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**SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The Senate should request all academic units of the University to develop a plan to design, implement and monitor a writing enhancement policy, whether it be a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), or some other, approach.

2. All units should report to Senate within one year outlining their plans and indicating who will be responsible for carrying them out.

3. A faculty position of Coordinator for the Teaching of Writing should be created. The position should be based in Academic Services and could be staffed by cross-appointment of an existing faculty member or by a newly hired person.

4. The University should establish a set of writing expectations for students throughout the University. These should be promulgated in the University Calendar.

5. Each Faculty or School should consider setting a minimum standard of writing as part of its admission requirements, or alternatively, set in place a process by which students who enter without meeting such standards will have reached an acceptable level of writing competence before graduating.

6. Instructors and administrators in all units should, wherever feasible, emphasize the importance of writing skills and assign some proportion of course grades for writing at all levels.

7. Students should be informed that good writing is expected in their courses and is a legitimate object of grading in all disciplines. This should be emphasized in the...
Calendar, in brochures from the Writing Centre, and in the course descriptions and grading proposals given to students at the beginning of each course.

8. Each academic unit should assign its teaching in such a way that instructors who undertake writing courses can do so without an increase in workload. This might be achieved by tightly limiting enrolment in these courses (e.g., to 35) or by assigning an adequate number of trained teaching assistants in larger classes.

9. Faculty members should be encouraged not only to explicitly include writing competence in their grading, but to actively and explicitly instruct students in writing, especially in the writing conventions of their own discipline.

10. Administrators should make it clear that student complaints or low teaching evaluations which can be shown to be due to the instructor enforcing writing standards will not affect a Faculty Members promotion or tenure. (If other measures proposed in these recommendations are successful and a high standard of writing becomes part of University culture, instructors who actively assist students in this area can expect their teaching evaluations to rise, not fall.)

11. Where faculty members wish to include their competence in teaching writing in their Teaching Dossier, they should be encouraged to do so.

12. Students in every Faculty and School should be required to take a writing course in their first semester at Memorial. This writing course might be in any discipline, not necessarily in English. At the end of the course, students who achieve some minimum standard, to be set by each Faculty and School, would be exempted from some part of future writing requirements within the Academic Unit. Students who do very poorly should be required to take extra remedial courses in writing, probably non-credit courses.

13. An exit examination for writing competence should NOT be instituted.

14. The University should insist that the Provincial Department of Education improve the writing abilities of students who graduate from high school. In particular, the need for good writing in all subject areas, not only Language Arts, should be emphasized.

15. Memorial University's Faculty of Education should be asked to review its program to ensure that future school teachers understand the importance of, and the methods for teaching, good writing.
16. The University should establish a formal line of communication about writing with the NLTA. A University representative (preferably the Writing Coordinator, if one is appointed) should be encouraged to seek a seat on the NLTA Special Interest Council on English.

17. The Writing Centre's mandate should be expanded to include, in cooperation with Academic Services, the implementation of a program to inform faculty members, especially those teaching designated writing courses, about the most recent pedagogical techniques in the teaching of writing.

18. Because some students and faculty perceive the Writing Centre as distant and stigmatizing, and not focused on their own disciplinary needs, the Writing Centre should consider a decentralized structure, with branches within various Faculties and Schools. The Centre should also expand its present policy of recruiting tutors familiar with the needs of each Faculty or School.

19. The Writing Centre should be funded to maintain a library of books, software and other materials helpful for improving the teaching of writing.

20. Graduate students with the appropriate writing skills should be granted teaching assistantships to teach and correct writing, even in classes outside their home departments, when the instructor lacks the time or expertise for such teaching and correcting.

21. The Graduate Program in Teaching should explicitly incorporate a unit on techniques for the teaching of writing.

MANDATE AND MEMBERS

The Senate established an ad hoc committee on 1994-04-12 and directed it to recommend to Senate academic and administrative policies and practices aimed at improving the written communication skills of students within the University, both at the
graduate and undergraduate levels.

On 1994-10-11, the Senate, on the recommendation of its Committee on Committees, specified the terms of reference more precisely:

1. Determine faculty members' perceived difficulties with student writing;

2. Determine students' perceived difficulties with writing;

3. Determine the need for a university-wide policy on writing;

4. If such a need exists, recommend a policy or alternative policies for consideration;

5. Include an implementation plan.

Members were appointed from the Faculties of Arts, Science, Engineering, Medicine, Nursing and Business Administration and from the CSU. Dr. Ivan Emke, from Sir Wilfred Grenfell College was also appointed and has been kept informed of the Committees proceedings by e-mail. The GSU was asked to name a representative, but never responded. During the course of the Committee's work, Dr. Penny Hansen (Medicine), Ms. Donna Moralejo (Nursing) and Dr. Anne Gregory (Business Administration) took sabbatical or other leave and resigned from the Committee. The Committee took the liberty of coopting Ms. Kathryn Hustins (Nursing) and Dr. Sharon Buehler (Medicine) as replacements, but Dr. Buehler later took leave herself. Dr. Bernice Schrank (English) was active with the Committee for a brief period. The CSU representative, Ms. Sherry Avery, lost her seat on the Council and so resigned from the Committee. Despite a request from the Committee, no replacement was appointed. The Committee acknowledges the contributions made to its work by all of these members. The following members served actively throughout the life of the Committee:

Dr. L. Faith Balisch Department of English

Dr. C. Robert Lucas Department of Chemistry

Dr. James J. Sharp Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science

Dr. David L. Thompson Department of Philosophy (Chair)

The Committee thanks Mr. Ron Loder, who conducted the Survey of Students, and Ms. Donna Hardy of the Higher Education Assessment and Research Unit and Prof. Mark Graesser who advised us on the Survey. Thanks are also made to those who contributed their time and expertise to the "Self-education" workshop for the Committee in early 1995: among others, Dr. Phyllis Artiss (English), Dr. Barrie Barrell (Education), Prof.
Elizabeth McGrath (English), Dr. Catherine Penney (Psychology), and Mr. Ed Jones (Provincial Department of Education).

