the common errors” in class. More intensive writing instruction techniques (such as the use of multiple drafts and peer response) were briefly mentioned as possible methods, but these were discounted as too time consuming for the instructor.

In 2004 the department’s “Equity Committee Annual Report” stated that when graduate instructors engaged in assigning multiple drafts to assist with ESL students’ writing, they were “going well beyond their formal responsibilities in the course” (University of Alberta, Equity, 2004, p. 4), which indeed would be true, given class size and the amount of teaching hours and training allotted to TAs. However, the lack of TA support and training, and this 2004 report, did little if anything to support some of the most effective methods of writing instruction for all students, ESL or not, which could have been possible if class sizes were reduced, and if one department were not solely responsible for teaching first-year literature to so many of the university’s students. Without more intensive training and supervision of graduate instructors and a reconsideration of the courses’ configuration and student enrollment, such combined composition/literature first-year English courses would continue to be severely challenged in
their official mandate to develop students’ writing skills, even if only done through 30 percent of the course.

The University of Alberta English department has had for several years at least one strong composition scholar within its full-time faculty (E. Sargent) and several other full-time faculty with significant knowledge and interest in the teaching of writing who assist the department with its various writing programs and courses and who offer significant training, advice, and resources to teachers and administrators of the first-year program. But in this department literary and creative genres are still given special treatment, whereas academic and professional writing are not. In contrast to the English 101 courses, whose size, literature emphasis, and graduate student instructors’ expertise limited composition instruction, the nine creative writing courses in the separate but departmentally-affiliated WRITE minor program had classes small enough to permit full-time faculty to coach students in literary genres of composition. The introductory poetry course WRITE 294 description (University of Alberta, Blue Book, 2003-2004) stated emphatically that it was “not a composition course,” assuming “composition” is synonymous with “basic writing” or “grammar.” Nevertheless, the course involved the composition of “a great deal” of poetry, includes “workshop” methods, and focuses on “style” and “technique” (p. 20). These courses constituted the core of a combined honours degree in creative writing. Prizes were available for the best students. In addition, there was a prerequisite portfolio submission for entry into the fiction and poetry classes, whereas none was required for the literary non-fiction classes. These courses were limited to 25 or fewer students in each section. The WRITE program description admirably gestures toward interdisciplinarity and the epistemic function of writing—“writing is how we do most of our thinking . . . from engineering to the arts;” “Skilful writers are valued in the workplace and in graduate schools,” but WRITE students “discover much more than a marketable expertise at their craft”; they are enabled to “discover new ways of seeing and revealing the world” (p. 82).

Although WRITE courses were theoretically open to anyone at the university with the prerequisites, the elite features of the program and limited enrolment ensure that both teacher and students are highly motivated and already experienced. In contrast, writers in English 101—partly due to the lower-status prose genres taught in English 101, mainly due to limited resources—were not granted an equal investment of instructors’ expertise and the workshop method.

Standing in contrast with the WRITE courses was a different kind of writing course on the bottom of the totem pole in terms of its status: “English 199: Essentials of Writing for Engineering Students” focuses on non-fiction writing (not “professional writing”), and its enrolment has been limited to the faculty of Engineering. Between 1993 and 1999 the Blue Books described the course as
designed to develop the student’s ability to write the narrative, descriptive, expository, and persuasive prose fundamental to all written communication. Instruction and practice will be integrated with the study of prose models drawn from modern essayists. A review of basic grammar will be included. (University of Alberta, 1993-2003, p. varies)

The course description altered very little between 1993-2003. The 2003 course description replaced “narrative” and “descriptive” with “analytical” and “technical,” leaving the remaining requirements exactly the same, including the grammar exam worth 10% (University of Alberta, Blue Book 2003-2004, p. 9). This revision did little to resolve the potential contradiction between the genres that engineers would write (analytical and technical reports, proposals, memos, etc.) and the genres of reading and writing often required by instructors of the course. An examination of a number of 2002-2003 English 199 syllabi demonstrated that the large
majority of instructors (i.e. Watkin, 2002; Rukavina, 2002) focused on grammar, diction, literary analysis of essay readings, the writing of “essays” and assigned reading of nonfiction literary “essays” in the modes listed above.

Did the Engineering faculty value this course? The Engineering calendar entry in 2003-2004 added a new section that allowed students to avoid English 199 and substitute it with other 3-credit or 6-credit courses in English:

Most engineering programs require a single-term (3-0-0) English course. ENGL 104, 105 and 199 are acceptable. Two-term ENGL 101 will be accepted as the English Elective plus an additional Complementary Studies Elective. Other English courses may be accepted with the approval of the Department or Faculty for qualifying year students. (University of Alberta Faculty of Engineering, Calendar 2004-2005, section 74.6.2 “English Electives”) [ENGL 104 and 105 were no longer offered in 2004-2005.]

