

DVS Writing Initiative 2017–18, Final Report

Submitted by Alison Syme, DVS Chair, to the RGASC, May 30, 2018

The Department of Visual Studies 2017–18 Writing Initiative focused on three large first-year courses: FAH101H5F: Introduction to Art History, CIN101H5F: Introduction to Cinema Studies, and VCC101H5S: Introduction to Visual Culture. In what follows you will find reports from the individual instructors about how the Writing Initiative was structured in each course. Concluding remarks reflect on some of the new challenges we encountered this year and include suggestions for next year, when all three courses will be taught by different instructors.

1. FAH101

FAH101 WDI REPORT 2017

By Bernice Iarocci, Instructor FAH101

WHAT WE DID

The Writing Module consisted of three components that were together worth 15% of the final grade for the course:

(1) Writing Instruction PowerPoints and related in-tutorial quizzes (worth 7% total).

It should first be noted that this was not what we had originally planned to do. Our intention was to have an extra hour of instruction each week and to administer the quizzes and/or a final test during that class time. The latter is what we have done in the past. At the beginning of this term there was a scheduling error, and we were not able to include that extra hour. Consequently, we ended up posting the Instruction PowerPoints on Blackboard and administering the quizzes during tutorial time, at different points in the term. The quizzes were five to ten minutes long and covered the following topics: Primary & Secondary Sources; Quoting, Paraphrasing, Summarizing & Academic Integrity; Paragraph Structure & Thesis Statements; Essay Structure; and Academic Vocabulary.

(2) Online Grammar tutorials and quizzes, posted on Blackboard (worth 4%).

These were the quizzes devised by the RGASC. Students were instructed to complete these by the end of the third week of the term. All quizzes had to be completed perfectly for full marks. Students were allowed to retake each quiz as many times as needed.

(3) Assignment 1 (Visual Analysis) Revision (worth 4%).

The TAs extensively marked up the first page of Assignment 1 (which was 2 ½ - 3 pages long) with regards to grammar and other writing-related problems. For the most part, the TAs indicated where there were errors, but did not provide the corrections. Students had a week to revise their papers (only the writing, not the content). They were also given a Reflection Sheet to complete and submit with their revised paper. This sheet contained four questions that asked them to summarize and assess the errors that the TAs had indicated.

Another part of the course, not directly part of the Writing Initiative but complementary to it, was run by Dr. Laura Taylor and offered extra instruction in academic integrity and skills to ELL students (though other students were free to attend). The PELS tutorials ran for an extra hour each week, held for ten weeks of the term. Regular attendance and participation resulted in 4 bonus points being awarded to the student. Other students could earn the same number of bonus points through an extra-credit assignment.

HOW DID IT WORK (OBJECTIVE ASSESSMENT)

Put simply, our learning objective was to improve student writing, in all its aspects, as much as possible. We focused on both grammar instruction, as we found in the past that many students have trouble with the basics of sentence structure, and broader issues related to essay writing, including the use of evidence and argumentation.

i) RESULTS FROM THE GRAMMAR QUIZZES & WRITING INSTRUCTION QUIZZES

With the Grammar Quizzes (see 2) above), out of 162 students, 84% of them completed all the quizzes for full marks. Only six students failed this component.

With the Writing Instruction (WI) quizzes (see 1) above) we counted the three best scores for each student towards their final grade. Overall, out of 162 students only 5.6% failed this component. 29% achieved perfect, while 77% attained A- or higher.

While the above grades for both the Grammar and WI quizzes are impressive, I am not sure that they are indicative of how much students actually learned and retained as knowledge that was later applied to actual essay writing. (The latter is difficult to gauge.) That said, both types of quizzes were at least incentive for the students to read through the instruction PowerPoints carefully.

ii) ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT PAPERS FROM THE BEGINNING AND END OF THE TERM BY THE RGASC

Students were asked to volunteer to have their Assignments 1 and 2 papers assessed by the RGASC, which resulted in a small sample size. (NOTE: Assignment 1 was a three-page visual analysis of a work of art. Students were given instruction on how to do this, and were not supposed to consult or cite written sources. For Assignment 2 [five pages], students were assigned an academic article and a corresponding work of art. They were asked to summarize the article and apply its concepts to the assigned work.)