The Committee also appreciates the contributions made by the many faculty members throughout the University who took the time to discuss the teaching of writing with the Committee.

**METHODOLOGY**

The Committee met fairly regularly, usually weekly, since it was first formed in December 1994. It has consulted widely throughout the University, with faculty, with students, with potential employers and with others in the educational system both in the Province and throughout Canada. Because not all members of the Committee considered themselves experts on the teaching of writing, the Committee consulted informally with those who have such expertise.

Various advertisements were placed (Gazette, Muse) to alert the University community to the existence of the Committee and to solicit comment, but no responses resulted. A survey of students, undertaken by questionnaire, was organized to obtain student viewpoints. A summary of the results is provided. To obtain information from faculty and to stimulate discussion among them, the Committee offered to meet with all academic units on campus. Most units accepted the offer and did arrange for some faculty members in the unit to spend an hour discussing problems with representatives of the Committee. Details of academic units visited and the questions asked are given in Appendix II. Prior to these meetings, letters were sent to all Heads, Deans and Directors asking if their units had any policies on writing.

All Canadian universities were asked for their experience with the teaching of writing. The results are presented and a summary of replies is given in Appendix III. Letters were also sent to employers of MUN graduates because it was considered important to have some indication of the ability of students who had successfully completed an undergraduate degree. A list of employers approached and copies of the letters sent are given in Appendix VI.

In February 1995, the Committee ran a mini-workshop organized with the assistance of the Office of the Vice President (Academic). The workshop was intended to pull together people with some expertise in the area and a variety of informal presentations were provided. Partly as a result of this workshop, but also because of various comments received from the university community, the Committee met with the Executive of the English Special Interest Council of the NLTA and with representatives of the Department of Education of the Provincial Government.
The Committee’s primary concern was not so much with the technicalities of grammar, spelling and punctuation as with students’ ability to express their ideas in a logical, coherent and analytic fashion. The Committee also worked on the understanding that its mandate was to consider problems of writing within the various disciplines of the University and methods of remedying these problems. The Committee did not consider the implications of writing as a discipline in its own right and has therefore not looked into the possibility of establishing a unit or group of faculty devoted to composition and rhetoric, as has been done at some other universities in North America. Thus, when reference is made in this report to a “writing course,” it should be understood that this refers to a course given in an academic discipline in which there is some concentration on writing in the context of that discipline.

Throughout its work, the Committee focused on the policies that the Senate might wish to promulgate, rather than on specific pedagogical methods which were considered to be beyond the competence of the Committee as a whole.

II RESULTS

SURVEY OF STUDENTS - SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Committee's mandate included determining the perceptions of students about the teaching of writing. With advice from Prof. M.W. Graesser and the Higher Education Assessment and Research Unit, the Committee designed a questionnaire and hired a graduate student, Mr. R. Loder, to administer and analyze it. There were 727 responses, (a response rate of 54%), well distributed over faculties and majors, years of study, grade levels, ages, genders, undergraduate, graduating and graduate students. The questionnaire used for the survey is attached as Appendix I. Since the complete results of the survey are 150 pages long, they are not attached to this report but are available from the Secretary of the Senate or from the Chair of the Committee (davidt@morgan.ucs.mun.ca). This section provides a summary and discussion of the results.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The vast majority of students consider writing to be very important. About three-quarters of them perceive themselves to write well, while less than 4% think they are poor writers.
Roughly two-thirds consider that they wrote well on entering university, and 78% believe their writing improved while at Memorial, yet only 28% attribute that improvement to "help" they received while here. This last result may be unreliable, due to the phrasing of the question (See question #8d).

Of those who take English courses, around 75% find them helpful for learning to write. Professors' instructions and comments are seen as valuable (75-80%). Approximately 65% of students report "other help" from professors, though 32% are disappointed with the results. Slightly more turn to fellow students for help and report 90% satisfaction. Over half look outside Memorial for help (parents, former teachers) and are pleased 95% of the time. A few try the Writing Centre (14%) or the Counselling Centre (9%) with a 71% and 53% satisfaction rate, respectively. Over 72% of students feel that marks should be assigned for the quality of writing in courses. Almost 20% propose a mandatory grammar course in the first year and want clearer expectations and more comments from professors. Ten percent call for improved High School grammar courses.

Generally, students seem to think that they write well, that Memorial is not doing too bad a job, but that there is considerable room for improvement in our teaching of writing.