During 2003 research interviews with a few of the university’s engineering faculty members (anonymous) one faculty member mentioned that English 199 might be of some use to ESL (English as a Second Language) writers. But he reasoned that since the majority of engineering students had such high grades in high school English, they should take a “real English course” instead. Such comments reflect the policies of the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board (CEAB), Canadian Council of Professional Engineers. The accreditation board stated in 2003 that engineers’ undergraduate programs “must also develop communication skills” (section 2). However, the same document gave little room for credit courses outside of engineering that focus primarily on written and oral language skills, since within the “complementary studies” requirement, “course content which imparts language skills cannot be used to satisfy the requirement for subject matter that deals with central issues, methodologies, and thought processes of the humanities and social sciences” (CEAB, 2004, section 2.2.4). In other words, the policy excluded from the “complementary studies” category any courses that focused on language skills and thereby limited composition and speech instruction to play a small role in courses that focus on “complementary” content. In light of this limitation, it is unsurprising that in 2003 University of Alberta Engineering leaflets and web pages for students did not mention English 199 at all, only the fact that students had to take a “complementary studies elective” chosen from a large number of disciplines (University of Alberta, About engineering, 2003). The Engineering Faculty’s 2002-2003 newsletter encouraged students to develop communication skills through extracurricular activities since “There simply isn’t enough class time, or money in the budget, to ensure that the in-class curriculum teaches every skill that will be required as a professional engineer” (University of Alberta, About engineering, 2003).

Despite the pressures mentioned above, the University of Alberta Faculty of Engineering occasionally included writing instruction in portions of courses like CivE 490: Civil Engineering Report Writing, and MecE 301: Mechanical Engineering Laboratory I. The latter course was part of a series of courses that “emphasize[d] communication through technical reports” (Fleck, 2001). Engineering instructors were provided with no training in composition instruction. In a personal interview in July 2003, Dr. Fleck expressed dissatisfaction with the small amount of technical writing instruction offered to engineering students and the poor writing skills of many graduating students (Personal Communication).

In contrast with the University of Alberta, other Canadian universities’ Engineering faculties had done far more to teach their students written and oral communications skills despite the curricular pressures of accreditation. In many universities, a writing or communication course is required as Complementary Studies, and language skills courses are
excluded only from Complementary Studies Electives. By 2003 the Engineering Writing Centre at
the University of Toronto had existed for many years, providing not only traditional Writing
Center services but also mentoring and support for Engineering instructors to teach writing in
their courses. In 2005, this Engineering Writing Center had grown into the Engineering
Communication Program that offered courses, and continued to offer writing instruction
support for Engineering Faculty. By 2005, focused writing or communications courses (not
merely complementary studies courses that required the writing of essays) were required for
Engineering students in all the twelve medical-doctoral universities surveyed above.

For undergraduate ESL writers enrolled in the University of Alberta there were no credit
courses that addressed their needs and enabled them to learn academic writing while learning
university-level course content. ESL composition courses were offered for degree credit in a
number of American universities, and in Canada at at least three universities (University of
Ottawa, Sheltered, 2005; Carleton University, SLALS, 2005; Concordia University, ESL, 2005).
Nevertheless, in most Canadian universities, as at the University of Alberta, academically
proficient and intelligent post-secondary ESL students who had fulfilled language-related
entrance requirements and were being charged double the tuition were expected to invest yet
more time and money outside of their programs of study to find the assistance they needed. The
University and English department were not unaware of some of the ethical and practical
dimensions of this problem and spent considerable effort addressing them in 2003-2004 (as
discussed at the end of this section). In 2003 the English department placed a disclaimer on their
stating that their courses were not intended for ESL writers who were still struggling with
academic English. The disclaimer referred such students to courses outside of the academic
program stream: remedial writing courses for ESL students offered through the Faculty of
Extension and Effective Writing Resources (where limited tutoring was available for a fee).

In 2003-2005 a host of non-credit writing courses from Effective Writing Resources and
University of Alberta’s continuing education faculty, called the Faculty of Extension, pointed to
the demand for writing instruction (University of Alberta, Effective, 2003). The non-credit or
certificate status of these types of courses and programs reinforced the common belief of
university faculty that writing skills should largely be learned before enrolment in a university
degree program, or concurrently outside of the four-year degree, not just after a degree (as in the
usual “continuing education” model, offering courses to working professionals who can afford
higher tuition). Not only do these courses used as pre- or informal co-requisites cost students
additional money and time but the tuition for Extension courses is usually higher per course.
The university as a whole, and any faculty that partners with the Faculty of Extension, can
generate greater revenue through “cost recovery” tuition for courses delivered outside of degree
programs through the Faculty of Extension This is yet another way in which some universities
have benefited financially from the marginalization of writing instruction. It also protects core
academic programs from enrichment and transformation through the incorporation of writing
instruction. The course offerings at the University of Alberta Faculty of Extension roughly
paralleled the variety of professional writing courses at other Canadian universities’ continuing
education departments, such as those at the University of British Columbia. In Fall 2005 at the
University of Alberta’s Faculty of Extension, 14 professional, technical, and personal writing
courses were listed, from “Essential Editing” to “Technical Writing: Procedures and Manuals”
to “Writing your Family History as a Multi-Media TV Show” (University of Alberta, Liberal
Studies, 2005).

