

UNIVERSITY NEWSBEAT

Prepared by the Communications Department, S 802 Ross, 667-3441

First Year Writing Project



Judith Humphrey

Some 1300 students in first-year humanities and social science Arts courses have writing instruction coming to them in what Dean of Arts Sydney Eisen calls "a very exciting and important new approach." Through the administrative support of Dean Eisen and Associate Dean William Whitla, the First-Year Writing Project was established this year to complement instruction in the Writing Workshop.

The project was developed by

program director Judith Humphrey as an extension of the teaching philosophy she learned as a Writing Workshop instructor. She explained that "the writing workshop (in universities) is a new concept, developed in the '60s as an alternative to traditional composition classes."

The basic approach is teaching subject-related writing, "practical writing which is a vehicle for good thinking."

In the project, tutorial instructors

in chosen courses are trained to transmit the lessons during normal course hours, rather than requiring students to visit the Workshop on their own initiative. At present 49 instructors teach a total of 68 tutorials in the project.

The training of instructors by Ms. Humphrey and the time spent on helping students with writing problems represent an increased responsibility for faculty. "They're very dedicated teachers" Ms. Humphrey stated. The project "does lead to a very nice relationship between instructor and student in that the instructor takes on a guiding role in helping the student write a paper, not just an evaluative role in marking" she added.

In the pilot project last year with approximately 225 humanities students Ms. Humphrey went to the classroom herself to give the lessons, but the instructors found that the lessons helped them as well as their students. In a project questionnaire several instructors "thought they had been helped in learning how to formulate better assignments, to diagnose writing problems and make suggestions to students" she said. The reactions and academic progress of the students were also monitored.

Carolyn Gardner, Director of the Writing Workshop, and Johanna Stuckey, Chairman of Humanities, were instrumental in arranging the pilot project. They had been working together for several years to promote liaison between the Writing Workshop and course instructors. Prof. Stuckey said "generally, the grades were better last year; some students improved their grades by as much as one grade" although

general interest in better writing on the part of the students, and subsequent visits to the Writing Workshop may have contributed to the improvement.

Prof. Stuckey views last year's project as "very successful" and hopes that the First Year Writing Project will have "a spread effect; training instructors to teach writing skills means the Writing Workshop won't have to be extended."

The approach and scope of the project is contained in a two-volume manual which details five basic lessons. The student is taught to analyze assignments and center his ideas on a specific argument or "thesis". Only then do considerations of style and organization enter into the lessons, beginning with larger units of meaning and working down to the sentence level.

Concern over the literacy — or lack of it — of freshmen students is headline by newspapers every few years, but Ms. Humphrey feels that student writing, over her four years of Writing Workshop instructing, has remained "uniformly poor." The problem in her view is that university courses demand argumentative writing, but high-school assignments tend to require only research and description.

"Argumentative writing belongs to the university field" she said. She feels writing skills should be taught at all levels of education. "Even professors learn writing skills in doing dissertations and showing papers to colleagues."

The First Year Project is, to her knowledge, "the only one of its kind." An Ontario Universities Programme for Instructional Development (OUPID) grant funded the pilot project, and a paper

describing its results attracted inquiries from teachers all over North America. She hopes to publish the manual as "the project is one that would be easy to mount in other universities; it uses existing staff, requires no extra funding, and combines the teaching of writing skills with mastery of the subject."

Assignments written under the guidance of the first two lessons this year are just being submitted to instructors now. The lessons are scheduled to accompany specific assignments; the approach is practical, rather than theoretical, Ms. Humphrey stressed. "The traditional approach stressed the rules of grammar and syntax alone. . . now the rules of grammar and syntax serve the larger purpose of aiding the process of argumentation, which begins with the formation of ideas."

The new project reaches out to first-year students and is part of their humanities and social science courses, not an option.

All course leaders contacted responded enthusiastically, but only the first 12 courses could be included. "Many instructors who wanted to couldn't participate" Ms. Humphrey explained, "so I hope to continue the project next year, keeping the same instructors and adding some new ones."

Trent Brady, a lecturer in social science, has been using the new method in his tutorials, and said "Students have been receptive and it's worked out quite well. This method of developing a clear, precise, limited thesis statement is really worthwhile. . . and I've found it very valuable in clarifying assignments, too."

Visa Student Drop

Preliminary information from the Registrar's office indicates a drop of about 25% in foreign students registered at York this year compared with the 1976-77 academic year.

