Strategic Plan 2018-2023

Towards a Writing and Communication Centre for the University of Waterloo community

WRITING AND COMMUNICATION CENTRE

UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

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INTRODUCTION

This document is the culmination of a two-year process of visioning and consultation. It represents an analysis of the current context of the University of Waterloo Writing and Communication Centre, our history, values, and current operations. It describes our process of strategic planning including our internal work and our community consultations. Finally, it shares our vision and goals for the next five years.

Since 2012, the Writing Centre has been developing and articulating a new approach to working with students on their writing and communication skills and strategies. Our aim has been to become more accessible and to meet the different and specific needs of undergraduate and graduate students in a global and increasingly digital world. In line with the recommendations of the 2012 Task Force on Support for English Language Competency Development, we wanted to help shift the way that students, staff, and faculty think about how writing is taught and how it is valued as part of the scholarly work of the university. This meant moving from reliance on a competency exam and towards a process-centred approach to coaching and supporting communication competencies.

In 2017, the name of our unit officially changed from the Writing Centre to the Writing and Communication Centre (WCC). This represents the degree to which the WCC has changed and grown as a unit, and the new philosophy that guides the ways we teach and support students in writing, speaking, and presenting. We expanded programming for graduate students, and we have emerged as leaders in this area because of the range of available programs related to thesis planning and writing, scholarly speaking, and writing for publication.

As well, the new WCC began successfully working with faculty writers in 2017. As we look ahead, we are imagining how we can expand faculty support, but also how we can begin to serve the needs of University staff in their writing and communication activities.

Following from several years of change and expansion, this strategic plan sets the groundwork and establishes a vision and a set of priorities for our next phase of growth. By establishing key goals and articulating measurable and achievable outcomes, this plan will guide us through the next five years.

We are proud to share our vision with our University of Waterloo community. We hope you will join us in building a better Writing and Communication Centre where our community members’ hard work as scholars and communicators is supported by excellent services, engaged student and professional staff, robust new programs, and dynamic technology, which are housed in a suitably open and accessible space.
Section A: The Writing and Communication Centre at a Glance

1. Vision and Mission Statements

Vision

As a hub of research and expertise, the Writing and Communication Centre will foster excellence in written, spoken, and visual communication within the University of Waterloo community.

Mission

The Writing and Communication Centre engages, encourages, and empowers members of the University of Waterloo community to communicate more effectively while meeting the varied expectations of their disciplines and vocations.

To achieve our mission, we deliver timely and focused individualized teaching at all stages of the composition and communication design processes. We help students, staff, and faculty:

- Synthesize, integrate, and share best practices in communication
- Experience their work as others do
- Support and promote a lively, cross-disciplinary writing culture on campus and online
- Develop skills and strategies that last a lifetime

2. Our Mandate

Our mandate is to support the continuous learning and development of students, staff, and faculty in academic and professional writing, speaking, and visual presentation; to facilitate the production and publication of written scholarship; to ground our teaching practice in research on writing, rhetoric, composition, and language acquisition; and to contribute to the broad fields of writing studies and teaching/learning scholarship.

3. Our Core Services

- **Consultation appointments** are for individuals and groups for writing, speaking, and presentations. They are available on the main campus and on all three satellite campuses, in-person as well as online.
- **Drop-ins** are same-day short appointments for individuals and groups that are hosted across the Waterloo campus.
- **Workshops** are hands-on and collaborative sessions on a range of disciplinary writing styles and genres.
- **Course-integrated support** is delivered in classes in collaboration with faculty. Custom sessions meet student needs and curricular goals, and include workshops and facilitated peer review sessions.
- **Programming for graduate students** includes professionalization activities, thesis writing and academic speaking support, and communities of writing practice.
- **Writing support for faculty writers** is limited but includes individual consultations and a community of writing practice.
- **Online resources** are informative and interactive guides to disciplinary genres and styles.
4. OUR TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Teaching is core to the work of the Writing and Communication Centre. We teach in a variety of contexts and modes and through a variety of activities. The following principles outline the values and commitments that are at the centre of our teaching practice.

Students, staff, and faculty are our partners in learning.
Our teaching is individualized and collaborative. We work alongside writers and speakers to help them see how their audience receives their work, to introduce new strategies, and to build confidence and competence. We provide our learning partners with information and choices, but each person is always the decision-maker over their own work.

We are committed to equity, access, and inclusion.
We are committed to teaching strategies that respect diverse abilities and racialized, Indigenous, religious, gender, and sexual identities. We help students navigate questions about the relationship between language and identity. We aim to provide barrier-free access for all students and community members by offering services in multiple sites across all University of Waterloo campuses, and by paralleling, where feasible, services online.

Language and communication are connected to students’ identities.
We recognize that language is intimately connected to identity and equity, and we are committed to advancing and supporting writers’ and speakers’ rights to engage with their language(s) on their own terms. We acknowledge that there are multiple, valid Englishes, and our teaching practices value students’ agency by empowering and supporting their rhetorical and language choices.

Writing and communication happen in a global context.
We regard multilingualism as an asset in the learning and writing process. In a global context, speakers of all languages, including English, must learn to communicate across cultures and fluencies as speakers and listeners, writers and readers.

Writing and communication are not separate from other disciplinary work.
Writing and communication are part of research, discovery, knowledge creation, learning, and critical thinking. In our teaching practice, we encourage people from all disciplines to see writing and communication as integrated with their research, learning, and scholarship activities.

