Scholarly Writing Support (SWS) at the University of Alberta: A Report by the SWS Working Group

Final Document presented to GFC March 20th, 2017

A. PREAMBLE

The University of Alberta (U of A) recognizes that academic writing is fundamental to academic success, career success, and citizenship. The U of A community needs well coordinated writing supports that are accessible, learner centred, relevant, discipline-based, responsive to diverse learner needs and collaborative. These supports will ensure that our community is future ready and has long term success. These supports should work together and should work in a manner respectful of diverse scholarly approaches.

1. Scholarly Writing Supports Review Process

Following a GFC discussion in May 2016, a decision was made to engage in a review of Scholarly Writing Supports across the U of A. The review was led by Dr. Wendy Rodgers, Deputy Provost, and Dr. Andre Costopoulos, Vice Provost and Dean of Students. The review consisted of face to face meetings and town halls and invitations for online and email submissions. The data were then reviewed by a small working group and collated into an initial report.

From August to December 2016, Drs. Rodgers and Costopoulos participated in over 25 meetings, including two town halls. The meetings included all known existing writing support units from Faculties, centres, and other academic units listed in Appendix 1 (SWS Working Group Workplan - 2016-17). Over 80 online submissions and 6 email contributions were received and carefully reviewed. Regular updates on the progress of the review were provided to Deans' Council, Vice Provosts' Council, Chairs' Council, and General Faculties Council.

2. Objectives

The overarching goals of the process are to report to the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) on the current landscape of scholarly writing support at the U of A and to make recommendations for the enhancement, optimization and coordination of all components and dimensions of writing support including service (tutoring), teaching and research.

It is key that a full spectrum of Scholarly Writing Supports be available to the University community. The process is not intended to eliminate any writing supports or to reduce overall central funding associated with writing initiatives across the University; there is no intention to reduce the academic strength or underpinnings of any writing supports; there is no intention to make support units compete with each other for funding or for clientele; there is no intention to mandate staffing requirements, delivery modalities, or other characteristics of supports provided by specific units; and there is no intention to impose a full fee or cost recovery model for all supports. There is also no intention to preserve only rudimentary or corrective writing and editing services.

3. SWS Working Group and Initial Report

The SWS Working Group was composed in December 2016 with representatives from the Students' Union, the Graduate Students' Association, the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, a Contract Academic Staff: Teaching (CAST) instructor, and Associate Deans (Academic) from two Faculties. This group was not intended to be representative of

constituency groups; rather, each member was chosen for their arm's-length perspectives, and knowledge on relevant issues across the University.

All notes, observations, and submissions from the online consultation process were reviewed by the SWS Working Group. The working group, upon thorough consideration of all this information and feedback, developed a set of principles on which to base their recommendations, which are reported here.

4. Preliminary Findings and Actions

One of the key findings of the consultation process was a general lack of awareness of the full range, number, and quality of different kinds of writing supports across the University. Toward that end, an early decision was made to re-develop a digital hub that will connect users to appropriate writing supports. This work has already begun.

A second key finding was a lack of awareness that all scholarly writing supports currently available at the U of A are staffed by fully qualified and fully trained instructors and tutors, many with very high level credentials and specialized professional accreditations.

Some of the other key messages the consultation feedback made clear included a need for a broader range of services and supports, the importance of maintaining a strong academic focus, a need to strengthen and broaden opportunities for scholarship and for training at all levels of participation (from students to professors). Finally the need for some centralized oversight and coordination was voiced by a large majority of those consulted.

B. DEFINITION OF SWS

Writing at the University must consider issues of teaching, service delivery, support provision, research, as well as the scholarly aspects of the teaching, learning, researching, and the training of instructors. Not all supports need to address all of these considerations; however, the *system* of supports across the University as a whole should address all these considerations.

The SWS Working Group defines scholarly writing supports as:

- Formal centres serving the University with financial support of a Dean, Vice Provost, Chair, and/or the Provost
- A spectrum of initiatives run out of Faculties with the financial support of a Dean or Chair (non-credit offerings, boot camps, writing clinics etc.)
- Academic offerings in the form of courses which are under the authority of Faculty Councils with oversight from the General Faculties Council (GFC)

SWS at the University of Alberta serve different audiences including students and faculty. The administrative authority is also diverse and may include the Provost, Deans, Faculty Councils, or GFC.