For ESL students, the University of Alberta Faculty of Extension’s two “English for
Academic Purposes” courses were one option for fulfilling the English Language Proficiency
requirement for undergraduate admission into the University. In 2005, ESL 140 and ESL 145 were offered, “a two-part series of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses that help advanced ESL students improve their academic listening, speaking, reading and writing skills” (Faculty of Extension, English for Academic Purposes). The same program also offered three separate evening courses in “Preparing for ENGL 111: Language, Literature, and Culture,” “Writing for Academic Purposes,” and “Thesis Writing for International Students” (University of Alberta, English for Academic Purposes, 2005). While ESL students in these courses received the benefit of intense instruction adapted to their unique language needs, none of the courses were part of the student’s official university program in the way that advanced foreign language courses are. A notable exception was “ESL 500: Preparing for Graduate Studies,” a course which not only fulfilled English Language Proficiency requirements for Graduate students but also added 6 credits to their transcript once the course was passed and they were admitted into their program.

In 1999 the Effective Writing Resources office offered free tutorials, but these were free only to students enrolled in their workshops. In 2003 fees were charged for all tutorials ($20) and for “Writing for University” workshops ($100). Their writing workshop did not carry credit toward academic programs; it was considered remedial or supportive of the work of a university student, and if students were in need of further development, they could consider non-credit courses in the Faculty of Extension or consider hiring a private tutor. My two years of work as a full-time freelance tutor of ESL writers enrolled at the University of Alberta 1995-1997 demonstrated the serious need of ESL writers to learn communication skills in the context of disciplinary knowledge. Rather than enroll in any of a number of remedial non-credit writing courses separated from their programs of study, many struggling post-secondary ESL students in Edmonton preferred to hire an external freelance tutor at high hourly rates while at the same time taking a credit course involving writing assignments.

In 2005 the department of English (renamed the Department of English and Film studies) placed a report online which addressed the ethical problems with ESL writing instruction at the university (University of Alberta, Equity, 2004). The report demonstrated extensive internal research toward good ends: to assist ESL students to learn without harm to their own self-esteem, to prevent them from being tempted to cheat or plagiarize, and to encourage them become socially integrated in the culturally diverse university. The report graciously suggested ESL students should be able to take Faculty of Extension ESL courses for credit within their programs of study and at the regular tuition fee rather than the higher tuition fee which was charged at the time. It also suggested investigating other universities’ Writing Centres and online writing workshops, which, if implemented at the University of Alberta, would provide services not only to struggling ESL students but to students with more advanced proficiency in English language.

However, the English Department’s Equity report assisted ESL students mainly by sending them elsewhere for “remedial instruction” (p. 5) until they were ready for what the English department offered. The report stated that the universal requirement of 6 credits in junior English “involves the development of mechanical skill in the English language, certainly, but the central focus of first-year English is the development of critical and intellectual skills through reading, writing, speaking and listening” (p. 2). This dichotomy between mechanical and critical/intellectual skills, and the notion that the former skill is merely a by-product or tool of acquiring the latter skill, revealed a limited philosophical and pedagogical understanding of the relationship between composition and higher-level cognition. The report humbly acknowledged that “ESL training is not an area in which the Department of English can claim expertise” (p. 7), yet such a statement excluded ESL Composition and pedagogy from their program’s present and
future and from the growing expertise of their graduate student teaching assistants. It also attempted to reduce ESL composition to a matter of “training” rather than education involving critical and intellectual skills. In addition, its suggestion to raise entrance requirements for ESL students to 60% on the English 30 provincial test downloaded writing instruction as much as possible to secondary education and to Faculty of Extension ESL courses prior to admission.

In 1995-2005, despite the later signs of openness toward change and improvement, these were the symptoms of the low status of undergraduate composition studies and non-creative writing instruction at the University of Alberta: 1) the ability for most university students to avoid taking any credit courses that focused on writing instruction; 2) the marginal status of writing instruction in first-year English courses; 3) the related lack of support for any serious required graduate-level training for writing instructors; 4) the marginal status of writing instruction for students in engineering; 5) the conception that writing instruction is primarily a remedial high-school and ESL issue; 6) the price of ESL extension courses, writing tutoring and workshops in 2003; and, in ironic contrast with all the above, 7) the separate and elite status of advanced creative writing courses in the WRITE program, which by 2005 had become an official “Minor in Creative Writing” (University of Alberta, New Minor, 2005). However, given the internal research and task forces that paid attention to this topic of late, it is entirely possible that within the next decade the University of Alberta (either within or outside the department of English) may come to support academic and professional writing instruction in a stronger way within their standard degree programs.