Writing and communication are social, meaning-making activities.
In all communication, meaning is negotiated between people. By analyzing the conventions of genres and discourses and by serving as an audience for writers and communicators, we make the contexts of communication explicit. We emphasize that writing and composing are iterative processes that are part of meaning-making.

We are committed to continuous learning and improvement.
We value teaching as a reflexive practice. Together, as professional and student staff, we are committed to ongoing improvement by sharing and integrating current research in rhetoric, composition, communication, teaching and writing centres.
5. WRITING AND COMMUNICATION CENTRE PROFILE AND HISTORY

The Writing and Communication Centre is an academic support unit reporting to the Associate Vice-President, Academic. Depending on the term and time of year, there are between 12 and 20 full-time and part-time staff housed in the WCC, including full-time and student staff. In addition to the director and administrative assistant, there are ten teaching staff, each of whom specializes in one area of writing and communication support. Undergraduate and master’s co-op students are hired each term as peer tutors.

The WCC’s main offices are located in South Campus Hall (SCH), and we also occupy a single semi-permanent office space in the Centre for Environmental & Information Technology (EIT). We have arranged drop-in space in numerous locations across main campus, including both main libraries and a location within the Faculty of Applied Health Studies (AHS), and we offer services at University of Waterloo’s satellite campuses: Pharmacy, Architecture, and Stratford.

The budget for the WCC comes from two funding sources. 71% of our annual budget comes from the centre from the Office of the Provost. 29% of our budget is funded through student ancillary fees, which are administered by SSAC (Student Services Advisory Committee). The WCC is not a revenue-generating unit; however, we occasionally assume projects beyond our core mandate on a cost-recovery basis.

The Writing and Communication Centre has been part of the University of Waterloo since 1976. Our unit originated as the Writing Clinic, a program housed in the Faculty of Arts that was responsible for administering an English Language Proficiency Exam (ELPE) to Arts students. Between 1976 and the early 2000s, the Writing Clinic became part of a central support unit called the English Language Proficiency Program (ELPP) as the ELPE broadened into a campus-wide undergraduate requirement. Writing Clinic work revolved around this exam, from marking to teaching recovery tutorial programs.

In the mid-2000s, the Writing Clinic was re-named the Writing Centre. In addition to the ELPP tutorials, staff began offering five to ten undergraduate and graduate total appointments per week and a small number of five-week graduate tutorials per term. We also started offering writing workshops in conjunction with Counselling Services’ Study Skills program.

In 2012, the Task Force on Support for English Language Competency Development at the University of Waterloo released its final report, and it recommended a significant shift in approaches to teaching and developing communication skills, including the elimination of the ELPE and the integration of communication teaching and practice across the curriculum. The Writing Centre was named as a key partner in helping to support students in building communication competencies.

Between 2012 and 2016, the Writing Centre engaged in a process of reviewing its programs and practices, developing programming, articulating a new direction, and re-branding our services to communicate a discipline-specific communication-centric approach. The name of our unit officially changed to the Writing and Communication Centre (WCC) in 2017. At this juncture, our strategic plan will set the groundwork and establish priorities for the next phase of the WCC’s growth.
Section B: Our Planning Process

Since 2014, the Writing and Communication Centre has been actively pursuing new directions for our services and programs, and we have sought to re-brand our work for students, faculty, and the University of Waterloo community. As part of this process, the WCC team has met regularly to evaluate successes and challenges, discuss annual priorities, and to share ideas for future directions. In early 2017, we began to formalize this process by conducting sessions to analyse the position of the WCC and to create a long-term vision. Through spring 2017 to fall 2018, we consulted with our three key stakeholder groups: staff from academic support and student support units, students, and faculty.

1. Planning process timeline

- In January 2017, the team met to conduct a PEST scan and a SWOT analysis.
  - A PEST scan is a type of environmental scan that looks at four factors--political, economic, social, technological--through four concentric circles expanding from the unit: Writing and Communication Centre, University of Waterloo, higher education in Canada, and the national landscape.
  - A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis establishes internal and external strengths and challenges facing a unit. Because there is some overlap with the PEST scan, and because the PEST scan can help to generate information for the SWOT, a SWOT analysis typically follows a PEST discussion.

- In April 2017, WCC team members individually completed pre-work that guided them to consider the compiled PEST scan and SWOT analysis against two key documents: the institutional strategic plan and Excellence Canada drivers. After completing their pre-work, the team met to discuss and create six clear and measurable working strategic priorities.

- In spring 2017, a small group from WCC organized and ran a series of focus group sessions that invited staff from key collaborating units on campus to respond to a series of questions about our programs and our impact on their work.

- In fall 2017, in several focus group sessions, we invited undergraduate and graduate students from across all faculties to tell us about their interactions with the WCC and to help us see where we need to grow next.

- In winter 2018, our director met with faculty in department meetings and curriculum committee meetings to share the growth of the WCC and to seek faculty input into our future directions.
## 2. SWOT Analysis

The following SWOT grid extends from the results of the January 2017 scan and analysis, removing elements no longer relevant and adding details where necessary.