A permission sheet designed by the RGASC was distributed in tutorials, which the willing students signed. After the term was over, a representative from the RGASC analyzed papers by sixteen students and assessed these for the quality of the following: thesis statement, evidence, organization, and language. I am quoting the summary of the assessment results that we received from the RGASC (while omitting the examples that the writer included):

The results of the assessment show that the most significant areas of improvement from the pre to the post are those relating to **Evidence** and **Organization**.

Regarding **Evidence**, while the pre samples show students mostly presenting and describing evidence, the post samples are where we see students organizing and marshalling evidence in support of a broader point/argument. In some cases, this goes hand-in-hand with improvements in the area of the **Thesis**.

Regarding **Organization**, this is perhaps where we see the most significant changes. While the analyses in the pre samples are mostly all structured into paragraphs, often the main ideas and topic sentences of the paragraphs are less than clear. Issues still remain in the post, but several samples show improvement in these areas.

HOW DID IT WORK (SUBJECTIVE ASSESSMENT)

i) TAS INTERVIEWED

At the end of the term, the four TAs for the course were interviewed as a group, for approximately an hour, by Michael Kaler from the RGASC. It can also be noted that all these TAs had received Writing Instruction Training from the RGASC, either immediately before the course began or previously. Michael asked them questions regarding their experience with the WDI and their recommendations for improving it in the future.

I am drawing here on the transcript of this interview and paraphrasing some striking points from the discussion.

THE PROBLEM OF WORKING WITH STUDENTS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS OF COMPETENCE:

Three of the TAs felt they had difficulty figuring out how to teach groups of students that encompassed a wide range of abilities. This problem was particularly (although not exclusively) due to the many ELL students in the course. The TAs believed that, even though we focused primarily on sentence construction, even this rather basic level was sometimes too advanced for the ELL students (for instance, given that we addressed issues such as comma splices and dangling modifiers). The TAs agreed that they were often unsure if the feedback they were giving met the students' needs. One TA also suggested that only indicating problems on papers—and not correcting—was not enough for many students: many needed some correction in order to learn what the proper form was.

THE PROBLEM OF TOO MUCH TIME BEING TAKEN UP WITH WRITING CONCERNS:

Several TAs felt that, on the whole, too much time was taken up during tutorials with writing-related concerns. They found the WI quizzes (see 1) on p. 1) to be disruptive and distracting. Students were so focused on passing these that they seemed to have little energy for course content that was taken up immediately after the quizzes. Moreover, two of the TAs believed that there was little evidence that the students learned from the quizzes or applied knowledge from them to their in-tutorial writing or Assignment papers. (This point of view is nonetheless contradicted to at least some extent by the analysis of student papers by the RGASC (see above, Objective Assessment ii)). All the TAs felt that an entirely separate, dedicated course—an introductory writing course—would work better as a requirement for first-year students: what we were trying to do had limits. On the other hand, one of the TAs expressed that, even though we tried to limit our grading time spent on writing-related material to mostly grammar instruction, many students also needed help with the construction of paragraphs and arguments.

THE POSITIVE:

The TAs believed the Revision process (see p.1 item 3) was truly helpful for the students. The Reflection Sheet was also useful, because it forced the students to really think about their TA's comments and recognize what kinds of mistakes they were repeatedly making.

Three TAs felt that teaching students at a basic level, including ELL students, made them better instructors, in general.

ii) RGASC ONLINE STUDENT SURVEYS

The RGASC administered online surveys of the students at the beginning (Pre) and end (Post) of the course, each time asking them the same set of questions regarding how they perceived their own writing skills. 86 students responded to the Pre survey, 18 students to the Post. I received the survey results in bar chart and numerical form. The following highlights some of the results for each question, along with **my own analysis**:

a) How would you rate your academic writing skills?