**DISCUSSION OF STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS**

Overall, the level of satisfaction with writing ability increases as students practise, age, and receive more education. Students in professional schools (Business, Education and Engineering) express more confidence in their writing abilities than do those in the Arts and Science Faculties. (Only the five faculties mentioned were compared as the number of respondents from other faculties was not sufficient to permit comparisons.) Furthermore, students in the professional schools perceive writing as being more closely linked to success than do students in the Arts and Science Faculties. The Engineering Faculty has the highest percentage of respondents who believe that writing is important to their success yet it has the lowest percentage of respondents who believe that their writing skills have improved during their studies at MUN. Also, nearly 50 percent of respondents in the Engineering Faculty are opposed to assigning marks for the quality of writing in courses. The Arts and Education Faculties' respondents do the most writing, both inside and outside of their courses. Respondents in the Engineering and Science Faculties reported the lowest level of reading and writing.

Consistent with these levels of performance are the respondents' opinions as to whether they received a lot of help which improved their reading skills. Students in the Engineering and Science Faculties report receiving the least amount of assistance to improve their reading skills while students in the Arts and Business Faculties report receiving more help which improved their reading skills.
Females report a higher level of confidence in their writing abilities than do male respondents. Moreover, females perceive writing to be more important to their success in life than do males. Females do more writing than males and have a more favourable response to having marks assigned for the quality of writing in courses. Males report doing a slightly higher level of reading as part of their course work than do females and more males report that their reading skills have improved during their studies at Memorial. Females report a slightly higher level of reading upon their arrival at Memorial.

Writing ability of the respondents increases as they become older, as does the amount of reading and writing done inside and outside courses. Not surprisingly, therefore, the highest level of support for assigning marks for the quality of writing in courses is found among respondents aged 26 and older, while respondents aged 17 to 21 show the lowest level of support. Similarly, as the respondents' year in university increases, so does the perceived quality of their writing and their support for assigning marks for quality of writing in courses.

The respondents' confidence in their writing abilities increases as their cumulative grade average rises. Furthermore, the higher a respondent's cumulative grade average, the more likely they are to support assigning marks for quality of writing in courses. In addition, individuals who do a lot of reading have higher marks than those who read less.

Among respondents who feel that they do a lot of writing as part of their course work, 85.2% feel that their writing skills improved while at Memorial. However, of the respondents who "Disagreed" or "Strongly Disagreed" that they did a lot of writing as part of their course work, only 66.2% feel that their writing improved while at Memorial. This 19.0% difference suggests that students' confidence in their writing skills increases with the amount of writing respondents do as part of their course work.

Undergraduates do the least amount of writing outside their course work while graduate students who received their undergraduate degree at Memorial, perform the largest amount. In addition, graduate students who received their undergraduate degree at Memorial have a slightly higher level of confidence in their writing abilities than do graduate students who received their undergraduate degree at another university.

When participants were asked the extent to which a variety of services provided by Memorial University of Newfoundland helped to improve their writing skills, a pattern of responses became evident. Although a large percentage of students "Never Used" some services, those that did use the services reported the highest level of improvement in their writing skills.
When asked to take the initiative and make their own suggestions as to how the quality of writing might be improved at Memorial, 395 students failed to provide a response; 332 provided one response; 123 provided two; 23 gave three and 3 provided four responses for a total of 659 responses from 481 people. The following table summarizes these suggestions.

### Student Survey Suggestions in Order of Frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUGGESTIONS</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institute a mandatory grammar course, or make it a large component of a course, in first year.</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear expectations from professors and more comments on papers when they are returned.</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve high school English grammar courses.</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marks should be assigned for written composition in a course.</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professors should be more approachable and interested.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer courses in citation forms, such as APA, MLA and a technical writing course for Engineers.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that professors can write and speak English well.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that there is uniform marking of grammar.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make first year English more relevant--get rid of the poetry component.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrance test for English, similar to the Math Skills inventory.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve the quality and quantity of assistance at the Writing Centre.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase the number of English grammar courses required for a degree.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short periodic assignments that concentrate on grammar quality.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase the reading content of courses.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let first year students do a draft of a paper.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More advertising of the Academic and Writing Centres.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make computer use mandatory for written assignments.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage more group work in writing.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In English, focus on the quality of the assignments.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The allocation of marks in first year English courses should be more generous.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage students to get others to read their papers.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Improve writing in the Math and Science Disciplines. 1 0.2
Initiate a program of on-line tutors for writing. 1 0.2
Have the two required English courses taught by the same professor so that progress can be monitored. 1 0.2
Have a smaller number of students in each class. 1 0.2
Stop reducing the number of English 1110, 2010, and 2020 slots. 1 0.2
Have uniform writing styles throughout MUN. 1 0.2
Distribute a handout on how to correctly do a paper. 1 0.2
Let students revise papers. 1 0.2
Total 481 100.0 %

VISITS TO ACADEMIC UNITS

The Committee determined that visiting academic units to discuss students' writing in the University would serve several purposes. These visits would provide the various units with an opportunity to discuss writing; they would raise consciousness about the expectations of students' writing on exams and assignments in that unit; they would offer the representatives of the writing committee insight into the nature of those courses in each unit which offer students any kind of instruction in academic writing, and would supply some information about the nature of this instruction; and they would reveal the range of views about writing held within the unit. On the whole, these expectations were realized.