### Strengths (our competitive advantage)

- High quality services and programs: research-grounded; experienced staff; student-centred approach; broad scope; discipline specific
- We have a collaborative team culture that strives to be a community of practice
- Our collaborations with other units are productive for students and for sharing knowledge
- We have a good reputation as partners and communication experts
- We are responsive to requests, often delivering custom workshops or programs quickly
- Course-integrated support is in high demand with new requests each term
- Our co-op staff provides a uniquely valuable perspective for undergraduates at drop-ins
- There is support for our work across campus
- Students speak highly of our services and there is growing demand for appointments, etc.
- Our staff are qualified with advanced degrees, including several PhDs, and we are connected to professional and scholarly communities
- We strive to be inclusive and proactive in the areas of diversity and inclusion
- We have seen continual growth since 2014

### Weaknesses (point to future initiatives)

- Our space is small and limiting. As a series of offices, it is not a “centre” and it is not ideal for the services we provide. It is also not fully accessible for those with mobility restrictions
- Increased demand causes increased work loads for staff and affects how well we can serve our community
- Outgoing communications are limited by staff capacity
- We need a more comprehensive assessment plan
- We should work to build greater diversity in our team
- We need to strengthen our formal relationships with the six faculties
- We have identified key program weakness areas requiring resources and time:
  - online learning; development of WriteOnline.ca
  - outreach and programming for the six Faculties; more discipline-specific support
  - speaking services; facilities to support this work
  - robust writing groups; writing retreats
  - undergraduate workshops need review
- Limited distinction between job descriptions and a flat hierarchy means that there is a lack of succession planning and a HR load on the Director. Some gaps, such as communications and Faculty liaising, could be addressed by a fully-consultative staff restructuring process

### Opportunities (lead to goals)

- Leverage LEARN to provide better support
- Improve synchronous and asynchronous online support
- Build evening and weekend services in various key locations, including residence
- Rethink how we program for undergrads because of low undergraduate workshop attendance
- Support Graduate Studies with their initiatives in grad professionalization
- Monitor impact from first-year communication courses to help shape future resource requests
- Consider collaborating towards a writing across the curriculum/ writing in the disciplines (WAC/WID) program as the communication outcomes expand into upper years
- Build a larger student tutor program with graduate and undergraduate students based on the success of the co-op peer tutor program
- Engage undergraduate engineering students and faculty as these students currently represent our lowest users
- Leverage the success of faculty consultations and faculty writing cafe by expanding support with faculty writing retreats or a launching a communications campaign featuring faculty writers
- Seek better points of connection with the incoming class

### Threats (things to monitor)

- Due to high demand and limited appointment availability, students and faculty may stop looking for and recommending WCC appointments, respectively
- Work-life imbalance and burnout due to overloaded staff schedules is a consistent concern
- External essay editing services offered by local individuals and large companies provide copyediting and excessive revision, and thus contribute to academic dishonesty
- Grammar applications (e.g. Grammarly, WriteCheck) are becoming more prolific, but are problematic because of accuracy issues, passive usage, and a prescriptive approach
- A lack of understanding about what constitutes our work and pedagogy can reduce writing and communication to grammar and copyediting. The circulation of older narratives about our unit contributes to this confusion, as does a lack of awareness about writing studies and writing centres as scholarly fields (leading to an “anyone can teach writing” attitude)
3. **Working Priorities**

Writing and Communication Centre staff identified the following six working priorities, which represent the WCC's work on strategic planning through to April 2017. These priorities were considered in formulating the goals articulated through this strategic plan, and they will be replaced by them.

1. Refine and expand existing programs to increase access to writing and communication support, with a focus on
   - high-demand programs;
   - course/program-integrated services; and
   - online and extended hours support.

2. Continue developing strategic campus-wide partnerships that support cross-campus and institutional goals and priorities.

3. Conduct, facilitate, and share communication and composition research that advances best practices in teaching and supporting effective communication practices.

4. Design sustainable quantitative and qualitative assessments to report outcomes and refine our services.

5. Establish consistent and transparent internal processes, including operational policies and procedures.

6. Pursue expanded or new space that accommodates current programs and anticipated future activities, is open and accessible to students, and is centrally located on campus.

4. **Community Consultations**

Five identifiable themes arose from our 2017-2018 consultations with academic support staff from other units, students, and faculty, many of which were shared by two or three stakeholder groups. The following lists the themes, a summary of some discussions in which they were raised, and by whom.

1. **Writing and communication are essential skills** (students / faculty)
   This theme reflects the degree to which participants value writing and communication at the University of Waterloo.

   - Undergraduate and graduate students shared how writing and communication connects to their learning, professionalization, co-op, and career readiness. They highlighted the importance of being able to articulate their objective(s) in various modes (e.g. visual, oral, textual) and in different environments (e.g. classroom, conference, online), and for various audiences.
   - Some faculty members discussed their frustrations at the issues they encounter when reading their students’ writing. Sometimes issues were related to language learning, but they typically manifested as failures to proofread and edit final documents.
While this theme does not directly impact how the WCC supports students, it does show that those interviewed were highly motivated to engage with and comment on their interactions with the WCC.

2. **Excellence in programs and services (students / faculty / academic support staff)**
   This theme describes how WCC services and programming are viewed by the three stakeholder groups, and it refers to the range and quality of programs and services provided by the WCC.
   - Students identified appointments and drop-ins as the WCC’s core services, and they acknowledged that both facilitated an individualized approach. Students also mentioned WriteOnline.ca, online resources, and workshops as useful for learning components of academic writing.
   - Graduate students also spoke highly of their experiences in Dissertation Boot Camp, writing café, and literature review workshops, and support for publication.
   - Some students noted that they were very happy to be able to access support from other students (referring to co-op students at drop-ins); one or two people said that this would not be their first choice.
   - International students mentioned the specific benefit to them as they improve their writing in English. Some English-speaking students initially thought the WCC was only for international students, and were happy to discover they can use the Centre too.
   - Faculty members referred to appointments and course-integrated support as having the most impact for them and their students.
   - Academic support staff suggested the WCC should continue to pursue a discipline-specific focus.