In the Pre survey, 30% students ranked their writing skills as “strong”, as opposed to 22% Post.

The number who ranked their skills as “weak” or “very weak” increased slightly -- 14% Pre vs. 16.5 % Post.

b) How worried are you about writing in your university courses?

In the Pre survey, 25.6% stated “very”, while in the Post, this response jumped to 50%.

There was a small improvement in those that were “somewhat” or “not worried at all”: 19.8% Pre vs. 11.2% Post.

These results suggest that through the course, students realized that their writing was not as strong as they initially believed.

c) How often do you make grammar mistakes when you are writing?

The number that chose “some” were 57% Pre and 50% Post.

The number that chose “a lot” rose from 19.8% Pre to 33% Post.

d) How often do you make punctuation mistakes?

The number that chose “some” were 46.5% Pre and 27.8% Post.

The number that chose “a lot” or “terrible” rose from 13% Pre to 22.2% Post.

e) Are you able to catch and fix your mistakes in grammar and punctuation when you edit or proofread?

The number that chose “always” or “mostly” dropped from 62.7% Pre and 38.9% Post.

The above three questions indicate that, over the term, the realization that they make mistakes increased overall among the students.

f) How much time do you spend editing your papers for school?

The number that chose “I read it over once or twice” increased from 44.5% to 72%.

The number that chose “I go through it line by line” fell from 33.7% to 22.2%.

Despite our emphasis throughout the term on the need to spend time proofreading and editing, the above shows that many students became less meticulous in this regard. On the other hand, these results also indicate that the number of students who spent time on these activities increased – from 79% to 94.4%.

g) How would you rate your ability to come up with your own arguments in your papers?

“Strong” or “excellent” – Pre: 34%, Post: 17% (with no one choosing “excellent”)

“Competent” – Pre: 53%, Post: 66.7%

“Weak” or “very weak” – Pre: 15%, Post: 16.7%

By the end of the term, there was a substantial loss of confidence in the students’ ability to come up with original arguments, or the realization that their abilities were not as strong as they first thought. On the other hand, there were fewer students who saw their writing as “weak” or “very weak”.

h) How would you rate your ability to organize your papers?

“Strong” or “excellent” – Pre: 31.4%, Post: 27.8%

“Competent” – Pre: 61.6%, Post: 50%

“Weak” or “very weak” – Pre: 6.9%, Post: 22.2%

i) How would you rate your ability to quote, paraphrase, or summarize?

“Strong” or “excellent” – Pre: 32%, Post: 22.2% (with no one choosing “excellent”)

“Competent” – Pre: 61.6%, Post: 50%

“Weak” or “very weak” – Pre: 5.8%, Post: 27.8%

With both questions, again there was the realization that their abilities were not as strong as they first thought. There were significant drops at the top end (those who felt “strong” or excellent” or even “competent”), while there were substantial increases in those who would categorize themselves as “weak” or “very weak”.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

WHAT WORKED:

- 1) The Revision exercise for Assignment 1. The TAs perceived this to be a positive process (see Subjective Assessment item i). All agreed that the inclusion of the Reflection Sheet with the Revision increased the usefulness and success of the process. The latter is supported by the fact that, when surveyed, more students said at the end of the course that they would spend time proofreading and editing, as compared to those surveyed at the beginning (see Subjective Assessment item ii) f).
- 2) The analysis of Student Assignments undertaken by the RGASC (See Objective Assessment ii)) indicated that students showed overall improvement in their papers in the areas of organization and evidence.

WHAT DID NOT WORK:

- 1) The Writing Instruction module conducted exclusively online, via the PowerPoints posted on Blackboard, was not effective. Again, we had originally planned to have an extra hour of in-class teaching for this, each week, but there was a scheduling mix-up. Given the TA feedback (see Subjective Assessment item i) it is clear that we need to restore that hour in the classroom.