The Head of each academic unit at the University received a letter in which the Committee explained its purpose and asked the Head to arrange an opportunity to discuss writing with members of the unit. Attached to this letter was a brief background document and a list of questions to be discussed. (Copies of both can be found in Appendix II.) As a rule, two members of the Committee were present at each meeting, one to lead the discussion, the other to take notes. In Arts and Science visits were made to individual departments; in the Professional Schools visits were made to the School as a whole or to one of its committees. The timing of such visits was left to the individual units and whichever Committee members were available at the requested time attended the meeting. Notes were kept for each meeting, and distributed to and discussed by the members of the Committee. Not all units in the University responded to the letter, but all -- except one -- who did respond asked for a meeting with representatives of the Committee. A list of units visited can be found in Appendix II.

Each visit began with a discussion of the questions that all faculty in the unit had been asked to address. (See Appendix II.) Comments made in the meetings in response to these questions were often wide ranging with considerable consensus.
EXPECTATIONS

Expectations from the majority of academic units were that students should write standard English and understand basic grammar and mechanics. They should have mastered the basics of essay writing, i.e., they should be able to organize their material into coherent paragraphs, and marshal arguments logically and clearly. No fewer than eight departments commented on problems of plagiarism and "scissors and paste" writing. Often these problems were attributed to a lack of clarity about standards and expectations either within the unit or in the University as a whole.

PERCEIVED WRITING DIFFICULTIES

All academic units visited responded that there were problems with student writing. Some departments estimated that as high as 80% of the students do not write well.

Problems in the first and second years were perceived as worse than those in later years, although some units felt there was little improvement. One unit indicated that student writing does not actually improve in the course of the degree programme, and that students simply master a variety of coping techniques to mask their inadequate reading and writing skills.

All units complained that the school system was not teaching students to write well, and that the approach taken to writing in the school system was largely responsible for students' dismissive attitude to writing skills.

Many units reported that students do not read or comprehend as well as they should, and that these poor reading skills affect their ability to write well.

All units felt the school system had not made students aware of the importance of writing well in all subjects. At least 50% of the units responded that students did not believe writing well is important. They believe essays and exams should be graded without regard to presentation. Several units indicated that professors who grade for writing as well as content believe that they receive lower ratings on course evaluations.

Most units have one or more courses, usually at third or fourth year, which offer majors instruction in writing in the particular discipline. The consensus is that it is the unit's responsibility to teach the student the specific skills needed for the discipline, but not basic writing skills, per se. Furthermore, not all faculty are willing or feel competent to teach such courses.

RESPONSIBILITY

The two most frequent responses to the question of who is responsible for student writing were: (a) Students should be competent before they come to university and so the primary
responsibility lies with the schools; or (b) it is the responsibility of everyone in the University. None of the academic units suggested that this was primarily or wholly the responsibility of either the English department or the Writing Centre.

(a) Students should be competent before they come to University:

A number of units suggested that the current approach to teaching reading and writing throughout the school system was inadequate and that there should be either entrance testing or competency testing prior to graduation to guarantee a minimum level of literacy. They further remarked that entrance testing would convey the University's concern that the high schools should do more to improve student writing.

(b) The University should assume responsibility:

Most units felt that the University should take some responsibility for teaching students to write well. Some units asserted that there should be compulsory first year composition courses, while others were in favour of some version of a Writing across the Curriculum programme. Three factors were seen as mitigating against the latter: class size, increasing use of multiple choice exams and the attitude of students to writing problems. The current system discourages instructors from evaluating the quality of student writing by penalizing instructors who undertake to grade for more than content. In the meeting with the Faculty of Business Administration, for example, it was reported that faculty have been told by students that it is their job to teach business, not writing. All units agreed that writing intensive courses cannot succeed when class sizes are large.

ROLE OF ACADEMIC UNITS

Responses here were somewhat low key in recognition that whatever steps the University takes to address the problem are likely to cost money and that in a time of cutbacks and restraint there is not likely to be support for expensive writing programmes. At a time when faculty workloads are being increased and morale is low, units could not countenance asking faculty to take on further commitments to teach writing. At the same time, a majority of the units surveyed reported that there should be some University-wide writing policy, if for no other reason than to convey to students that their attitudes to writing have to change. They suggested that there is need for a university policy regarding the grading of papers and exams to include writing as well as content. They recognized that, at the moment, there is no consistency of approach from department to department within each faculty to say nothing of between faculties. There is often no consistent policy within individual departments. Often responsibility for writing correction or instruction rests with a single faculty member who then must bear the brunt of student ire over low grades for what appear to the students to be unfair pickiness about writing in contrast to the standards employed elsewhere in the unit.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY ACADEMIC UNITS
During these unit visits, some of the most frequently heard recommendations included (in order of frequency):

Entrance testing followed by compulsory remedial programmes.

Institution of a WAC programme throughout the University. Help would be needed by units not accustomed to teaching writing.

Faculty should be encouraged to ask for more essay assignments or to use essay examinations, and to grade for presentation as well as content.

Recognition should be given to those faculty who are prepared to teach writing courses in all departments and faculties.

There is a need for an improved and enlarged writing centre with several full time fully qualified staff and "satellite" centres in the professional schools, for example. More speciality advisors to help students in faculties other than Arts and more locations would improve access -- especially for students on the north campus.

The University should make use of some of the new computer-based writing programmes which teach composition skills. This could be done either through the library or the Writing Centre.