A comprehensive list of SWS can be found on the writing.ualberta.ca site (currently under construction).

REPORT FROM THE SWS WORKING GROUP

In developing recommendations to achieve the needs described above, the Scholarly Writing Supports Working Group used several foundational principles to describe the qualities of writing support:

1.Principle: Accessible

Writing supports should:

- Be affordable to users
- Be offered in multiple locations
- Include robust online supports or options
- Utilize multiple modalities
- Have high visibility (high community awareness)
- Provide choice of multiple learning environments
- Provide choice of multiple delivery methods

2. Principle: Learner-centered

Writing supports should focus on learning as a key outcome (as appropriate). Being learner-centred comprises:

- Active involvement of learners and educators in the development and delivery of supports
- Provision of a range of supports suitable to diverse learner stages and goals
- Appropriate preparation of instructors of all kinds
- Establishing pathways to instructor or tutor status for those who are interested

3. Principle: Relevant

Writing supports should be relevant to learners and to program learning outcomes. Writing supports should relate to current pedagogies and reflect best practices in teaching and research, or in service provision, where appropriate. Relevance of writing supports comprises the following ideas:

- Should align with each other and with current pedagogy, best practices, and research evidence, as well as Faculty or unit goals and learner needs
- Should be current and innovative
- Should develop transferable skills that will contribute to success in academia, careers, and society, and ensure learners are "future ready"
- Should include high quality of training for instructors/tutors/professional staff
- Should use evidenced-based evaluation of quality

4. Principle: Discipline Based

Writing supports need to relate to pedagogical goals and pathways of specific disciplines. The spectrum of supports across the University should include a range of activities or opportunities to support different kinds of writing such as technical reports, laboratory reports, literary pieces, critical reviews, essays, thesis writing, etc. Disciplinary attributes include:

- Context specificity
- Audience appropriateness

- Credibility of instruction
- Integration of instruction or collaboration with disciplinary activities

5. Principle: Responsive to Diverse Learner Needs

Writing supports are sought out by individual learners and groups of learners under different circumstances. The range of supports available should (differentially) respond to circumstances such as urgency, specificity, breadth and depth of need. There should be mechanisms for reviews of services to assess learner responsiveness. Being responsive should take into consideration:

- Timeliness
- Purpose of the writing
- Topic of the writing
- Environment and method of delivery:
    - Delivery environments might include: credit/non-credit courses (stand-alone or integrated into the curriculum); workshops; drop-in sessions; fee-for-service editing; bootcamps; etc.
    - Delivery methods might include: one-on-one tutoring or coaching from peers or professionals; large group classes; seminar-type sessions; delayed editing and feedback; real-time editing and feedback; on-line tutorials; study-hall sessions; etc.

6. Principle: Collaborative

Writing supports across the University need to be collaborative. Support providers and associated staff, including professors, tutors, and professional coaches, must work together to ensure a spectrum of coordinated supports are available, and to support ongoing strength of an entire system. Collaboration should include the following:

- Coordination of relevant disciplinary knowledge
- Demonstrated respect for different perspectives and methods
- Referring users to alternative supports to better meet their needs
- Contributing to the community of writing at the University in meaningful ways

7. Principle: Centrally Coordinated

The Office of the Provost, including the Vice-Provost and Dean of Students and the Vice-Provost and Dean of FGSR, have an important role to play in supports across the University. They have particular insights into the needs and opportunities for the full spectrum of undergraduate and graduate students. Through outreach and support of Deans and Faculties in their work to provide writing supports, the Office of the Provost can help to ensure the participation of relevant disciplinary leaders in the development and delivery of writing supports in alignment with the principles listed above. Finally, together with the Deans of Students and FGSR, the Office of the Provost can contribute and coordinate funding and funding distribution to writing supports across the University in fair and equitable ways, and can ensure accountability. Central coordination should include:

- Creating communications systems across the University
- Creating a coordinating body to support ongoing consideration and application of these SWS principles
- Coordination and allocation of funding
- Fairness and equity in allocation of funds as well as in remuneration of tutors and

instructors

8. Principle: **Funding & Sustainability**

Accepting the principle that writing supports should be accessible to all, it must also be acknowledged that even if they are provided with no fee to the user, the provision of supports is not "free". A determination of which supports should be subsidized and offered without a fee and which should be cost-recovery needs to be made. Overall, the spectrum of writing supports must be sustainable with costs recovered when appropriate and when possible, but should, in general, not aspire to be revenue generating. In addition, supports must be sustainable, including the training of staff and tutors. Consideration of sustainability includes the following:

- What should be free to the user?
- What should be cost-recovery?
- What do students need most/least?
- How should central funding be allocated?
- What succession plans are in place to sustain each writing support?
- What training processes and paths to 'tutor' positions are in place to ensure sustainable access to these positions and a sustainable supply of tutors to writing supports?
- How are the principles of equity and quality applied to the allocation of funding and other resources?
- Generally, for cost recovery, costs should start low as possible, and should increase with increased use of supports or with increased depth of service
- Funding should be sustainable across the system - permitting some supports to be consistently free to the user and others to have associated fees

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Scholarly Writing Supports Working Group offers the following recommendations to enhance, optimize and coordinate writing supports in all of its components and dimensions across the institution:

1. **A better communication strategy** is needed to ensure the University community is aware of the entire range of writing supports available. Therefore, the digital hub is being re-developed to better represent the writing community and to describe all Scholarly Writing Supports.

2. **The University Writing Committee (UWC) should be re-invigorated** with a stronger terms of reference and a mandate to provide advice to the Provost on SWS. The following actions will equip UWC to support the Provost:

- UWC should have a specific and formal reporting structure through to the Office of the Provost and be chaired by a Provost's Representative
- UWC`s mandate should include the review of existing supports taking into account funding levels, user statistics, user satisfaction, and other indicators aligned with the principles listed above
- UWC should have the mandate to advise the Provost on standards, protocols, and performance measures around scholarly writing support
- UWC membership should be reviewed and guidelines established for a composition that will include representation from people associated with the supports balanced with equal numbers of people not specifically affiliated with supports
- UWC should be consultative
- UWC may provide advice to a Dean or any other internal stakeholder or centre
- UWC should work to forge relationships among stakeholders involved in writing supports to build a sense of community and to encourage coordination

3. SWS should be coordinated centrally and together with the Office of the Provost monitor the principles set out in this report in order to ensure scholarly writing support is accessible

- Current services and supports should be reviewed by UWC as stated above, with a goal of ensuring the principles proposed here are equitably and fairly applied to all existing supports. Where applicable, new supports for writing could be established according to the principles set out in this report.
- The intent is that the range of supports should be advised by UWC such that sessions are regularly available in all the various physical areas of the University at predictable times and places. Spaces should be available where members of the community can work on their writing projects, support each other, and have access to a range of supports. It is recognized that not all supports can be available at all times.
- Broader integration of writing supports into curricula is recommended. The Scholarly Writing Supports Working Group recommends expanding the mandate of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), such that it can support faculty members to include disciplinary specific writing into the curriculum, to be coordinated at the program (or unit) level. A recognition system could be built by Faculties and Units (e.g., Departments) to encourage and recognize individual faculty members and units for including efficient and effective writing assignments appropriately across their courses.
- The Scholarly Writing Supports Working Group recommends the development of writing certificates. These might be considered first at the graduate level, and might also build upon the WAC activities to develop discipline specific certificates that emphasize either

writing capabilities in particular domains (e.g., scientific writing), or writing tutoring (e.g., through a combination of courses, directed study or research experiences, and evaluated practical experiences).

RECOMMENDATIONS: ADMINISTRATIVE AND OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE OF SCHOLARLY WRITING SUPPORTS

The SWS Working Group looked specifically at the administrative and operational structure of scholarly writing supports and recommends that the following principles be followed:

1. Each SWS must have an administrative "home" in an academic unit (a Faculty or other unit within the Vice-President (Academic) portfolio). This "home" should be determined by the sources of funding and/or, if applicable, through an agreement between a Dean(s) or other heads of Academic Units and the Provost.

2. Each SWS must have a defined Terms of Reference and Mandate that respects the context of other SWS. The authority to approve the mandate of a SWS rests with the Dean and/or Academic Unit Head and Provost, including plans for staffing, staff training, type of supports to be provided, nature of teaching, learning, or research focus and necessity to collaborate with other units (e.g., CTL, WAC, REO, RSO, etc). Advice on the mandate and the type of supports to be provided should be sought from UWC who will work to maintain a balance of supports across the institution and integrity of principles listed here.