The University of Alberta English Department’s approach to composition instruction was not representative of all English departments in Canada. Their approach was influenced not only by the sharp decrease of provincial government funding to Alberta universities during this period, but was also influenced by the primarily anglophone culture of Alberta. A quite different approach to writing instruction can be seen in the writing programs and courses provided by the University of Ottawa. The University of Ottawa’s French and English bilingual culture and its correspondingly unique understanding of English language and literature led to the development of resources for composition instruction within English and ESL credit programs. Its hospitable approach to Francophones learning in English and Anglophones learning in French resulted in a similarly hospitable approach to all other ESL/EFL learners studying in English, as well as a healthier respect for the study of written composition in a variety of faculties and programs, including the English department. In 2005 the University of Ottawa’s Faculty of Arts required a composition-only course for every anglophone student except English Majors/Honors, a course called English 1100: Workshop in Essay Writing (University of Ottawa, 2005). The English department also offered the traditional first-year courses in composition and literature, a Technical Report Writing course open to anyone (not just Engineering students) and an advanced workshop in writing—Eng 2171 Craft of Writing (University of Ottawa, 2005). The University of Ottawa was also unique among universities for providing not only a wide array of advanced ESL courses for credit, but “sheltered” ESL courses for credit alongside selected courses in political science, psychology, and sociology: “ESL Sheltered courses provide students with the possibility of earning subject matter and language credits at the same time. Students register in the appropriate section of the subject-matter course and the corresponding ESL course” (University of Ottawa, 2003). In contrast with the University of Alberta, the University of Ottawa considered composition instruction, both ESL and non-ESL, more broadly as an English department foundation for almost all students and as a helpful supplement to content-courses. As will be shown below, the University of Ottawa is only one example of many institutions widely differing from the approach of the University of Alberta toward English composition.
Beyond Alberta: Recent Developments within English Departments

Looking at the larger landscape of Canadian Universities once again, one can see that other universities have already taken up the call to strengthen writing instruction. A strong positive development between 1995 and 2005 was the willingness of some English departments to expand their notions of writing instruction and provide additional courses or programs in the area. I have already touched on the developments and state of first-year literature and composition courses in English, so my attention now focuses on upper-level courses and new programs in writing. Many writing majors or writing minors within English departments were created or strengthened in this decade. There was also a continuing increase in job postings in composition and writing instruction in English departments in Canada. In some English departments the field of rhetoric, which many compositionists see as their field's ancient roots, has been increasingly named, usually in connection with professional and technical writing.

It would take too long to describe all the developments; however, it is significant to note that most of the more visible developments (i.e., new programs) in English departments have been occurring in the smaller institutions. In May of 2005, undergraduate programs or academic units that offered majors, concentrations, minors or certificate programs in rhetoric and/or professional or technical writing could be found in at least 17 programs at 14 Canadian universities (See Appendix A), but only 10 of these programs were within English departments. In addition to standard degree programs, at least 21 professional or technical writing certificates, continuing education programs, and community college programs could be found on institutional websites (Smith, Canadian Programs, 2003).

The larger the university or college, the less likely it was that the English department housed a professional writing program. Among the twelve largest English-language universities’ English departments, the closest to a professional writing program was the University of British Columbia’s major in language (Rhetoric, Discourse, History and Structure of English Language), which included courses in linguistics and language as well as writing. But more developed professional writing programs were to be found in smaller universities such as Waterloo and Victoria. In the 1990s and early 2000s, it was widely acknowledged that one of the strongest professional writing programs within a Canadian university English department was housed at the University of Waterloo in Ontario (Department of English, University of Waterloo, 1999/2005). During the mid-nineties, the University of Waterloo’s program in Rhetoric and Professional Writing was the major source of the English department’s significant growth (Schryer, 1998).

In some cases, writing programs grew in cooperation with similar programs in other departments or faculties. For example, by 2001 another primarily undergraduate university English department, the University of Victoria’s, had developed a Professional Writing Minor in conjunction with the Department of Writing in the Faculty of Fine Arts (University of Victoria, 2001). The Fine Arts faculty’s Department of Writing had existed since 1995 (University of Victoria, 1999). In subsequent years, the Minor program separated from and complemented the English department’s Minor program. While the English program focused on web design and writing for business and government, the Fine Arts program specialized in journalism and publishing. In 2005 the English program was still just as strong as it had been in 2001, and the Fine Arts program encompassed a Major in Writing, a Minor in Professional Writing in Journalism and Publishing, a new Harvey Southam Diploma in Writing and Editing, and the Co-op program was now combined with the co-op operated in Humanities. Whereas the English
Department program offered nine Professional Writing courses beyond the first year, the Fine Arts program had more than twice as many courses as the English minor—12 in the first and second year and 37 in the third and fourth year, including courses in poetry, nonfiction, journalism, and film writing (University of Victoria, Minor, 2005; University of Victoria, Department of Writing, 2005).