I should add that, as the course instructor who has also taught the WI this term and previously, I did feel disconnected from this part of the course this year. I was the one who made up and posted the PowerPoints on Blackboard, but not having the weekly in-person contact with the students made it much more difficult to gauge how they were reacting to the WI material over the term.

- 2) I believe that we were “stalled” at the grammar level for much of the course because of the absence of the weekly writing module.
- 3) Neither the Writing Initiative nor the PELS tutorials have been able to decrease the academic offences that we have for this course -- that is, when comparing this year to previous ones.

WHAT TO KEEP, WHAT TO POSSIBLY CHANGE

- 1) For sure, the students benefit from the WDI and we should run the project again. We also must re-instate the weekly in-class hour of Writing Instruction. The Revision exercise (with the Reflection Sheet) should be repeated.
- 2) Most of the TAs expressed a desire for more Writing Training related to how to work with students at different levels of ability. They would like to know how to tailor feedback in this regard, as well as what works best, in particular, for ELL students.

- 3) While paragraph construction, argumentation, and other writing issues were covered in the Writing Instruction PowerPoints, we should try to implement more systematically writing exercises that are focused on these skills (perhaps low-stakes ones in tutorials). Incorporating such exercises into the writing process for the Assignments is also a possibility.
-

2. CIN101

Writing Development Initiative Report

CIN101H5F: An Introduction to Cinema Studies (Fall 2017)

Prepared by Matthew Stoddard

Summary of writing initiative instruction and resources offered:

1. Revision Assignment (Nov 3)

This assignment asked students to revise their first paper based on their TA's feedback. The mark for this assignment, which amounted to 10% of the final mark, was separate from the mark for the first paper.
2. Revision Workshop (Oct 20)

This workshop took place in tutorial and was based on an exercise provided by Michael Kaler (from RGASC). Students were asked to read through their TA's feedback on the first paper and to answer questions about their understanding of this feedback. Students also did this for the feedback provided on a classmate's paper. This exercise was designed to help students with the revision assignment.
3. Presentation on Thesis Statements (Nov 24)

During lecture, Michael Kaler (from RGASC) gave a presentation about how to write a good thesis statement. The presentation was designed to aid students with their second (and final) paper, which was due the week after the presentation. The slides from the presentation were posted on Blackboard.
4. Paper 2 Workshop (Nov 24)

This workshop took place in tutorial. TAs selected a short clip from films on the syllabus and guided their students through an analysis that touched on elements of both form and content. This activity provided a demonstration of the sort of analysis students would perform in their second (and final) paper, which was due the following week.
5. Drop-In Hours at the RGASC

The week before each paper assignment (including the Revision) was due, the RGASC offered drop-in hours specifically for students in the course. These drop-in hours were noted on the syllabus, on Blackboard, and were repeatedly advertised in lecture.
6. Professional English Language Skills (PELS) Workshops

These workshops, held weekly, focused on developing writing skills for non-native speakers. Activities in the workshops were geared specifically toward course assignments. Extra credit was given for attending and participating in seven of these workshops.

Summary and Assessment of Outcomes

The analysis of student writing performed by the RGASC—comparing samples of the first and second papers—reported “clear improvements” in four areas: interpretation, organization, evidence, and language. Interpretation describes the students’ ability to develop a thesis that makes a claim/argument about a film. Improvement in this area is somewhat unreliable since the first paper, unlike the second paper, was largely descriptive rather than interpretive. However, improvement in the other three areas, particularly organization and language, provides good evidence of progress in students’ writing abilities.

Student impressions of writing instruction in the course appear to be good. The exit survey conducted by the RGASC suggests an increase in overall confidence in writing. The percentage of students who rated their academic writing skills as “Excellent” or “Strong” was more than 4 points higher than at the start of the term. The percentage of students who claimed to be “Very Worried” about the large amount of writing in university courses fell by more than 10 points from the start of the term. (More specific questions about skills yielded mixed results.) Furthermore, the course evaluations contain numerous references to the high degree of support for developing writing skills. Given the prominence of writing in the course, the relatively high numbers on the evaluations more generally also suggest a favorable view of the writing initiatives.