3. **Continuous improvement (students/faculty)**
   This theme identifies areas for improvement and further development, specifically in reference to programs and services.
   - Students repeatedly expressed frustration about availability of and wait times for appointments. Students in each focus group called for more appointment times. Faculty across departments also raised the problem of wait-times and suggested it was an issue constraining their students.
   - Students wished they had learned about the WCC earlier in their academic careers, and some said that they would have taken advantage of workshops as early as orientation week.
   - Students complained about the WCC’s location and space in SCH. They voiced concerns about accessibility and noise-levels, specifically.
   - Students requested more evening and weekend hours, and better access for students on co-op.
   - Students also asked for more online services, including appointments, examples of different assignment types, and online workshops.
   - Students would like WCC staff to list more information related to their areas of expertise on their website biographies.
   - Faculty suggested graduate student and faculty writing retreats.
   - Staff and students noted that the WCOnline booking system is confusing for certain purposes (workshops, wait list, etc.)
Community partnership and collaboration (academic support staff)

This theme highlights the importance of collaboration, exchanges of expertise and resources, and relationship building, particularly with other academic support units.

- Academic support staff agreed that the quality of relationships with the WCC are positive, respectful, and collaborative.
- Academic support staff suggested that there is room to collaborate on a number of key topics (academic integrity and career documents) and suggested some joint projects, such as:
  - Building boot camps for other genres of writing
  - Supporting online learning
  - Supporting students with disabilities
  - Sharing communications to help orient students to campus-wide supports
  - Supporting entrepreneurial activities such as pitch competitions, etc.
    with Velocity

4. Communication (students, academic support staff, faculty)

This theme summarizes challenges in communication to and with students and campus partners.

- Students frequently noted that they would liked to have known about the WCC earlier in their academic career. They identified email as a key mode of delivery, and they suggested closer integration of WCC information and resources into LEARN. They suggested a closer relationship with academic advisors. One group recommended a subscription-based WCC e-newsletter.
- Academic support staff noted that, in general, communication to students and with other academic support units is a challenge. Ideas discussed included rotating attendance at different units’ staff meetings or introducing other regular points of contact to keep our colleagues informed of each other’s activities.
- When meeting with faculty, it was clear that there was a range of familiarity with our programs and services. In addition, many faculty were not aware of graduate courses for multilingual students at Renison University College and the possibility of referring their students there.
Section C: Investigations of External Contexts

1. Environmental Scan

Summary

The landscape of writing centres in Canada and the U.S. is broad. Writing centres adapt to their institutional contexts, so writing centres are as different as the universities where they are housed. As well, because there are distinct national differences between the U.S. and Canada (Mueller et. al., 2012), it is difficult to compare writing centres across borders. For example, while writing centres are linked to academic programs in some schools in Canada (usually departments of English), they are usually central to first-year composition programs and writing across the curriculum (WAC) programs in the United States. Though we had planned to include data about U.S. writing centres in our environmental scan, it became clear that the contexts were so divergent that such data would muddy the picture.

Finally, one of our goals in doing this scan was to highlight some writing centre exemplars. However, it is difficult to point to one institutional writing centre that “has it all.” As demonstrated in the discussion, writing centres have optimized certain elements of their programming to meet the specific needs of their students. Instead, we have focused on highlighting how the University of Waterloo WCC measures against other schools across a range of categories. Each category therefore begins with a detailed summary of the results of the environmental scan for that category, followed by a brief description of what the broader context means for the WCC and how it performs in its field.

Overall, the environmental scan suggests that the WCC offers an exceptionally broad range of programs and services. This is particularly true for our graduate student programming, which is robust and diverse compared to other schools. While our services to undergraduate students are in line with other schools, there is room to be more dynamic by developing additional programs for these students. The fact that the WCC’s structure and location are somewhat unusual lends support to our articulated goals of engaging more student teaching support, evaluating our existing staff structure, and pursuing creative solutions to our space needs.

Scope

The goal of this scan is to situate the University of Waterloo and the Writing and Communication Centre in the field of Canadian research-intensive universities to gauge how the quantity and quality of programs and services we offer compares with those offered at relatively-similar institutions. We reviewed the websites of writing centres and services at sixteen Canadian universities: those who comprise the U15 plus two local universities of similar size to the University of Waterloo. Additionally, we sought to conduct phone interviews with a representative from each unit at each institution:

- University of British Columbia
- University of Calgary
- University of Alberta
- University of Saskatchewan
- University of Manitoba
- University of Western Ontario
- University of Toronto
- McMaster University
- Queen’s University
- University of Ottawa
These universities range in size from small institutions such as Queen’s, University of Guelph, University of Saskatchewan and Dalhousie with 18,000 to 25,000 students, to larger institutions such as UBC, University of Toronto and York University with 50,000 to 90,000 students. With 31,380 undergraduate students and 5,290 graduate students, 17% international undergraduate students and 37% international graduate students, the University of Waterloo is in the middle range. The University of Waterloo’s total international student population (19-20%) is close to, or slightly lower than that of many universities located in large cities: UBC (23%), University of Alberta (21%), McGill (29.4%), McMaster (22%) and University of Toronto (19-20%).