In western Canada, the English department at the Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, B.C. (formerly University College of the Cariboo) had long had quite a thorough undergraduate program in rhetoric and professional writing. W. Garrett-Petts explained in 1999 that writing courses were set vertically in their curriculum so that each year their students took a writing course (Garrett-Petts, 1999). There were nine courses one could take after first-year composition with titles such as “intermediate writing,” “writing in the disciplines,” “scholarly editing,” and “rhetoric and composition theory.” The program crossed over with journalism, “so that Journalism students [could] take English courses for elective credit, and vice versa; English RPW students [could] also get credit in specified courses in philosophy, theatre, and anthropology” (Garrett-Petts, 1999, n.p.). In 2005, the program still offered four courses in rhetoric and composition theory, three courses in composition, and two courses cross-listed with Journalism (Thompson Rivers University, 2005).

English departments at some smaller universities and colleges in Eastern Canada also fortified their undergraduate course offerings in writing. Laurentian University, in Sudbury, Ontario had a Rhetoric and Media Studies (ERMS) stream in its undergraduate Honours English program that remained stable between 1999 and 2003 and grew slightly by 2005. ERMS students focused on rhetoric, film, and creative writing courses more than literature courses. As in 1999, in 2003 the required ERMS courses were a second-year “Composition and Rhetorical Theory” course, a second-year Film Foundations course, a pair of half courses in the history of rhetoric (from classical to contemporary), and a fourth-year special topic seminar course (Spoel, 1999; Laurentian University 2003). As well, students had to take a few ERMS electives, which varied from year to year. Two full-time faculty were specialists in rhetoric and film at Laurentian in 2003, and three full-time faculty in 2005 (Laurentian University 2003, 2005).

S. Drain, chair of the English department at Mount Saint Vincent University, N.S., wrote in October of 2001 of her program’s proposal for a “Certificate in Professional Writing and Rhetoric” with six courses and a co-op program (Drain, 2001). In 2003, her department’s web page proudly announced this new certificate program beginning in January, 2004, to supplement the “Rhetoric and composition” stream already in place in the B.A. Major and Honours in English (Mount Saint Vincent, 2003).

It is an interesting correlation that the top three universities in the Maclean’s 2004 rankings in the “comprehensive” category had very strong offerings of professional writing and rhetoric programs in English often alongside similar programs offered in other departments (Maclean’s, 2005):

1) The University of Waterloo (University of Waterloo, 2005),
2) Brock University (Brock, Communications Studies, 2004; Brock, English Language and Literature, 2004), and
3) The University of Victoria (University of Victoria, Department of English, 2005; University of Victoria, Department of Writing, 2005).

If more English departments in Maclean’s “medical-doctoral” and “comprehensive” universities in Canada decide to develop a professional writing or rhetoric program, we would produce more and better M.A. and Ph.D. graduates in this area who could teach in post-secondary institutions. It would be interesting to follow the developments of future years to see whether an English
department and university flourished over the same period as the growth of one or two professional writing programs.

Writing Instruction Developments Outside of English Departments

Interdisciplinary and disciplinary writing courses outside of English are often part of campus-wide trends or initiatives that are now called Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) or Writing In the Disciplines (WID). WAC is characterized by courses that explicitly teach principles of writing in a variety of faculties and a committee of WAC specialists who provide training and resources to instructors and students. However, WID is the use of students’ writing processes (not just the mere fact of assigning essays or written exams) to learn disciplinary subject matter; it is a subject-area course in which writing is seen as a mode of learning and an integral part of the research process.

As R. Graves (1994) explains, in the middle of the twentieth century, professional disciplines, particularly engineering, pushed to create writing courses that were more practical for their students, and this resulted in special arrangements with English to offer “service courses” to their disciplines (such as first-year English courses for engineers), but where these arrangements were impractical, professional disciplines created separate writing courses of their own. In contrast, WID courses do not explicitly teach writing; they use the process of student writing, peer response, and revision in their exploration of knowledge, and they habituate students to the modes of thought and expression within their discipline. R. Hunt (1998) has said that because of the interdisciplinary situation of writing in Canada “we got to WID before there was a WID” theorized by scholars (n.p.). It is often harder to discover WID courses because their methods are not always clear in course titles and descriptions, and instructors are less likely to come together to discuss their teaching methods.

The Canadian scene in 1994, as Graves describes it, was a natural outgrowth of English’s refusal to teach a form of composition that could be used for writing in other disciplines. Graves’ survey of 61 universities reveals that writing instruction was already going on largely outside of English departments, in engineering, education, law, business, and other disciplines. There were at that time “isolated writing courses in a wide variety of settings”—most of them outside of English (p. 33). However, Graves concluded that improvement in the field of writing instruction would best be initiated in an organized and structured manner within and among the disciplines, instead of proceeding in a disconnected and haphazard fashion.