VISITS TO NLTA AND PROVINCIAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Because complaints about the adequacy of the teaching of writing in the school system were a part of virtually every unit discussion, the Committee met with the executive of the English Special Interest Council of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association. Although the Committee was of the opinion that the present High School Language curriculum is adequate, there was concern that it was by itself insufficient. It was suggested that the absence of emphasis on writing in other subjects across the curriculum leads to student difficulties. Some teachers believe that even in Public Exams in English Literature examiners are prohibited from taking grammar into account. Of more concern is the fact that Public Exams in non-English subjects do not specifically include any examination of writing. Inevitably this leads to teachers of other subjects downgrading the importance of writing in their teaching, even though this is not mandated by the Department of Education. The absence of any formal liaison on the subject of writing proficiency between the University and teachers was noted.

Concern about the apparent absence of a global policy on writing beyond Language courses led the Committee to meet with Dr. Glenn Loveless, Director of Program Development at the Provincial Department of Education, purely for information purposes. It learned that the new Atlantic High School curriculum, to be phased in over the next four years, will attempt to place a more global emphasis on writing. The
Committee was also given the results of a study commissioned by the Canadian Ministers of Education which indicated that, in reading and writing abilities, Newfoundland students are equal to other students across Canada, within the limits of statistical error. The relevant extracts from the study can be found in Appendix IV.

**POLICIES ON THE TEACHING OF WRITING AT OTHER UNIVERSITIES**

All universities across Canada were contacted for information regarding their policies on the teaching of writing. Fourteen universities responded. Most universities reported that they approach the issue through a variety of means. There is no uniform standard for the teaching of writing across the country.

Seven universities responded that they had entrance requirements which focused on high school level English. There were no admission requirements to demonstrate 'writing competence' as such. Three universities indicated they had graduating requirements which were identified as specific academic courses with writing requirements. Two other universities stated that they had tried mandatory entrance writing competency tests, but had abolished them.

All universities had some form of writing resource centres which were generally staffed by instructors and graduate students. These centres provided a variety of roles ranging from offering writing competency courses to general tutorial programmes and English as a Second Language programmes. Five universities responded that they had required courses in writing. Many universities indicated an interest in a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programme. However, only five universities had actually implemented such a programme. In addition, those universities with a Writing Across the Curriculum program also offered programmes for faculty development in methods of teaching writing. One university has recently completed a comprehensive review of its writing programme.

Appendix III presents an overall summary of those universities which responded.

**EMPLOYERS**

Letters to employers were sent out in October 1995. Details are given in Appendix VI. A total of 26 letters was sent out and ten substantive responses were received. These were generally, though not uniformly, negative and indicated that writing skills "were frequently unsatisfactory." Points raised indicated problems relating to "spelling, grammar, poor sentence construction, organization and presentation." Respondents also pointed to a generally poor ability in "developing ideas and arguments in a logical and concise fashion." Several respondents indicated a strong belief that the "problems began in the school system" and that not enough was being done at the University to correct these problems.
It was clear, however, that not all graduates lacked writing skills and some were noted to have "exceptional skill in presentation and oral communications." Some respondents, indeed, indicated that they were "quite satisfied, in general, with the writing skills of [our] graduates." Nevertheless, while it would be unwise to draw strong conclusions from only ten responses, there is no doubt that the majority of employers who responded to letters from the Committee were dissatisfied with the writing capabilities of Memorial graduates.

### III CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

**WRITING AT MEMORIAL**

The ability to write well is closely related to the capacity for clear and critical thought. Since it is important that our future leaders and citizens think clearly, improving the writing of all our graduates, regardless of their vocational orientation, must be a central task for Memorial. While it is important to acknowledge and to take full advantage of the professional skills of experts in the teaching of writing, the development of basic writing competence among all our students is the responsibility of every Faculty and School, and of each individual faculty member. Many Faculties and Schools also require, beyond the basic ability to write well, that their students master specific technical norms of writing. The general development of writing ability among all our students should be distinguished from remedial training for those students who arrive at the University with inadequate writing skills.

In all of these cases, however, learning to write is a long-term, perhaps lifelong, process. Writing is somewhat like a foreign language: It must be practised to be improved and students who have little experience with writing will lose even the skill they have developed if it is not constantly practised. The teaching of writing therefore requires a coordinated program throughout a student's university career; one-shot English courses, or occasional visits to the Writing Centre can achieve little in isolation. Many high schools and universities currently make this mistake. In high schools, students are taught writing in three writing courses and the skill is largely ignored in other courses. Many units of the University rely entirely on two first year English courses to do whatever is necessary and ignore bad writing, other than to complain about it, from then on. The teaching of writing needs to be restructured so that students obtain practice throughout their academic careers. **Instructors must expect and require a high standard of written material in all areas of instruction and at all levels.**

The Committee found widespread agreement on these principles during its hearings across the University. Most faculty members agree with the principle that graduates
should be capable of thinking, writing and reading adequately, and that this can only be accomplished by a long-term process throughout each student's program. At present, however, the University has no coordinated policy for implementing these principles, other than the traditional requirement for two first-year English courses.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE TEACHING OF WRITING

The Committee considers that such a coordinated policy would be best achieved by the Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) approach which has been adopted in a number of other universities. In a WAC program, courses in various disciplines would be designated as Writing Courses. The curriculum of each of these courses would integrate the teaching of disciplinary material with explicit instruction, practice and examination in writing skills. Each student's degree program would require a minimum number of such courses strategically positioned in various disciplines and at different levels.