Laura Taylor, who ran the PELS workshops, reported very good attendance. Michael Kaler reported use of the drop-in hours at RGASC. While it is hard to assess how much these resources improved writing, it is highly encouraging that they were utilized.

The course’s TAs, who were interviewed by Michael Kaler, recognized and reiterated the value of the WDI. They also expressed some concerns about its implementation in the course. Some noted difficulty in balancing writing instruction with instruction on course content (and within time constraints more generally). A larger concern was with the difficulty of dealing with students with a very broad range of writing skills, and especially of dealing with ELL students. Most of the TAs felt inadequately equipped to deal with the writing issues of non-native speakers. While acknowledging this shortcoming, the TAs also highlighted the general usefulness of the initial training they received. Another set of concerns focused on the writing assignments. More specifically, the TAs felt the first paper and the revision did little to forward the goals of the WDI.

Thoughts Going Forward

There seems to be a need for further training of the TAs in writing instruction, particularly in regard to ELL. In fact, the ELL issue seems to be significant enough to require its own separate course/set of initiatives. On a smaller scale, the writing

assignments for CIN101 could be re-thought. The differences in approach between the first and second papers made assessment of improvement in writing (as carried out by the RGASC) somewhat tenuous. In addition, the TAs noted how the dry technical nature of the first paper posed difficulties for many students, as did the fact that the paper is quite different from the standard argumentative essay more familiar to the students. The TAs were also largely unconvinced of the utility and success of the revision assignment, both in itself and in its relation to paper one.

3. VCC101

VCC101 WRITING INITIATIVE REPORT 2018

Design of writing development initiatives

The curriculum for VCC101 is designed to include multiple opportunities for students to improve their writing and develop an awareness of its importance through revision exercises, regular writing practice, reading that explicitly attends to writing, and an emphasis on keywords to build vocabulary. This year these components were as follows:

(1) Assignment 1 (visual analysis) revision

The TAs extensively marked up the first page of Assignment #1 (approximately 3 pages) with regard to grammar and other writing-related problems. Students were asked to extrapolate from the first page and correct similar errors on the following pages. They had a week to revise their papers. The assignment was worth 8% of the final grade, with the revision component counting for 4%.

Students also had the option to repeat this revision process for Assignment 2 (critical analysis of an assigned reading, worth 12%), although in this case the revision led to a revised overall grade rather than an additional grading component. As in previous years, the TAs followed the advice of Michael Kaler at the RGASC, who has advised us that while the grading could indicate the full range of writing issues, it is most effective to focus on a few recurring problems.

(2) Follow-up tutorial for Assignment 1

When Assignment 1 was returned to the students for revision, the TAs went over common errors in their tutorials. They also gave students a reflection sheet that asked them to read through the TAs' comments and write down what issues they needed to address in their revision. Students filled this out during the tutorial, which enabled them to seek immediate clarification on any issues flagged by the TAs they did not understand.

(3) Weekly journal exercise

Students were required to write a 250-word entry every week (for 9 weeks) in their Blackboard journals, using the keywords relevant to the week's readings to analyze a photograph of their choice. This comprised 15% of the final grade. The weekly exercise required the students to engage in regular writing practice that also helped them understand and apply (and thus also retain) vocabulary specific to Visual Studies. In

previous years this exercise had required students to assess their own ability and progress by comparing their journal entries with the way the readings were unpacked in the lectures and tutorials. However, from student feedback and final submissions it became clear that this was too much to expect, so this year the TAs were given additional hours to provide brief feedback on the journal entries for 6 weeks. This feedback was dispersed through the term but weighted towards the beginning as students got the hang of the exercise (note that this feedback did not always specifically address writing, but it helped students to feel the exercise was worthwhile).

