

MINUTES
FACULTY of ARTS READING AND WRITING TASK FORCE
MARCH 9, 2004

Present

Phillip Hansen (Chair)
Nils Clausson
Lynn Wells
John Whyte
Judy Chapman
Jo-Ann Episkenew
Loanne Myrah
Bernie Thraves
Stephanie Jeanes

Absent

Sandra Blenkinsop
Allison Fizzard

1. Approval of Agenda

Lynn made a motion to approve the agenda

2. Approval of Minutes of previous meeting

Nils made a motion to adopt the minutes of the previous meeting.

3. Business Arising: Discussion of research strategy

- Phil will try to contact Frank van Drimmelen from Winston Knoll Collegiate and arrange for an interview with him at next week's meeting.
- Next week we will review the material we have gathered to date.
- There will be open interviews for anyone else who would like to address the Task Force (faculty, administrators, graduate students, etc.). Tentatively scheduled for 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. on March 29, 2004, and 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. on March 30, 2004.

4. Scheduled interviews:

Helen Oko (Federal PSC) (9:00A.M.)

Helen stressed that good communication skills, both verbal and written, are important for all government jobs. Conceptual, analytical, and organizational skills are among those sought for in potential employees. Helen said that Arts graduates from all departments get hired in various areas. Having the skills required for the position is often more important than which academic department a candidate graduated from.

As a result of perceived gaps, Training and Development Canada sometimes provides training in areas such as communication skills. Participation in training programs is required for some jobs and voluntary for others.

During the process of recruitment and selection, the PSC attempts to assess the writing competency of the candidates. First, the resume and cover letter provide some indication of writing competency, particularly in how the cover letter responds to the information on the job posting. There is also a standardized multiple choice test on written communication. Some candidates are required to make a verbal presentation on a written document. Presenting written work verbally is an important skill, which is necessary in many government positions.

Diane Crease (Provincial PSC)(9:30A.M.)

Diane is a staffing consultant who meets with candidates to fill positions in the provincial government. She thinks that problems with reading and writing go back to high school. She notices a marked improvement of communication skills among university graduates. For many positions, a variety of communication skills are needed to deal with different people. For example, as many PSC jobs involve working with the public, employees must be able to communicate effectively with people for whom English is a second language. People who cannot articulate themselves well have a hard time finding work in government. Reading comprehension is also important. In order to determine their reading and writing skills, candidates are given a policy document to read, and they are then asked either to explain verbally what the document meant or to summarise the document in writing. Diane said that candidates often reiterate the document word-for-word, rather than interpret its meaning.

If asked, the PSC will provide feedback to unsuccessful candidates, as to why they were not selected for hire. The PSC can talk to people about what they need to do to find employment, which sometimes involves going back to school. Diane said that for junior positions, the PSC is looking for someone with a degree. It is not important to have a degree in any specific discipline, as people are hired from a variety of different disciplines (although she did mention a need for more English graduates). It is however, important to have skills, such as the ability to accurately and concisely communicate with clients. If skill deficits are discovered after hire, there are training and development programs, tuition and book programs, and some departments will send employees back to school to improve their skills.

Nils asked Diane if a minor in writing and rhetoric would benefit graduates looking for work. Diane thought it would be very helpful. Many junior positions involve research and/or policy development, for which writing and rhetoric skills would be particularly important. She mentioned that students sometimes use colloquialisms, and pointed out the importance of writing to the appropriate audience. She would recommend the teaching of audience-directed writing in university. She believes that writing formalism and speech formalism are sometimes insufficient.

5. Other business

- Janet Giltrow will be coming to the University of Regina on April 15, 2004. She will meet with the task force at lunchtime. We will reserve the window room of The University Club, starting at 11:00 am. In the afternoon, from 2:00 – 4:00 pm. Janet will participate in a public discussion. Plan to have approximately five people to engage in an on-stage dialogue with Janet. One of the five, one should be a student (Lynn Wells suggested an English graduate student). Someone who teaches reading and writing classes, and someone who is concerned about reading and writing in their classes should also participate in the discussion. Perhaps an ESL student could speak as well. The Task Force could talk more with Janet over dinner at Danbry's.
- The Task Force needs a website. Phil will contact Scott, and Judy will assist with the webpage construction.