In our scan, we examined a range of factors related to writing centres’ locations, structures, and programs:

- physical location
- staffing structures
- where and how these units are situated institutionally
- scope or mandate
- appointment utilization rates
- writing support services offered

Institutional locations

Environmental Scan Summary

Writing support services are housed in a variety of locations across universities: academic departments, libraries, student service departments, and graduate studies departments. Guelph’s writing support is affiliated with the library, as is Laval’s French-language writing support. Laval’s English-language writing support is housed within the Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines. At McGill, writing support is housed within an academic department in the School of Continuing Studies. Similarly, at York, the writing centre is part of an academic department within the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies. McMaster’s services are provided by two separate units: McMaster undergraduate students can seek support from Writing Assistance within the Student Success Centre, while graduate students can schedule writing consultations through Graduate Studies. At Toronto, each of the 14 separate writing centres is affiliated with a particular college or other institution on campus. The remainder are located in a student support office, learning commons, or under a Dean of Students’ portfolio.

Often writing support programs, even those not organizationally included within the library, are physically located in a library. Other common physical locations for writing support units include student centres and departmental buildings.

What this means for the WCC

The location of the University of Waterloo WCC under the executive academic portfolio aligns most closely with those institutions whose writing centre is affiliated with an academic program or department. Our physical location outside of a library, learning commons, or student service centre is unique. It is worthwhile considering how our student-oriented services may benefit from a collaborative location on campus, one that includes more service elements than the existing drop-in configurations at the two main campus libraries.
Staffing structures

Environmental Scan Summary
Most writing support units have at least a full-time director or manager role to oversee the department. In some cases, director roles are faculty positions and some units have both an academic director and an administrative director or manager who oversees scheduling and training of teaching staff. In smaller units, writing support is managed by a coordinator or manager, without a director.

The staffing structures of writing support units vary widely. Some have a team of full-time or part-time staff instructors, some rely on ongoing or sessional faculty, and some rely exclusively on paid or volunteer undergraduate and graduate students. Eight universities have full-time teaching staff. Qualifications for these positions vary; however, many full-time staff in writing centres have either a master’s or a doctoral degree.

At least 10 writing support units rely on part-time instructors – graduate students, sessional faculty, or professional teaching staff – to support their teaching activities. The number of part-time staff ranges from one to fifty, depending on the size of the institution and the number of appointment hours available. While most institutions we contacted emphasized the work done by graduate student or professional, part-time and contract instructors, at least four make use of paid, part-time undergraduate student tutors.

What this means for the WCC
The non-faculty full-time staff structure of the WCC is somewhat unique in Canada, as many full-time writing centre staff hold faculty positions. Where writing centres have non-faculty staff, staff are typically responsible for high-level work like program planning and management instead of or in addition to teaching. Similar to staff in these writing centres, WCC staff are academically qualified: several WCC staff have PhDs and all hold advanced degrees.

Most staff-based writing centres rely on graduate students and undergraduate staff to deliver appointments. The leadership structure of the WCC is similar to most, but there is room to add additional leadership roles and/or to add variation in full-time roles to enable staff to do more high-level work.

Writing Centre Services

Environmental Scan Summary
Toronto, Dalhousie, British Columbia and Alberta all indicated that their services are available to undergraduate and graduate students, and in some cases, postdoctoral fellows. McMaster also offers writing support services for both undergraduate and graduate students, but for the most part these services are provided by different units; Writing and Academic Skills serves primarily undergraduate students, while the Graduate Student Life team offers writing consultations for graduate students.

Western and Queen’s indicated that they also provide writing support services to faculty and, less frequently, staff. Alberta’s paid writing support service, the Centre for Writers, is open to all members of the university community. Queen’s and Guelph both offer faculty writing retreats. Toronto works with faculty on assignment design and professional development related to writing pedagogy.
Most writing support units offer a combination of some of the following services and programming: in-person appointments (ranging from 20-30 minutes to 50 minutes), online appointments, drop-in consultations, emailed or asynchronous feedback, in-house workshops, in-class workshops or introductory visits, online learning resources, and speaking support for English as Additional Language (EAL) learners. Some institutions were outliers in offering unusual services and resources such as paid and for-credit courses (York and McGill), Sunday hours (Dalhousie), and discounts for editing software (McMaster -- Grammarly).

Some institutions offer unique programming focused on meeting the needs of undergraduate students. The University of Western Ontario, for example, offers a paid academic writing clinic to incoming first-year students. York University and some of University of Toronto’s writing centres have guided writing rooms: physical spaces for undergraduates to write in, ask questions, and receive feedback.

Writing across the curriculum/writing in the disciplines (WAC/WID) programs focus on embedding writing across disciplinary curricula at all undergraduate levels and heavily engage writing centre support services. York University, Laval, and University of Toronto have formal WAC/WID programs that are sometimes restricted to particular faculties, but many other writing support units mentioned informal arrangements on campus that serve a similar purpose to these formalized programs (Calgary, Alberta, McGill), and at least one (McMaster) indicated that they have proposed a formal WAC/WID program.

Other institutions have focused on developing programming that meets the unique needs of graduate students. Guelph has a particularly well-developed graduate support program, including Dissertation Boot Camp, Talk Like an Academic (which focuses on presentation skills for EAL learners), and a graduate student-specific workshop series. Queen’s and McMaster also offer Dissertation Boot Camp programs. Toronto, Alberta, and Calgary have focused on developing coached writing groups or writing communities for graduate students. Some units have physical space just for graduate student and postdoctoral fellow writers (Western, McMaster), while only one (Alberta) offers copy-editing services.