For the last two decades, across Canada, writing courses in disciplines such as Engineering, Education, and Communication have only begun to be linked together by cross-disciplinary writing programs. Writing Across the Curriculum is now being formally organized by writing specialists in some universities. The border crossing involved in this endeavour often raises questions regarding the adaptability of writing experts to disciplinary knowledge and the adaptability of disciplinary instructors as they work with WAC experts to apply writing scholarship to their discipline. In September 2002, a discussion in the CASLL listserv centred on this issue. Participants acknowledged the problems inherent in “parachuting” WAC experts into a discipline, as well as the problems in letting disciplines do their own thing without the aid of composition scholarship. N. Artemeva (2002) of Carleton University argued that

the ideal would be for disciplinary professors to devise writing assignments in collaboration with a rhetoric person who should understand the demands of a particular discipline either by virtue of having a degree in this discipline or through an exposure to the discipline as a writing consultant, for example, and then respond to students’ writing as a team. I have doubts, though, about the feasibility of such a set-up. (np)
R. Irish’s essay in this volume describes one way of combining disciplinary expertise with writing expertise.

Several examples can help to illustrate the successes and challenges of these developments in the decade before 2005. At the University College of the Fraser Valley, a four-year college in British Columbia, five of fourteen full-time English faculty listed “composition” on their website as one of their interests in 2003 (Department of English, University College of the Fraser Valley, 2003). English students could choose among three streams within a literature B.A. in English, and there were four optional courses in advanced composition (academic writing) and rhetoric. In 1999 R. Schuller (1999) was trying “to get a third concentration in Applied English or Rhetoric recognized and approved” (n.p.) within her department at this institution, but in 2003 the website named only concentrations in English, North American literature, and drama (University College of the Fraser Valley, 2003). However, in contrast with the English department, this university college also had a Communications department that in 2002-2003 offered a wide range of writing courses: a basic writing course that could be adapted for military personnel, ESL students, First Nations students; an academic reading and writing course; business writing and public relations courses; web authoring and document design courses; and a variety of technical communication courses (oral communication and report writing) targeted for trades, drafting, human services, and kinesiology students (University College of the Fraser Valley, 2002).

At the University of Calgary, a unique disciplinary configuration has existed for the teaching of writing and rhetoric. By the early 1980s, the English department at the University of Calgary had renounced its interest in teaching composition, although by the turn of the century it had become renowned for its Ph.D. program in Creative Writing. The Faculty of Communication and Culture (formerly called the Faculty of General Studies), a unique interdisciplinary faculty, housed a program in communication. In 2005 the undergraduate program featured COMS 361/461, a series of two courses in spoken and written discourse and rhetoric, and COMS 363/463, courses in professional and technical communication (University of Calgary, Communications Studies, 2005). In 2005 there were six full-time staff who taught rhetoric and writing (University of Calgary, Faculty, 2005). Two new Assistant Professors with PhDs in English (Rhetoric and Composition) were hired in 2002 (T. Smith) and 2004 (A. Williams) to strengthen the rhetoric and professional communication fields within the program (See D. Brent’s contribution to this volume).

The School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies at Carleton University housed a respectable graduate school of writing theory and pedagogy that was growing in status throughout the late 90s and early 2000s. At the undergraduate level they offered courses in technical writing to engineering and computer science students, five ESL courses for credit (at several levels and for several disciplinary audiences), courses in rhetoric, discourse analysis, TESL, and a course in writing theory cross-listed with the English department. Faculty at this school spearheaded the Canadian “branch” of rhetorical genre studies, which is a significant development in contemporary Canadian writing theory (Artemeva, Rhetorical Genre Studies, 2003). Carleton professors Freedman and Medway (along with coauthors Dias and Paré from McGill) coauthored the frequently-cited book Worlds Apart (1999), which contrasts workplace writing and academic writing education. In 2003 their school had at least 6 graduate faculty members with expertise in writing pedagogy, TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language), linguistics, and rhetoric (Carleton University, 2003-2005). As a sign of their growth, in 2002 and 2003, their school advertised twice for an assistant professor’s position in composition theory and rhetoric; the 2002 ad stated the candidate would be “teaching undergraduate courses in
composition theory; and possibly developing a program in professional and technical writing” (Pringle, 2002; Artemeva, Job ad, 2003).

Elsewhere, rhetoric and professional writing courses and programs have appeared in interdisciplinary units. For example, at the University of Toronto, Mississauga campus, a program called Professional Writing and Communication (PWC) in 2002 had only three staff members and offered only a minor. This then became part of a larger unit called Institute of Communication and Culture, founded in 2003, which in 2005 was housed in a new building and administered several other communication-related programs in information technology, visual and media culture (including art and art history), and biomedical communications (University of Toronto, Institute, 2005). By 2005 the PWC program listed nine faculty members and offered a major and minor program with a wide range of courses based in rhetoric and communication theory, in genres including science writing, organizational writing, expressive writing, collaborative writing, and journalism (University of Toronto, PWC, 2005) [Editors’ note: also see Procter’s essay in this volume].