The adoption of one centralized policy for the University would be inappropriate. Academic units operate in many different ways and with very different students. At one extreme are Professional Faculties, such as the Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science, which have very tight control over each student's program of studies, and a strong sense of responsibility for the overall ability of their graduates. On the other hand, a Department in Arts or in Science is responsible for fewer than half of their students' courses so the overall integration of a student's program is largely the responsibility of the individual student. Some Faculties, such as Medicine and Education, which require an undergraduate degree, expect their students to have already acquired their basic writing skills before entering the faculty.

It is clear to the Committee that any policy to improve writing must take into account the differences which exist between academic units. Thus any general university-wide recommendations should be seen as a minimal policy, leaving it necessary for each unit to decide what additional measures need to be implemented within the unit. Nevertheless, it is important that conscious and explicit writing policies be adopted throughout the institution, and that structures be set up to ensure responsibility for writing standards. Many components of a policy for the teaching of writing already exist at Memorial. What we now need is more deliberate planning and integration. The Committee therefore recommends that:

1. The Senate should request all academic units of the University to develop a plan to design, implement and monitor a writing enhancement policy, whether it be a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), or some other, approach.

2. All units should report to Senate within one year outlining their plans and indicating who will be responsible for carrying them out.

3. A faculty position of Coordinator for the Teaching of Writing should be created. The position should be based in Academic Services and could be staffed by cross-appointment
of an existing faculty member or by a newly hired person. The duties of the person appointed to this position should be:

- To promote the active teaching of writing throughout the University.
- To consult with Academic Units about the University’s writing policy and assist them in the implementation of these policies within their own programs.
- To initiate, in cooperation with Academic Services, workshops and other supportive activities for faculty and graduate students involved in the teaching of writing.
- To support the writing-related activities of the Writing Centre, of each Academic Unit, of ESL programs, of Academic Services, of CAL, computer and other technical services, and all other components of the University’s writing policy.
- To maintain, in conjunction with the Writing Centre, a central registry of information and expertise about the teaching of writing (e.g., computerized teaching programs, Internet sources.)
- To recommend and promote a standard writing handbook throughout the University.
- To set up and maintain a web site to guide faculty and students in the development of excellence in writing and the teaching of writing.

PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES

One of the main objectives of a new writing policy must be to change the perceptions of and attitudes about writing on the part of both students and faculty.

The Committee’s survey of students suggests that most students (90%) perceive writing ability to be very important. Yet many faculty report that students resist attempts to improve their writing and often respond to instructors correcting their writing by claiming, "It's none of your business." Why is this?

A number of factors seem to be involved. First, since the vast majority of students (96%) think of themselves as already good, or at least adequate, writers, they reject and resent any suggestion that they are not.

Secondly, many students seem to separate form from content, a habit already instilled in High School. That is, they accept the myth that some people are born writers for whom "Writing is Easy": They believe that "academic writing is just a matter of writing down everything you know without regard for logic, structure or grammar," as one faculty member put it. Organization and grammar, they think, are only relevant in language courses, so instructors other than those in the English Department have no right to correct their writing.

Another, perhaps related, factor is that students are not always aware that high quality writing should be expected of them not only in English, but throughout the whole
University and within their own disciplines. In most disciplines, students do not expect instructors to evaluate the quality of the writing on papers and exams, and, since at the moment most instructors do not criticize writing, many students seem to be convinced that the few instructors who do must be misguided. ("How could I have made it to graduate school if my writing is as bad as you say?") Expectations must be clearly set out.

The Committee therefore recommends that:

4. The University should establish a set of writing expectations for students throughout the University. These should be promulgated in the University Calendar. (A proposed statement of expectations is attached as Appendix V.)

5. Each Faculty or School should consider setting a minimum standard of writing as part of its admission requirements, or alternatively, set in place a process by which students who enter without meeting such standards will have reached an acceptable level of writing competence before graduating.

6. Instructors and administrators in all units should, wherever feasible, emphasize the importance of writing skills and assign some proportion of course grades for writing at all levels.

7. Students should be informed that good writing is expected in their courses and is a legitimate object of grading in all disciplines. This should be emphasized in the Calendar, in brochures from the Writing Centre, and in the course descriptions and grading proposals given to students at the beginning of each course.

The Committee was struck by the discrepancy between students' perceptions of their own writing ability, as mentioned above, and faculty perceptions of these same students. While faculty do indeed think that some students write well, they perceive other students (opinions range from 20% to as high as 80%) to be inadequate or poor writers, a perception that does not appear to have been clearly communicated to most of these latter students.

One reason that students who write badly have not discovered the fact may be that some faculty members share the attitude of many students that instructors have no business requiring them to write well. In one unit we visited we heard the following sequence of comments spread over a one hour discussion:

"Students cannot read or write when they enter the University."
"Their writing standard doesn't improve while they are here."

"They graduate by developing [non-writing] coping skills - e.g., memorization and plagiarisation - to pass exams."

"It's not our responsibility."

In each academic unit, the Committee found a spectrum of attitudes among individual faculty members who ranged from those who care passionately about the teaching of writing to others who are less convinced. Typically, from the attendance at meetings held with academic units, and from comments at these meetings, the Committee inferred that relatively few faculty members focus on the writing quality of assignments and exams or provide detailed feedback about their students' writing. On the other hand, the vast majority of faculty consider the quality of student writing to be very important and frequently complain about it. Why, if writing is considered so important by so many, is so little done about it?