**What this means for the WCC**

By providing services to undergraduate and graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and a limited number of services for faculty, the WCC is one of the few universities providing widespread institutional support. Most university writing centres serve undergraduate and graduate students, with only a few specifically referencing postdoctoral fellows and faculty. University staff are not often included in the service group for writing centres, and their needs are typically addressed on an as-needed basis.

The WCC is currently a leader in programming for graduate students by offering programs and workshops that target a range of competencies and contexts, which is a result of the WCC’s focus on graduate programming in the last few years. Our programs and services for undergraduates are in line with other institutions, and plans to start writing groups at the undergraduate level accord with similar initiatives in two other universities. The University of Waterloo currently does not have a writing across the curriculum/writing in the disciplines (WAC/WID) program that targets undergraduate communication skills. However, the University is currently implementing communication courses at the first-year level, most of which highlight disciplinary writing, and the WCC is preparing to support these courses. The WCC does not currently provide support for university staff, and we provide limited support for faculty, including some consultations and a
weekly writing café. Unlike many institutions, the WCC is not responsible for supporting faculty in teaching writing; however, we collaborate with the Centre for Teaching Excellence (CTE), the unit that provides this teaching support. Overall, the scan indicates that the WCC has a diverse set of programs and services directed towards multiple groups, but that there are some key growth areas to focus on, including University staff support, undergraduate programming, and greater collaboration with CTE.

**Utilization rates and appointment numbers**

**Environmental Scan Summary**
Utilization rates are contingent upon the size of the institution and the number of appointments available. Western and Guelph sit at the lower (but certainly not low) end of the utilization spectrum, with usage rates of 85% and 85-90%, respectively. Alberta and Toronto fall somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, with a 95-98% utilization rate and 98% percent utilization rate, respectively. Several of the units we consulted have long waiting lists and indicated that their utilization rate is consistently at 100%.

Some institutions measure appointment numbers weekly or daily, while others measure appointments by term or year. At the lowest end of the spectrum is Laval, which currently offers 200 hours of appointments per term. Unsurprisingly, given its size and the number of writing centres, the University of Toronto ran about 15,000 appointments last year making it the high outlier. Next highest are institutions like Alberta, which conducted 8,500 appointments last year, and in the mid-range is Guelph, which conducted 2,000 appointments in Fall 2017 and Western, which offered 4500 last year. On the lower end, McMaster offers about 39 appointments weekly during peak weeks, and Queen’s offered about 2400 appointments last year.

**What this means for the WCC**
The WCC appointment utilization rate averages just over 97% during regular term days for both undergraduate and graduate students, placing us in the average to high range compared with other institutions. Last year, the WCC was booked for a total of nearly 8,000 appointments, which averages out to 160 appointments per week and 33 appointments per day. This positions the WCC at the higher end of the field in terms of delivered appointments. Like many centres, we maintain ongoing, and at times lengthy, waiting lists for appointments. Bringing down the WCC utilization rate to a more reasonable 80-85% means finding creative ways to grow appointment availability, and perhaps finding other ways to give students the support they are seeking.

**Managing demand for services**

**Environmental Scan Summary**
While it is clear that there is significant demand for appointments and other services at all writing centres, our environmental scan again revealed significant variation in how writing support units address this challenge: some limit student appointments by assignment, by week, or by term, while others have sought to generate revenue in order to fund expansions to programming. Students at McGill may book up to 7 hours of appointments per semester, while
students at University of Toronto may book up to 15. Students at University of Toronto, however, may only book two appointments at a time. At University of Calgary, students may book up to two 30-minute appointments per week, while University of Ottawa allows students to book up to four 45-minute appointments per week. At University of Saskatchewan, students are limited to two appointments per assignment.

Reliance on part-time, contract labour (undergraduate and graduate students, sessional instructors, etc.) enables some writing centres to increase or reduce the number of appointments available as demand changes throughout the academic year. Some writing centres have also adopted unconventional funding models to address the challenge of unmet student demand. Queen’s charges students a $25 fee if they cancel appointments with less than 12-hours’ notice. Other writing support units make even more concerted efforts to bring in revenue: Western charges incoming students who would like to participate in their Academic Writing Clinic program $499 each. At the University of Alberta, writing support is divided between the Student Success Centre, which charges for its services (500 appointments per year), and the Centre for Writers, which does not (8,000 appointments per year). In a similar fashion, McGill’s Writing Centre, which is an academic department, uses funds generated from the paid, for-credit credit courses it offers to fund the other programming it offers to students at no cost.

What this means for the WCC
To manage demand for appointments, the WCC recently introduced a limit of four hours of appointments per month (from a monthly limit of eight hours). We also began offering undergraduate students the option to book 25-minute appointments as an alternative to 50-minute appointments. We currently do not financially penalize students for missing appointments; however, we temporarily suspend their accounts after three no-show appointments. These efforts appear to be sufficient, although financial penalties may be worth investigating in the future.

2. INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND PRIORITIES

Supporting Degree Level Expectations

The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance has identified Degree Level Expectations for both undergraduate and graduate students. These broad expectations are outlined by the Council of Academic Vice-Presidents, and they overlap significantly with the Writing and Communication Centre’s learning outcomes. [http://oucqa.ca/framework/appendix-1/#](http://oucqa.ca/framework/appendix-1/#)

Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations

Through workshops and individual appointments, the WCC supports students in developing the Application Skills that are identified as an Undergraduate Degree Level Expectation: particularly “the ability to review, present, and interpret quantitative and qualitative information to . . . develop lines of argument.”
Through focusing on genre, multimodal communication, teaching students to assess the rhetorical context, and teaching a genre approach to writing, we support undergraduates in developing degree-level appropriate Communication Skills: “The ability to communicate information, arguments, and analyses accurately and reliably, orally and in writing to a range of audiences.”