3. Each SWS should have a sustainability plan explicitly defining the associated costs of the SWS to the administrative unit noting whether they have off-setting funding sources. Any plans for fees-for-service or cost recovery SWS should be made explicit. The sustainability plan should be approved by a Dean, Academic Administrator, and/or Provost. The Dean and/or Provost may seek advice from UWC on sustainability including proposed SWS fee structures, if applicable.

4. Each SWS should provide an annual report on usage, costs, innovations, etc. to the UWC who will review the reports and provide advice to the Provost. UWC can make strategic or system wide recommendations to the Provost for each SWS.

5.The Dean, Unit Administrative Head, and/or Provost holds final authority for administrative decisions regarding SWS including creation, movement, or dissolution of SWS. While authority rests with the Provost and/or Dean to make the administrative decisions, advice may be sought from a variety of stakeholders including the UWC.

APPENDIX 1: SWS Working Group Workplan - 2016-17

Date	Tasks	Notes
GFC May 30, 2016 – Question Period		
August 2016		PHASE 1 –Aug – Dec 2016
10	Organizing meeting	W. Rodgers (WR), A. Costopoulos (AC), K. Peters, C. Watt
16	WR and AC met with Dean Cormack	
22	Provost and WR met with L. Moussu, C4W Director	WR and AC plan to attend a C4W staff meeting on Oct 3
24	Deans Only Deans' Council (Stakeholder)	WR and AC presented the plan and proposal for a working group to Deans. Deans were asked to identify entities/groups within their faculties providing scholarly writing support
29	VPC	WR and AC presented an update and statement of intention
An online portal for submission of comments was created and included a repository for consultation feedback/comments – similar to that created for Dean Selection consultation. K. Peters confirmed that the **portal opened immediately after September 26 GFC.** https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/164YSXfIVRt-x_gosnBaSDJDO7CCLOBm4kpslsLgISuQ/edit#gid=1181308306 - Closed		
September 2016 –scheduling of stakeholder consultations (W. Rodgers and A. Costopoulos hosted and attended all consultations)		
23 Sep 4–5 PM	University Writing Committee	Allen Ball and members of UWC 2-725 Students Union Building (SUB) 4 to 5 PM - **confirmed**
Sept 26 2-4 PM	GFC Briefing – S. Dew	Progress update since May 30 GFC) Council Chamber, 2 to 4 PM – **confirmed**
October 2016		
Oct 3 11-11:30 AM	Centre for Writers (C4W) Staff Meeting	Room 1-42 Assiniboia Hall, 11- 11:30 AM (meeting runs to 11:50 AM) - **confirmed**
Oct 6 3:30 – 4:30 PM	SU Executive Team	SUB – 2-900 SU Boardroom.
Oct 11 10 – 11 AM	CTL - S. Forgie, Roger Graves and new CTL Director, Janice Miller-Young	Boardroom 5-02 Cameron Library in CTL, 10- 11 AM - **confirmed**
Oct 12 10 -11AM	GSA Executive Team	1-49 Triffo Hall – **Confirmed** – 10 – 11 AM
Oct 18 3-4 PM	English Language School (Faculty of Extension)	Jennifer Foote, Donald Mason, Martin Guardado – **confirmed** – **2-237 Enterprise Square** 3 to 4 PM
Oct 20 9-10 AM	Student Success - Wendy Doughty, Stephen Kuntz – and Rob Desjardins, Writing Advisor for Graduate Students in the Student Success Centre – 9-10AM	Room 2-36A booked – **confirmed –**
Oct 20 3-4 PM	**Townhall #1 -** Distribution of memo/invitation to Deans, Directors, Chairs, Academic Staff, Non-Academic Staff – AND STUDENTS	**ECHA 2-150 - confirmed**