(4) In-tutorial writing practice

For 6 of the 12 weeks of tutorials, again dispersed over the term, TAs incorporated low-stakes writing practice into their tutorials, using various methods that had been covered in previous Writing Training. Usually the exercise was coordinated across the tutorials as it also served a pedagogical function in terms of course content; however, individual TAs were free to tweak these exercises as they saw fit as long as a basic quantum of writing was assigned. Again, unlike last year, these exercises were also graded. The aim here was not so much to provide feedback but to ensure continued practice and to collect samples of writing for analysis by the RGASC.

(5) Introductory tutorial for Assignment 2

The second writing assignment involved the critical analysis of an academic article, with attention to written expression as much as to the argument. The TAs' introduction to this exercise included an explanation of this type of analysis using a short polemical passage. This provided an opportunity to focus students' attention on the importance of various aspects of writing: the way grammatical correctness, overall structure, and rhetorical style are linked with communication and expression.

(6) DVS Writing Tutor and dedicated RGASC slots

Students were encouraged to seek individualized help with their writing from the DVS Writing Tutor and the RGASC. The RGASC provided dedicated drop-in timeslots to VCC101 before the first essay revision was due.

Assessment

The course instructors were not provided with any specific instruments for objectively measuring improvement (and designing these is well beyond their expertise); however, the RGASC provided an analysis of selected writing samples. This analysis revealed "improvements in most areas of the rubric... especially in the areas of subject-verb agreement and antecedents."

The TAs' views on the initiative were solicited and compiled by the RGASC. The TAs generally felt they saw improvement in student writing over the semester, particularly in the journal entries that they saw as the most effective component of the initiative. They also remarked on the effectiveness of the reflection sheets introduced in tutorial to help students process their feedback on writing. However, the writing initiative most benefited native English speakers, except for some ELL students – typically more advanced 2nd and 3rd year students who understood the importance of attending classes – who showed noticeable improvement in combination with other language initiatives like the PELS sessions. In the revision exercise ELL students often had trouble correcting their writing mistakes, and sometimes made new errors in the process of doing so. The TAs felt that students were not taking the revision exercises as seriously as they could or should, and

had some suggestions for making them more effective (see “Possible changes” below). This is borne out by the fact that while the first revision was mandatory and had a grade attached to it, only 36 students out of 211 attempted the second assignment revision, which was optional.

Students’ views on the writing initiative were solicited in a self-assessment exercise as part of an optional extra credit assignment. Here they were asked to write 250 words reflecting on how their writing had improved over the term (if at all). 56 students out of 211 provided feedback in this way. All except one student thought their writing had improved; some also remarked on how they felt they could do much more to become better writers. The person who did not report improvement expressed the view that a focus on writing was inappropriate in a visual culture course. In general, however, students commented on how they had come to appreciate the value of writing. They, like the TAs, singled out the writing practice required for the journal exercise as a source of improvement; several of them also mentioned the role of feedback in obtaining better grades over the course of the semester. Specific elements that students remarked on included the use of the active rather than the passive voice; sentence fragments; the development of precision and clarity; a more mature and academic tone; the ability to summarize and structure ideas; and an expanded vocabulary. Several students also wrote that the writing components of this course complemented and reinforced other writing courses they were taking such as WRI1203 and CCT110; others appreciated the dedicated support provided for this course by the RGASC.

What we have learned

Students’ estimates of their own improvement were often more generous than those of the TAs, but it is clear that there are many benefits to the writing initiative. The sheer quantum and regularity of writing required, along with directed feedback, seemed effective in orienting students towards the elements of good writing and towards the importance of clear written expression. Here both the revision exercises and the weekly journal stood out as effective ways to achieve this; the extra hours of TA feedback therefore proved highly worthwhile. Giving students opportunities for reflection and self-assessments were also excellent ways to reinforce their learning. What remains unavailable – there simply aren’t enough hours in the course – is the opportunity to substantially restructure an essay or revise it in terms of content and flow. In general issues of argumentative structure remain unaddressed except in relation to the article analyzed in the second assignment, or are only covered in an ad hoc way depending on the availability of time and TAs’ individual inclinations. Indeed, this led to a little confusion and frustration on the TAs’ part as they tried to separate issues of grammar from those of style, structure, and content.