Finally, our teaching philosophy, which emphasizes a writer’s own agency, encourages undergraduate students to develop Autonomy and Professional Capacity, or the “ability to manage their own learning in changing circumstances.”

Graduate Degree Level Expectations

The WCC contributes to ensuring graduate students meet an appropriate level of Communication Skills in order to earn a degree, namely the “ability to communicate complex and/or ambiguous ideas, issues and conclusions clearly and effectively.” Our work also supports graduate students in developing other key degree level expectations, such as Research and Scholarship, through helping students to demonstrate their “ability to produce original research, or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, and to merit publication.”

As it does for undergraduates, our teaching philosophy fosters Professional Capacity/Autonomy in graduate students, or “The intellectual independence to be academically and professionally engaged and current.”

Supporting the University of Waterloo’s Strategic Plan, 2013-2018

As an academic support unit, the Writing and Communication Centre performs core activities that support the University of Waterloo. The University is between two institutional strategic plans: the current one that finishes in 2018 and the forthcoming one, which is scheduled to begin in 2020. When the WCC team engaged in discussion and visioning, we drew primarily on the last five-year strategic plan, but it will be necessary to consider the 2020 plan going forward as it becomes available.

The University of Waterloo 2013-2018 strategic plan identifies eight key themes or priority areas under one main goal: “to be recognized as one of the most innovative universities in the world.” While the Writing and Communication Centre primarily reports progress under the theme of Outstanding Academic Programming, we have also relied on several other themes to guide and direct our work.
Outstanding Academic programming

Under its goal to deliver outstanding academic programming, University of Waterloo has prioritized:

- Offering leading-edge, dynamic academic programs
- Being a leading provider of technology-enabled learning opportunities

A key component of the first goal is a commitment to students graduating with demonstrated proficiency in communication skills. The Writing and Communication Centre will continue to work closely with the University Communication Outcomes Initiative (UCOI) group to support first-year communication-intensive courses. Additionally, we will continue to grow collaborations with faculty members, the Library, and a number of other campus partners to integrate writing and communication skills development into a variety of learning contexts and activities. Internally, the Writing and Communication Centre evaluates its programming on an ongoing basis to ensure that it is responding effectively to the changing needs of students.

Finally, we recognize the importance of online and technology-enabled services for all students, including those at satellite campuses, on co-op terms, and those who rely on technology for accessibility. Through collaborative inter-university platforms such as WriteOnline.ca, and through online consultations, resources, and workshops, we strive to offer online services that are appropriate and pedagogically sound.

Student Experience

The University of Waterloo’s goal is to enhance student experience through a student-centred environment in which students feel engaged and connected to their work and their campus community. The Writing and Communication Centre is committed to a student-centric approach to developing and supporting communication competencies. Individualized teaching, dispersed locations across main campus and satellite campuses, student-to-student teaching, support of classroom learning, and a pedagogy that aims to empower students to take ownership and control of their own writing and learning are critical components of writing centre practice. For many students, particularly graduate students, their relationships with WCC instructors are critical to their engagement in campus life and to their experience of Waterloo.

Experiential Education

University of Waterloo’s 2018 goal is to be the world-leading university in co-op education and other forms of experiential and work-integrated learning. The Writing and Communication Centre provides teaching and workplace experiences to a group of undergraduate and graduate co-op students each term. Our team of co-op students receive training in writing centre pedagogy in order to facilitate drop-in communication appointments in the Library, as well individual consultations. They develop administrative and marketing skills by designing and leading social media campaigns. And, by working as part of the WCC team, they gain essential professional skills such as workplace communication, meeting facilitation, and project collaboration.
Transformational Research

The University of Waterloo prioritizes transformational research by aiming to increase the reputation and impact of its research internationally. By supporting undergraduate, graduate, postdoctoral fellows, and faculty researchers through the writing process, our unit is actively engaged in enabling “conditions which support excellence and impact.” As both a teaching service and a hub of communication research, the WCC contributes to writing centre scholarship and the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) by conducting and disseminating its own qualitative, quantitative and theoretical research at the intersections of communication and pedagogy.

A Global Outlook

To become one of the most internationalized universities in Canada, the University of Waterloo’s goal is to “educate globally literate and world-ready graduates.” The Writing and Communication Centre supports the University’s large population of international, multilingual speakers and writers in becoming familiar with and responding to the conventional features of the English language and edited academic writing, and in providing opportunities for recursive practice. The WCC also helps students to recognize language and writing/speaking conventions as culturally contextual, rather than universal.

Promote a Sound Value System

Under this theme, the University seeks to enhance well-being, integrity, equity, and inclusiveness as core values. In the Writing and Communication Centre, instructors interact with students and faculty individually on a daily basis, giving us an opportunity to support the well-being of members of the campus community by (a) fostering teaching environments and approaches to language that are inclusive, (b) designing and participating in workshops that promote sustainable, manageable writing processes and practices, and (c) helping to connect the people we meet to other support services on campus, when necessary. We also have the opportunity to engage campus community members in formative discussions about academic integrity in workshops and in individual appointments.