First, and perhaps most importantly, many faculty feel that the teaching of writing is not their responsibility or that they are not competent to teach it. However, professors who are convinced that they should do something face a series of obstacles or disincentives to the active teaching of writing. Student attitude is one: Some instructors reported that when they did insist on good writing they were harassed by students who said it was none of their business. Instructors in this situation typically believed that they got poorer teaching evaluations than if they ignored writing. Since most academic units have no formal policy on writing, those faculty who do insist on standards feel isolated and defenceless.

Probably the most crucial single disincentive is the problem of workload. Larger class sizes have increased faculty workloads over the past few years. This has generally resulted in the perception that students are being required to submit less written material and that as a result their writing skills are deteriorating. These perceptions are widely shared by faculty, students and academic administrators as reported in a survey carried out in 1995 by an Ad Hoc committee of the Senate Academic Planning Committee. Indeed some members of our Committee were surprised and appalled at the degree to which multiple choice examinations were being used by departments which might traditionally have been expected to require a high standard of writing ability. The active teaching of writing involves detailed corrections, suggestions and discussion and is extremely difficult in large classes. Even in medium-sized classes, those instructors who attempt to criticize students' writing face a daunting increase in their workload over those who do not. It is important that the University find ways to encourage and reward those who actively undertake the teaching of writing in their classes rather than discourage or penalize them.

The Committee recommends that:
8. Each academic unit should assign its teaching in such a way that instructors who undertake writing courses can do so without an increase in workload. This might be achieved by tightly limiting enrolment in these courses (e.g., to 35) or by assigning an adequate number of trained teaching assistants in larger classes.

9. Faculty members should be encouraged not only to explicitly include writing competence in their grading, but to actively and explicitly instruct students in writing, especially in the writing conventions of their own discipline.

10. Administrators should make it clear that student complaints or low teaching evaluations which can be shown to be due to the instructor enforcing writing standards will not affect a Faculty Members promotion or tenure. (If other measures proposed in these recommendations are successful and a high standard of writing becomes part of University culture, instructors who actively assist students in this area can expect their teaching evaluations to rise, not fall.)

11. Where faculty members wish to include their competence in teaching writing in their Teaching Dossier, they should be encouraged to do so.

Clearly there must be attitudinal changes among both students and faculty. Students must constantly be informed that good writing is essential and that any educated person must have mastered the art of clear communication within the discipline in which they have specialized. Telling students, however is not enough. Instructors must demonstrate by their actions that good writing is required for good grades. Administrators must support instructors by establishing a system which encourages instructors to insist on good writing rather than penalizing them when they do.

TESTING AND STREAMING

We need to face the reality that the teaching of writing ideally requires small classes, perhaps only 15 students per instructor. Given the financial situation at Memorial, it would be unrealistic to aim at this ideal. Nevertheless, it is also unrealistic to think that one instructor can teach writing effectively in a class larger than about 30 students without adequate teaching assistance.

One solution is to reduce the financial burden by streaming students. Although almost every student could benefit from writing courses, identifying those students who already write well and exempting them from some part of the writing program would reduce the costs of the program.
Variations among High Schools means that entrance grades are too uneven to serve the purpose of streaming. The demise of the Provincial Public examination system might tempt Memorial to institute its own entrance exam in writing. The Committee has decided not to recommend such an exam. Experience in our own English Department and in universities elsewhere suggests that such exams are very unreliable. They are also expensive to administer.

Testing for streaming purposes is best done within a context, and with expectations clearly understood by students. The Committee suggests that the examination at the end of the first writing course taken by students is the best indicator of their writing potential. The Committee therefore recommends that:

12. Students in every Faculty and School should be required to take a writing course in their first semester at Memorial. This writing course might be in any discipline, not necessarily in English. At the end of the course, students who achieve some minimum standard, to be set by each Faculty and School, would be exempted from some part of future writing requirements within the Academic Unit. Students who do very poorly should be required to take extra remedial courses in writing, probably non-credit courses.

We do not, however, expect miracles. While these measures will somewhat reduce the cost of a writing program, we do not expect that many students will be exempted. Experience in English suggests that less than 20% of first year students write well enough to warrant exemption from a full WAC program. An effective writing program will be expensive.

Other universities have experimented with a writing competency exam as an exit requirement for all students before being awarded their degrees. The results have been problematic. One university, for example, had a backlog of several hundred students who had fulfilled all requirements for the degree except the writing exam. This situation led to political pressure to waive or abolish the requirement. The Committee therefore recommends that:

13. An exit examination for writing competence should NOT be instituted.

Faculty members complain that students often arrive at Memorial unprepared and that the teaching of writing is the job of the provincial school system. National tests indicate that Newfoundland high school students are, in general, as competent at reading and writing as other students across Canada (See Appendix IV). This does not mean, of course, that the system cannot be improved. Speaking with school teachers and with officials in the Provincial Department of Education, the Committee discovered that, while the Language Arts courses promote good writing, the skill is largely ignored in other subject areas. There is some hope that the new Atlantic Curriculum, which will be introduced in the next three years, will correct this problem to some extent. Nevertheless, the Committee
recommends that:

14. The University should insist that the Provincial Department of Education improve the writing abilities of students who graduate from high school. In particular, the need for good writing in all subject areas, not only Language Arts, should be emphasized.

