

**MINUTES**  
**FACULTY of ARTS READING AND WRITING TASK FORCE**  
**MARCH 2, 2004**

*Present*

Phillip Hansen (Chair)

Nils Clausson

Lynn Wells

John Whyte

Judy Chapman

Jo-Ann Episkenew

Sandra Blenkinsop

Allison Fizzard

Loanne Myrah (in place of Simone Hengen)

Bernie Thraves

Stephanie Jeanes

**1. Approval of Agenda**

**2. Approval of Minutes of previous meeting**

**3. Scheduled interviews:**

Andrew Stubbs (9:00 A.M.)

Andrew brought up the status of reading and writing programs; there is some uncertainty as to whether the primary function of reading and writing centres should be administrative or academic. He thinks that the University of Regina reading and writing program should perform both administrative and academic functions. He also expressed a need to elevate the status and prestige of writing programs.

Andrew is in favour of a holistic view of writing. He thinks rhetorical factors should be at the top of the priority list, and surface errors at the bottom. He fully advocates a high-end approach to writing. It should be approached from the high end, working from the top down. The skills of communication and generation of meaning should be emphasized. He agrees with the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA).

Andrew stressed that writing should not be product-oriented. Writing is a process and a skill that is acquired interactively. Andrew proposed that the Task Force consider the feasibility of the development of a central office responsible for writing programming across the curriculum. This academic learning centre would be a go-to agency directed by specialists in the field. This could lend prestige and authority to writing as an academic field. It is also important to interact with the various disciplines. The centre could also provide consultation with students. Andrew feels that discipline professors are not focused on writing and that they should be supported by an agency responsible for providing direction in the teaching of writing.

Finally, Andrew believes that University 100 and University 110 should receive course credit within the Faculty of Arts. There is not enough recognition of the value of these courses and what they do.

Jeanne Shami (9:30 A.M.)

Jeanne emphasized the importance of reading in the development of writing ability. She believes reading is as important, if not more important, than writing (reading leads to better writing). As an English professor, she encountered students who are unfamiliar with reading and do not know *how* to read. They seem to lack familiarity with idiomatic English. The consequences of a lack of reading are manifested in the quality of the student's writing. She believes there is a need for teaching strategies that make reading necessary—ensuring students must read in order to pass the course. Writing should be a part of thinking. She emphasized that professors need to give ownership back to the students (although some students resist this move.)

In some courses, students receive papers with no comment or feedback on their writing ability. Students need feedback. Plagiarism is another big problem. Jeanne believes this is part of a culture of not being able to read critically. Courses should be more reading and writing intensive—formal essays should not be the only class assignment. Students need to write all the time. They need to practice reading and writing. Small written projects should be part of everyday work. She also thinks more group-work, where students learn from each other, would be useful.

In some of her classes, Jeanne has taken a unique approach to designing the course and the evaluation ensuring that students will read. Instead of having a final exam at the end of the course, she gives examinations after material was (or should have been) read, but before it is discussed in class. This encourages students to complete the reading tasks and to understand what they have read before it is discussed in class. She also requires each student to meet with her individually before the first essay. In this way, she can identify areas that individuals need to work on and hopefully help them improve in those areas before submitting a final draft. She also feels that when students know their professor, they are much less likely to plagiarize.

Angelina Weenie (10:00 – 11:00 A.M.)

Angelina is from the First Nations University of Canada, where she has been working for seven years. Prior to that she taught at the residential school in Prince Albert for twenty years. She shared some of her learning experiences as a First Nations person, first having to learn English and then learning to read when all available written material is culturally strange.

She feels many students have a poor attitude towards reading and writing, and that students need to learn to enjoy reading and writing more. As part of the Indigenous Peoples Curriculum Project, various indigenous people were asked about their memories of reading and writing in order to get a better understanding of why students now do not like reading and writing. They found that teaching practices under a punitive model were part of the problem. Rather than emphasising progress or good aspects of writing, this model tended to point to errors. She shared a poem written by a First Nations University of Canada student that illustrates this feeling. Reading and writing seem to be of an even greater punitive nature for those individuals who are learning to read and write and are not yet able to read and write well. Punitive feedback is discouraging. Angelina mentioned, for example, at the residential school where she used to teach, students who received detention were required to write “lines.”

Another issue for First Nations students, especially in northern locations, is that the material that is available to read is not related to their lives and experiences as First Nations people. She provided the example of Dick and Jane books, which were used for years in public education. For northern First Nations people, Dick and Jane simply do not represent their reality or culture.

As with many other interviewees, Angelina stressed a process approach to writing. She stated that starting with an outline and then revising drafts was found to contribute to the production of good, written work. She believes that students need more feedback on their work and the opportunity to resubmit work after receiving constructive feedback. She also mentioned that each individual needs student to put effort in to learning. One activity she suggested was to get each student to read part of a selected work and present their section of the work and its meaning to the rest of the class. By doing this students become somewhat of a expert on that subject while learning about other pieces of the work from fellow students.

#### **4. Other business**

- Loanne Myrah will be filling Simone Hengen's place on the Task Force.
- Andrew Stubbs has resigned from the Task Force.
- Judy has contacted Janet Giltrow and she has agreed to assist us with this project by coming to the University of Regina this semester (near the end of April). The Dean has approved her travel expenses providing that she is available for a Faculty of Arts event.
- Next week's meeting will conclude our preliminary interviews, with both a provincial and federal representative from the Public Service Commission.
- The following week (March 16) we will reflect on the information we have gained so far and identify general areas of concern. There will be some discussion of what the final report will look like.
- March 23 there may be interviews. Stephanie Jeanes and Kim Turchenek will present a summary of their report on University 100 and University 110.