All in all, however, while the writing initiative may not have led to dramatic improvements over the course of a single semester, this may be too much to expect; I am convinced that it is important in laying the foundation for an orientation towards good writing that needs to be reinforced throughout students’ university career. It is unfortunate that in most cases this foundation is not already provided by their high school education. In general a great deal more remedial work is required that simply cannot be

accomplished by individual courses in piecemeal fashion: *there is no substitute for an intensive writing course that is compulsory for all first year students* (or changes to the secondary school curriculum - although that would take an even greater feat of political will).

Possible changes to the VCC101 writing initiative

Although I will not be in charge of VCC101 next year and therefore cannot predict what shape the course will take, I highly recommend that we continue with this initiative in some form. At a minimum I would recommend building in graded weekly writing and at least one opportunity for revision. The TAs had some useful suggestions for making a revision exercises more effective. One is to introduce a revision commentary that students are required to complete, including tracking specific changes to their papers, so that both students and TAs can see more clearly whether and how students are responding to feedback. Another easily implemented suggestion is to provide the grading rubric along with the brief for the essay so that students know in advance what the TAs will be looking for. Finally (a point that did not surface in the report on their conversation with the RGASC), the TAs advocated for streamlining the low stakes in-class writing assignment by keeping a consistent format for each week; this would make it easier to grade for improvement and allow for a design enabling students to build up a specific skillset.

Kajri Jain, instructor, VCC101 2018

Conclusion:

The reports from instructors suggest the importance of continuing the DVS Writing Initiative as well as ways to improve it next year. They also highlight the continuing challenges ELL students face and create in our classrooms, and the need for the administration to find a better way to address them. While the DVS and our instructors remain committed to writing instruction, the reports emphasise (as the DVS has for many years) the urgency of introducing a mandatory writing course for all students at UTM. If one is introduced, our Departmental writing initiative would be able to focus on higher level skills.

As indicated above, the FAH101 weekly 50-minute, in-person writing instruction component had to be cancelled due to room constraints (another course also had to be moved due to lack of available space, which dramatically affected its enrolments—we are greatly relieved that North B will be open in the fall). While Dr. Iarocci, who has taught the writing module multiple times, did her best to make up for the loss of this instruction time through homework assignments and in-tutorial quizzes, they were not an adequate substitute for the live instruction and in-class writing exercises that accompany it. Both

the instructor and the comments of our experienced TAs confirm that the instruction and interaction the module offers is essential to our students' acquisition of core skills. The hour for the module in Fall 2019 has been scheduled and confirmed with Gerry, so everything should be back to normal for 2018–19. The other important suggestion for FAH101 was the incorporation of more exercises focused on higher level skills, whether introduced through in-class writing assignments or homework, which we will convey to the new instructor.

For VCC101 this year we received a substantial increase in TA hours to enable more feedback on students' weekly writing assignments, for which we are grateful, and which seems to have been very successful. We request that the increased funding level for this course be maintained in 2018–19, and we will encourage the new instructor to work with the RGASC and use a consistent format for low-stakes writing exercises in tutorials.

CIN101 is the least intensive of our Writing Initiative efforts. While it is pleasing that the RGASC survey results are positive for this course, the evaluation of improvement based on the RGASC's RA's grades for two very different assignment types seems, as the instructor himself notes, "somewhat tenuous" and "unreliable." A surprise this year was the fact that the revision exercise in CIN101, which had seemed to work well for the two previous years, was found to be less effective. The new instructor for the course will doubtless have very different assignments, and we would appreciate the RGASC's advice on what will work best for this course in its new format.

Based on the TAs' comments, we would like to request more training for all of our TAs on how to deal with ELL students in the classroom and how to best serve their writing needs with our limited means. We appreciate the RGASC's continued funding and support for all of our introductory courses.