October 21 9-10 AM	**Townhall #2** Distribution of memo/invitation to Deans, Directors, Chairs, Academic Staff, Non-Academic Staff – AND STUDENTS	**Humanities Centre – L1 - confirmed**
October 24 10 AM	Update to VPC	AC and WR
October 31 3:30 – 4:30	UAI Doug Weir and Kumarie Achaibar-Morrison, Assoc Dir/Intl Student Services (UAI works closely with C4W and to a lesser degree with Student Success. UAI provides space at Telus for C4W tutors, and provides some funding for C4W	Note: UAI works closely with C4W and to a lesser degree with Student Success. UAI provides space at Telus for C4W tutors, and provides some funding for C4W tutors. UG intl students are served, and C4W is into a second year of a pilot for intl grad student writing support) **Room 2-35B Telus**
November 2016		
Nov 7 11 – 12 Noon	Kathleen DeLong and Trish – Libraries	**2-36A SAB confirmed**
Nov 15 10 am to 12 Noon	PACC – Room 2-31 SAB (SD in Chair)	**Confirmed**
Nov 21 2 – 4 PM	GFC Update	
Nov 23 10:30 AM - 1:30 PM	**Townhall #3 Augustana Writing Centre** 9:45 am meeting with A. Berger –W. Rodgers, A. Costopoulos, K. Peters (travel to Augustana), and D. Herman (joined by conf call) 11:30 am lunch 12:15 pm Town Hall, Wahkohtowin Lodge Classroom, F L1-055	**Confirmed -** Dean Berger: Dr. Janet Wesselius, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Associate Dean Teaching, Craig Peterson, and Dr. Sandra Rein, Acting Associate Dean Research (among others)
Nov 25 1-3 PM	**Townhall #4 CSJ Bilingual Writing Centre** – TOWN HALL and Meeting with Dean Mocquais and Sheena Wilson	1:00 - 2:00 PM: **Town Hall in 3-04 Lacerte Pavilion** 2:00 - 3:00 PM: Meeting with Dean Mocquais and Sheena Wilson, Assist Prof and Director of BWC (Bilingual Writing Centre), **Room 2-51 cMahon**
End of Nov/Dec	Work began on establishing working group (to begin work in December-2016) following initial round of consultation with groups. Provost consulted. Terms of Reference drafted.	Post-consultation WR and AC to establish and co-chair a small, time-limited working group that will be advisory to the Provost.
December 2016		
Dec 5 4 – 5 PM	Katharine Moore (VPR SAO), and Susan Hamilton, AVP (Research)	Topic: grant writing support. **Confirmed**
Dec 12 8:30 AM	Meeting with J. Chesney, J. Tam, WR and AC (if available) re. online portal	First meeting to discuss online portal to replace http://www.writing.ualberta.ca/
Dec 20 10 – 12 Noon	PACC (Provost's Advisory Council of Chairs)	
January 2017 – Working Group Meetings begin		
January 2017 – SWS Working Group		PHASE 2 –Jan-Feb 2017
Jan 4	Statutory Deans' Council Update	2-31 SAB - confirmed
Jan 5 Jan 20 Jan 24 Jan 27 Jan 31	• Thursday, January 5, 2017 from 10:00 - 11:00 am (Room 2-36A SAB) • Friday, January 20, 2017 from 11:00 - 12:00 noon (Room 2-36A SAB) • Tuesday, January 24, 2017 from 3:00 - 4:00 pm (Room 2-36A SAB) • Friday, January 27, 2017 from 1:00 - 2:00 pm (Room 2-36A SAB) • Tuesday, January 31, 2017 from 1:00 – 2:00 pm (Room	All dates confirmed in AC and WR calendars Meeting group members confirmed: H. Zwicker (J. Nychka, Delegate) M. Banister (SU) A. Talaei (GSA) J. Causgrove Dunn K. Mundel

	2-36A SAB) (regrets from AC –WR ok)	R. Jensen
February 2017		
Feb 8 Feb 27	• Wednesday, February 8, 2017 from 10 am to 11 am (Room 2-36A SAB) • Monday, February 27, 2017 from 11 am to 12 Noon (Room 2-36A SAB)	
	Working group to begin writing final report	
March 2017		<mark>PHASE 3 –March 2017</mark>
March 1	• Submission of final report to the Provost • Post final SWS report to the Provost on the Provost's wegpage • Invitations sent for townhalls – to include same invitees as per townhalls 1 and 2	
March 1	Opening of new online repository for SWS at the UofA	Date to be determined
March 7 March 8	**Townhalls 5 and 6 -** confirmed in AC/WR Calendars SWS Working Group members to attend as schedules permit	Tuesday, March 7th @ 11:00 AM Wednesday, March 8th @ 9:00 AM Council Chamber booking confirmed for both by rocentralbooking
March 20	Final Report to GFC	