Bridge to 2020: Preparing for the next University of Waterloo strategic plan, 2020-2025

As the University of Waterloo moves towards its next strategic plan, the WCC is staying apprised of the core focus areas and is engaging with the planning process. Our direction for the future remains aligned with the currently articulated directions of the new plan, which are not yet publicly available.
Section D: Our Five-Year Vision and Goals

1. OUR FIVE-YEAR VISION

The Writing and Communication Centre has been continuously growing and expanding for the last four years. In 2017-2018, our number of overall contacts with students increased by 89% over 2014. This considerable growth has had an impact on staff and program capacities. We carry waiting lists for appointments throughout the term, and both students and faculty report feeling frustrated by long wait times and a lack of availability of consultations. Our programs and staff have expanded to the limits of our space, and the format of our space is no longer optimal for our needs. In a recent psychological health and safety assessment of our unit, staff reported feeling overwhelmed and identified work-life and in-work balance as critical issues.

When we imagine the next five years, we see the Writing and Communication Centre housed in a physical space that reflects the unit’s role as a “centre.” We envision greater integration of our work and programs with curricula across all disciplines and with the services of other departments. These collaborations could extend into sharing some physical resources, for example, the establishment of a learning commons in a location like the Library. The WCC of the future is a bustling hub of activity, with easy access to consultations by students, staff, and faculty, and with ongoing writing groups, boot camps, and workshops. Our online services are robust and interactive, and community members can access the electronic services of the WCC through a variety of modes. WCC staff are seen as experts in their field; we have excellent relationships with the six Faculties, and we are regularly called upon to advise and collaborate on teaching and research projects. We have a successful student staff program, with undergraduate and graduate tutors providing high quality feedback in consultations with students. In service of this vision, we articulate the following program and management goals.

2. PROGRAM GOALS AND OUTCOMES

GOAL 1 | Deepen and broaden Writing and Communication Centre services and programs to develop and support excellence in academic and professional communication.

OUTCOMES
1. Ensure that students can access support when they need it. Our target is for undergraduate and graduate students to access appointments within three days and five days of when they begin the booking process, respectively.
2. Develop expanded capacities to provide support to students in the evenings and on weekends.
3. Deliver programs within disciplinary contexts or in collaboration with academic departments where possible and appropriate. Leverage campus partner collaborations, wherever possible, to align programs and cooperate in service / program delivery for the benefit of the student.
4. Expand the availability of individual consultations for faculty members.
5. Work with OHD and other relevant campus partners to initiate consultations and other programs that support the professional writing activities of University of Waterloo staff.
GOAL 2 | Create an accessible online learning environment that parallels and extends the services of the Writing and Communication Centre.

OUTCOMES
1. Collaborate with partner institutions to re-vision and re-develop WriteOnline.ca as a more robust, interactive and flexible platform addressing a wider range of writing and communication tasks and activities.
2. Build a series of online video workshops and writing guides so that students can access the workshop experience at their convenience.
3. Explore creative and non-traditional approaches to online support, e.g. Reddit, online chat, Facebook Live, etc.

GOAL 3 | Strategically address the unique needs of undergraduate students through robust and targeted programs.

OUTCOMES
1. Identify key undergraduate courses in academic programs that would be served by additional writing and communication support, and collaborate with faculty members to facilitate additional supports.
2. Establish weekly undergraduate writing groups that are supported by tutors and staff.
3. Explore the need for and the feasibility of an undergraduate communications certificate that is integrated with curriculum or co-op, and which includes a capstone project.
4. Examine the feasibility of a cross-disciplinary undergraduate journal.

GOAL 4 | Develop communities of practice that support the scholarly writing activities of students and faculty.

OUTCOMES
1. Develop structures for a range of locally-run graduate student and faculty writing groups that support a variety of needs: goal setting and accountability, language learning, cross-disciplinary, discipline-specific, etc.
2. Plan and implement faculty and graduate student writing retreats that foster community, productivity, and healthy writing practices for a range of participants.
3. Explore the feasibility of new boot camps, such as for journal article writing.
3. MANAGEMENT GOALS AND OUTCOMES

GOAL 1 | Initiate a consultative staff review and restructuring process that will balance workloads, enable more productive partnerships with faculties, help with succession planning, and create room for undergraduate and graduate tutoring staff.

OUTCOMES
1. Work with HR and WCC staff to develop and implement a transparent and consultative process.
2. Develop opportunities to engage undergraduate and graduate students in the Writing and Communication Centre as tutors and researchers through a robust and flexible program.
3. Consider the feasibility of a WAC/WID program in partnership with CTE and faculty.

GOAL 2 | Implement sustainable quantitative and qualitative assessments to measure success, report outcomes and provide us with actionable feedback on services.

OUTCOMES
1. Initiate a cross-unit working group of individuals interested in developing and aligning assessment practices on campus.
2. Develop an assessment plan for the Writing and Communication Centre that leverages current practices and technologies, but enables outcomes-based data.

GOAL 3 | Create and support the development of research in writing, communication, and writing centre fields.

OUTCOMES
1. Collaborate with faculty and staff across the University and with other institutions on research projects.
2. Ensure that staff have sufficient time to read new research and work on research projects that relate to writing centres and writing studies.
3. Develop a sustainable community of practice in the Writing and Communication Centre consisting of an annual plan for internal professional development, including teaching observations, reading discussions, and opportunities to share expertise and teaching practices.
4. Develop our resource library and integrate it into the main Library catalogue.

GOAL 4 | Pursue expanded or new space that accommodates current programs and anticipated future activities, is open and accessible to students, and is centrally located on campus.

1. Produce a complete space needs assessment that anticipates the Writing and Communication Centre growth in the next five years.
2. Pursue discussions with relevant individuals and units to locate suitable collaborative or independent space.