15. Memorial University's Faculty of Education should be asked to review its program to ensure that future school teachers understand the importance of, and the methods for teaching, good writing.

16. The University should establish a formal line of communication about writing with the NLTA. A University representative (preferably the Writing Coordinator, if one is appointed) should be encouraged to seek a seat on the NLTA Special Interest Council on English.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Many faculty members stated that they had neither the expertise nor the time for teaching writing. Indeed, while most faculty members are dedicated and competent, we have heard some horror stories of instructors who, in all innocence, were using pedagogical techniques which are more likely to cause writer's block than improve students' writing ability. The teaching of writing has in many places become an independent academic discipline in its own right and it is important that Memorial take full advantage of professional expertise in the area. Recent advances in philosophy and methods must be made available to those faculty who are willing to teach writing. Support services are needed to ensure that instructors continually increase their skills at teaching writing. One of the most important of these services is the Writing Centre.

The Committee therefore recommends that:

17. The Writing Centre's mandate should be expanded to include, in cooperation with Academic Services, the implementation of a program to inform faculty members, especially those teaching designated writing courses, about the most recent pedagogical techniques in the teaching of writing.

18. Because some students and faculty perceive the Writing Centre as distant and stigmatizing, and not focused on their own disciplinary needs, the Writing Centre should consider a decentralized structure, with branches within various Faculties and Schools. The Centre should also expand its present policy of recruiting tutors familiar with the needs of each Faculty or School.
19. The Writing Centre should be funded to maintain a library of books, software and other materials helpful for improving the teaching of writing.

20. Graduate students with the appropriate writing skills should be granted teaching assistantships to teach and correct writing, even in classes outside their home departments, when the instructor lacks the time or expertise for such teaching and correcting.

21. The Graduate Program in Teaching should explicitly incorporate a unit on techniques for the teaching of writing.

CONCLUSION

Improving the teaching of writing at Memorial will not come easily or cheaply. Professors focused on their own specialties cannot be expected overnight or without help to become experts in the teaching of writing. Detailed and constructive feedback to students about their writing cannot easily occur in classes of 200 students. Students can be inspired to write well only by professors who willingly take up the challenge of teaching writing, but such willingness is unlikely to be present when correcting writing adds to the burden of an already high workload. Nevertheless, much of the poor writing which is currently prevalent occurs primarily because instructors do not require a high standard. Students with heavy workloads respond accordingly. If little emphasis is placed on good writing by professors, little effort to produce good writing will be made by students. Major improvements could potentially be realized by a simple change in attitudes and perceptions among the professoriat and in the student body. Resources need to be made available: support services; faculty development programs; teaching assistance; limited section enrolments; and reduced teaching loads. Only by a concerted, well coordinated and sustained effort throughout Memorial will we succeed in improving the quality of our graduates' writing.
APPENDIX II

ACADEMIC UNIT VISITS

The following academic units discussed the teaching of writing with members of the Committee:

Arts Faculty, Academic Planning Science Faculty, Undergraduate Studies

Business English Medicine Religious Studies

Chemistry Folklore Music Sociology

Economics Geography Philosophy Social Work

Education German and Russian Psychology Nursing

Engineering History QEII Library

Background Material for Academic Unit

Discussions on Writing

In April 1994, Senate approved the establishment of a committee to investigate writing problems in the University. The mandate of the Committee was essentially to determine whether faculty members and/or students perceived that there were problems with students' writing and, if so, to recommend policies for remediation. The Committee is assessing the nature and extent of the problem in a number of different ways. As part of the assessment, it has been decided to hold informal discussions with each academic unit of the University. The intent of such discussions is to determine whether or not a problem exists, whether or not there are significant variations in the problem from one unit to another and whether or not there are remedies which might be implemented in the unit or across the University as a whole.

The Committee would like your assistance in identifying the nature and scope of the problem. For example the nature of the problem, if one exists, may relate to such things as:
spelling, punctuation, references, footnotes, etc.

grammar, sentence structure, tense, etc.

terminology (rich or limited), use of slang, idioms, etc.

organisation, e.g., introduction, conclusions, paragraph structure, etc.

logic, clarification of expression, development of arguments, consideration of alternatives, etc.

Presumably there is some improvement between first year and graduation. We would like to know to what extent, if at all, the problems reduce as students become more experienced. Also, if the problem is less serious in senior years, is this because students who cannot write fail out or learn to write as they proceed through the system?

Discussion will focus primarily on issues related to these listed above. However, the Committee would also like to consider possible solutions and in particular to learn what types of solution would, and would not, be acceptable to your unit. To help focus discussion we have developed a number of basic questions. These are attached.

What expectations does your unit have for the writing competence of students?

2. Do writing difficulties affect students in your programmes?

(a) Define problems. What is the difficulty?

Scope of problems. What student levels are involved?

3. Solutions (if there are problems)

(a) Who is responsible for ensuring that our graduates are literate?

Do academic units have some role to playing solving these problems?

Should there be some overall policy? If so, what should it be?
Good writing is expected of students in all courses, not only in those designated "Writing Courses." Throughout their academic careers, students' writing should improve so that by the time they graduate they should be reasonably proficient. Upon graduation they should be capable of expressing complicated ideas clearly and concisely and should be able to develop arguments in a logical manner. While grammar and spelling are secondary to logic and the expression of ideas, they are nevertheless still important. Students are therefore expected to write without spelling errors or major grammatical mistakes.