Writing program histories reveal the gains and losses experienced in the endeavour to make writing instruction a concern across the curriculum. In the 1994 Inkshed volume, *Contextual Literacy*, M. L. Craven, J. Brown, and J. Spencer (1994) described how WAC was institutionalized at York University. At York, the Writing Workshop for WAC tutoring was founded separately from the English department in 1967. This writing workshop had suffered because of its lack of departmental status and its tutors’ and administrators’ lower institutional status. The University’s introductory courses, designed in the late 1960s to orient students to a variety of university disciplines, had largely become electives and suffered from low instructor pay and the threat of loss of funding. An opportunity to unite these ailing programs came in 1989 when an Associate Dean in charge of a Critical Skills Program also became the director of the Writing Workshop. Then, in 1990 in the Faculty of Arts a university task force was created to restructure Arts courses so that they would include a critical skills component, which meant explicit instruction in writing and critical skills. In short, the various groups and entities which had already engaged in writing instruction across the curriculum were finally able to unite and share the common mandate of working with college instructors to help them integrate student writing and WID concepts into their courses (Craven *et al*, 1994). From 1987 to 2003 York had a Computer-Assisted Writing Centre, which still had to struggle against faculty apathy as well as the perception that technology is merely a way to make writing easier; it announced its closure in 2003 (York University Computer-Assisted Writing Centre, 2003). However, in 2005, the Centre for Academic Writing at York University provided credit courses within four faculties (such as “Academic writing in the Social Sciences,” “Writing History,” and “Theories of Writing”), regular and electronic tutoring, and short workshops (York University, Centre for Academic Writing, 2005). By 2003 York University had also developed a Professional Writing program that relied on cooperation with the Centre for Academic Writing and Seneca College (York University, Professional, 2003). By 2005 (as proposed to the senate in 2002), this major had become a joint Honours BA in Professional Writing, housed in the Department of English, drawing from courses in many other academic units of the university (York University, Professional, 2005; York University, 2002). [Editor’s Note: see also the essay by Sheese, Spencer, Rehner, Greenwald, and Rozendal in this volume].

Interdisciplinary or independent minors and certificate programs are fragile beginnings and may experience setbacks without sufficient resources across academic units. The University of New Brunswick Faculty of Arts at Saint John, which offered a Minor and Certificate in Communication and Professional Writing (CPW) since 2001, no longer offered these programs in the 2005-2006 academic year (University of New Brunswick, 2001, 2005). There were several
reasons for this collapse. First of all, the program was affiliated with the Writing Center rather than with an academic department such as English. The full-time Instructor positions advertised for this program in 2000 were 10-month renewable term nonacademic positions paying only $29,191--$36,496 per annum (Lee, 2000). S. Makmilen, the coordinator and a teacher in this program 2001-2003, left in 2003 to pursue graduate studies in composition at the University of British Columbia (University of New Brunswick, 2003), and R. Lee, the Director of the Writing Center, retired. In January 2005 seven CPW courses were deleted and the Theory and Practice of Technical and Professional Communication courses were kept and renamed as Humanities courses (University of New Brunswick, 2005). The narratives of struggle leading to growth at York or collapse at the University of New Brunswick reveal that unique development is possible with hard work and cooperation among academic units including English, and that institutional opposition in one area can lead to growth in another.

Looking Toward the Future

By 2003-2005, the period during which this essay was written and revised, writing instruction in Canada had changed significantly from what it was in the 1980s and 1990s in many universities and departments, while some established English departments continued to be relatively resistant to growth in writing instruction. But change, working around this localized resistance, continued and accelerated from 1995-2005. Scholars of composition found environments hospitable to growth, not just in English departments but also in other faculties and departments. However, Ph.D.-level studies in rhetoric and composition, the field which trains postsecondary scholars and teachers of composition, was still largely underdeveloped in Canada compared to the United States, where the Doctoral Consortium in Rhetoric and Composition listed over 70 member programs in 2005 (Doctoral, 2005). In 2005, only three Canadian PhD-level programs permitted a significant degree of study in rhetoric and composition due to the presence of relevant graduate courses and more than a few faculty members in the area: University of British Columbia (English, Ph.D. in English Language), University of Waterloo (PhD in English Language and Literature), and The University of Calgary (Ph.D. in Communications) (Brent, 2005). In addition, a PhD in the area was being planned at Carleton University (Artemeva, Re: Graduate, 2005). Many Canadian graduate students interested in rhetoric and composition, as I was in 1998, still chose to do their advanced degrees in the United States. Since many of these students graduated to find more hospitable academic positions in the United States, it was difficult for Canadian universities to find permanent faculty members who were trained in writing instruction and rhetoric and composition scholarship to teach courses, mentor teaching assistants, and nurture undergraduate and graduate programs in these areas. Canadian programs need to invest in graduate education in this area in order to sustain and develop undergraduate academic and professional writing instruction.