Bob Elliott, Statistics Officer, stated that November 1 estimates showed that 779 foreign undergraduates registered this year compared with 1,027 last year. The drop in enrolment is most apparent in the first-year intake, with 187 successful applicants compared to 447 in 1976-77.

This is the first year in which York, like most Ontario univer-

sities, has charged differential fees for foreign students. Canadian students pay \$765 for a normal five-course academic year, but foreign students are charged \$1,590.

Graduate student enrolment has dropped more than 50%. Foreign students doing graduate studies on visa total 50 this year, compared with 112 last year.

Mr. Elliott stressed that these figures are preliminary findings prepared for November 1. However, it is unlikely that final totals will show a large climb from the present statistics.

Footnotes

Religion & Israel

Dr. Zalman Abramov, author of *Perpetual Dilemma: Jewish Religion in the Jewish State* will speak Monday, November 14 at York.

The lecture, on "Religion and the State in Israel", will be presented at 10:00 a.m. in Room 038, Admin. Studies Building, as part of the Conferences on Jewish Life and Education at York. The Conferences are a co-operative effort organized by the Faculty of Arts (Religious Studies Program) and the Faculty of Education (Judaic Studies Option). Admission is free.

Robinson Cuso?

A public information meeting about Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO) will be presented by the International Student Centre Monday, Nov. 21 at 4:00 p.m. in the Faculty Lounge, 8th floor, Ross Building.

CUSO offers an opportunity for

Canadians with teaching and technical skills to visit underdeveloped foreign countries and share their knowledge. Transportation is paid, and wages are at local levels.

A film on "CUSO in Papua, New Guinea" will be shown and CUSO staff will attend. Call Susan Miller, 667-6262, for information.

Transportation Fellowships

Fellowships and Assistantships are available to M.A. and Ph.D. students who relate their studies to transportation, under the University of Toronto-York/University Joint Program in Transportation.

Applicants must be Canadians or landed immigrants and working towards thesis completion except for those in graduate transportation programs. Support is \$6,500 for Ph.D. students \$6,000 for Master's Fellowships, and \$4,200 for master's assistantships over a twelve-month period.

Further details and application forms will be available shortly from the Joint Program in Transportation, Room 430, Osgoode Hall.

Education Wins Windows

The Faculty of Education's new Resource Centre boasts the first windows installed in the Ross Building since its construction.

Located in S166 Ross, at the extreme south end of the building, the Centre is, in Dean of Education Robert L. R. Overing's words, "an extension of our philosophy that we have to try and make our own instructional mirror . . . that learning and studying should be pleasant, and one way to do that is to include the light, trees, and grass outside."

The supervisor of the centre, Nancy Kaspers, explained that the Centre gathers together "the materials that Education students actually use in teaching elementary and secondary school students." Books, records, learning kits and games are all available from the centre.

Formerly it was located in a room in the Scott Library basement; students could not work where the material was located, but had to take it to a study area. As with the Education facilities on the eighth floor, the new centre is a "multi-use area" in which lighting, colours, and partition deployment have all been carefully chosen.

Ms. Kaspers said about the

students "They usually come in and say, 'Oh my gosh, it's so much nicer' and if they focus on one thing it's the windows." Affording a southern exposure and a view of the lawn and Administrative Studies building, the windows are striking.

Other community members outside the Faculty of Education have already used the new centre.

During the summer some children came in, to play with the learning kits; and psychology students have used the materials, as well as York Daycare Centre workers.

The new area, formerly the academic gown storage room, represents a gain of over 200 square feet in floor area — not to mention light and user delight.



Assignment Workshop

A workshop of interest to faculty, and teaching assistants entitled "Formulating Assignment Questions" has been rescheduled. The Development of Teaching Skills workshop will now take place at

4:00 p.m., Thursday, Nov. 10 in Room 114, Founders. Call Janette Baker at 667-3220 for further information.

Re Review

The Department of Theatre is going vaudeville with a new production titled *Review of Revues*. Concocted by Mavor Moore, Jill

Courtney, and John Oxley, this production will feature the Fourth Year Performance Ensemble. The review is based on Spring Thaw material from productions of the '40s, '50s and '60s.

Tickets are free from the Burton Box Office starting November 14. The Review runs from Monday, Nov. 21 to Friday, Nov. 25 with matinees Monday, Wednesday and Friday.