The cultural, institutional, political, and economic differences between the U.S. and Canada and differences among universities within Canada both limited and encouraged innovations in writing instruction. Canadian compositionists and colleagues interested in writing instruction should be aware of the trends and recent developments that I have described. I hope this brief historical snapshot of developments will inspire readers as well as caution them. Alongside the significant growth and interdisciplinary migration of composition courses and programs, significant challenges were posed by traditional institutional attitudes and structures that limited writing instruction within degree programs.

In terms of program development, Canadian universities currently have a large variety of Canadian models to choose among to tailor to their particular institutional circumstances. They
can create hybrid forms of communication studies departments, interdisciplinary programs, rhetoric and professional writing programs, and WAC programs, changing the face of traditional disciplines such as English, education, communication, engineering, and journalism. Scholars and administrators need to continually look outside their own institutions and across national borders as well as across disciplines for ways to improve how language is used and taught in order to understand how writing is best learned and taught. Faculty members across the university should consciously and collaboratively strengthen the teaching of writing and build up the value and support for writing instruction both within and outside of official academic credit-bearing programs and courses. While doing so, let us not primarily focus on building academic careers, powerful programs, or stronger universities, which will hopefully be important by-products, but rather let us keep in mind the ultimate goals of composition scholarship in Canada: to improve the ability and confidence of all Canadians to discover and disseminate knowledge and to participate fully and responsibly in a global society, sustaining it, critiquing it, and transforming it positively through the skillful use of written language.

References


Appendix A

Canadian University* Programs in Professional Writing** as of May 2005
*(Institutions included in Maclean’s University Categories: Medical Doctoral, Comprehensive, Primarily Undergraduate)
**Excluding most Journalism and Creative Writing programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brock University.</td>
<td>Communications, Popular Culture, and Film ²</td>
<td>Certificate and Minor in Professional Writing (with English dept courses); B.A. in Communication: Business communication stream, with co-op option.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brock University.</td>
<td>English Language and Literature ³</td>
<td>B.A. with Major in Professional Writing Certificate and Minor in Professional Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concordia University</td>
<td>English ⁴</td>
<td>Minor in Professional Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakehead University</td>
<td>English ⁵</td>
<td>Minor program in Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurentian University</td>
<td>English ⁶</td>
<td>B.A. or Honours B.A. in Rhetoric and Media Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Saint Vincent University</td>
<td>English ⁷</td>
<td>Certificate in Professional Writing &amp; Rhetoric, with co-op option</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thompson Rivers University</td>
<td>English ⁸</td>
<td>Major in Rhetoric and Professional Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of British Columbia</td>
<td>English ⁹</td>
<td>Major in English, Language Emphasis Program. (History of English, Structure of English, Rhetorical Theory, Approaches to Discourse).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Prince Edward Island</td>
<td>Faculty of Arts ¹⁰</td>
<td>University Writing Minor (Interdisciplinary program)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Université de Sherbrooke</td>
<td>Lettres et Communications</td>
<td>B.A. in English and Intercultural Studies: Professional Writing, Literature and Translation; Certificate in Professional Writing in English ¹²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Toronto: Mississauga</td>
<td>Institute of Communication and Culture ¹³</td>
<td>B.A. Major and Minor in Professional Writing and Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Toronto, Innis College</td>
<td>Faculty of Arts and Science ¹⁴</td>
<td>B.A. Minor in Writing, Rhetoric and Critical Analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 The research methods used in this chapter include analyses of scholarly publications, public university documents and websites, unstructured personal interviews via email and telephone. Some information was gathered from Canadian writing instructors’ email correspondence on the Inkshed /Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Literature (CASLL) email list. When using email list comments, authors’ consent was obtained in 2003 as a courtesy even though this email list archive was publicly accessible before summer 2005 (thereafter it required list membership and a login password). In this chapter, I focus primarily on explicit writing instruction provided in courses offered for credit in universities and university-colleges. The main time frame of this chapter is the years 1995-2005, although it occasionally covers developments before this period. An earlier version of this chapter was published in 1999 on the CASLL/Inkshed website, and a significant portion of program information as well as the argument was updated in 2003 and 2005. It should also be noted that my analyses and observations are influenced by my experience as a literature student in the University of Alberta English department 1990-95 and 97-98, Ph.D. student and TA in English (rhetoric and composition) at The Ohio State University 1998 to 2002, and as Assistant Professor (in rhetoric and professional and technical writing) in the Faculty of Communication and Culture at the University of Calgary since 2002.


