

Faculty Writing Supports

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF RESEARCH SUPPORTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE



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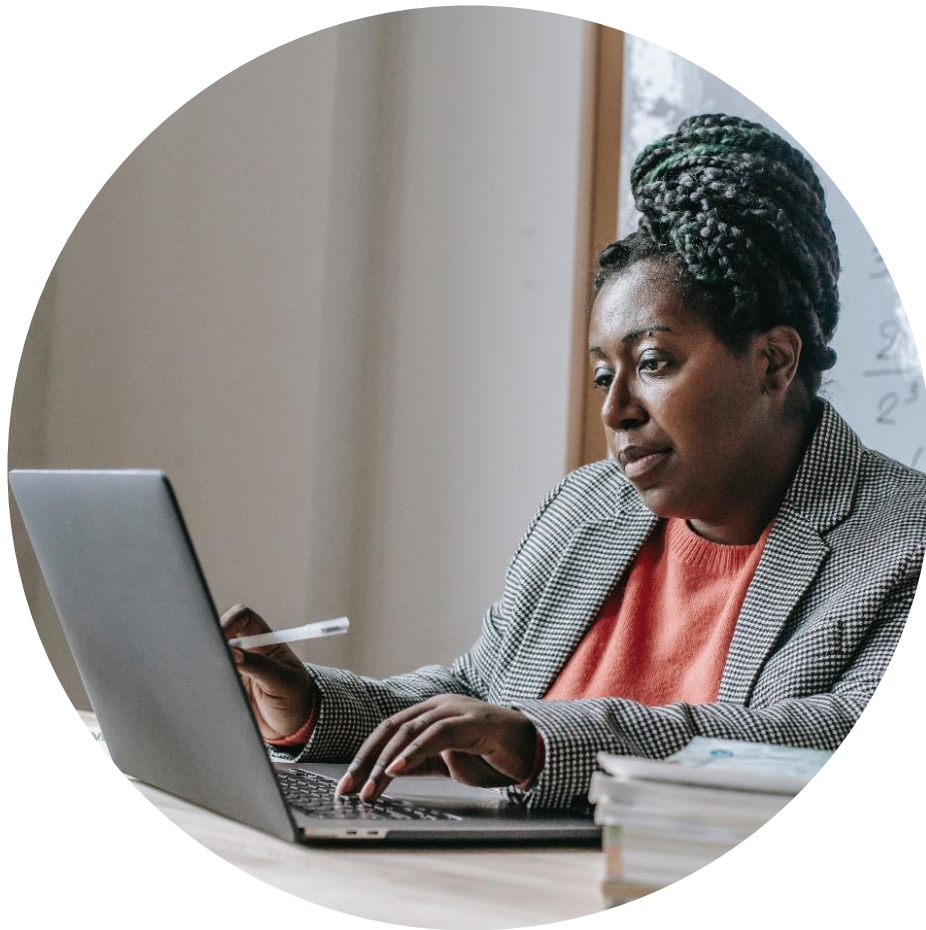
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Executive Summary

This mixed-method research project assesses faculty writing supports at Carleton University in the last decade and in particular during the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on data from surveys and interviews, the study results underscore the significance and effectiveness of faculty writing programs. The research also demonstrates the importance of writing supports for potentially marginalized faculty members (e.g. BIPOC, people with disabilities, women, caregivers, pre-tenure individuals), underscoring how action to buttress faculty writing supports can contribute to achieving the university's goals with respect to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Decolonization. The study further reveals significant gaps in the supports offered, including the ad hoc nature of programs for faculty, demonstrating a need for the university to offer responsive, comprehensive and sustainable writing initiatives. To meet this need, this report advances eight evidence-based recommendations. These recommendations aim to ensure the sustainability and success of faculty writing supports and that they reach faculty members across the range of disciplines, life experiences, and career stages. Writing supports can strongly contribute to nurturing a sense of community and belonging across the university. To manifest a vibrant and responsive writing culture at Carleton University, evidence-based action needs to be taken to fully support faculty writing practices.





Context

In the neoliberal university, increasing demands have been placed on academics, resulting in heavier workloads, longer work hours, and workplace stress (Dickson-Swift, et al. 2009). Reliance on performance indicators for assessing scholarly outputs necessitates that scholars manage busy teaching and service loads, while also setting aside substantive writing periods to advance their publications (Kempenaar and Murray

2019). In response to these pressures, faculty at Carleton University have provided volunteer-led academic writing support programs to assist faculty members across campus. Starting in 2013, Dr. Merridee Bujaki initiated a semester long writing workshop (the Belcher Workshop) based on Wendy Belcher's key text *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks* (2009; 2019). This workshop has been offered consistently at the university since then, serving over one hundred faculty members, many of whom have participated in the program more than once. Notably, these participants have varied in rank (from postdoctoral fellows to full professors) and across disciplines (including faculty from the social sciences, humanities, sciences, and business). These writing workshops have been supported by Carleton University's Office of Quality Initiatives, which facilitated registrations, secured space on campus for meetings and provided textbooks to participants.

With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, work at the university was severely disrupted, further complicating the ongoing personal and professional demands on faculty members. Women, and those with caregiving responsibilities, in particular, were notably impacted by these difficult working conditions (Bowyer et al. 2022; Corbera et al. 2020; Dunn et al. 2022; Gao et al. 2021). In the context of the remote work mandate and in response to the isolation felt by many Carleton employees, in 2020 Drs. Melissa Redmond and Sarah E.K. Smith launched Carleton University's Silent Writing Café. This was a reoccurring virtual workshop (facilitated again by Drs. Renate Ysseldyk and Kim Hellemans in Spring 2021) to enable faculty to create intentional scheduled time to write, while providing a shared virtual social space in which to build community. Having co-facilitated the 2019 Belcher Workshop and following the robust response to the silent co-writing program, Drs. Redmond and Smith subsequently ran the Belcher Workshop online in Winter 2021. Hoping to increase workshop inclusivity and accessibility they introduced a new collaborative-facilitation model, which was successfully implemented again in 2022 by Drs. Bujaki and Redmond.



These writing programs buttress Carleton University's commitment to fostering faculty development and research and speak to a particular need to care for marginalized faculty members (including Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour [BIPOC]; people with disabilities; caregiving; female; and pre-tenure faculty members). In collaboration with the Office of Quality Initiatives, we have undertaken research to evaluate the effectiveness of the Belcher Workshop and Silent Writing Café, and to examine the larger issues of academic writing support for vulnerable faculty. The results of this research speak to the effectiveness of these programs. However, our research also reveals a critical need for additional writing supports as expressed by participating faculty, as well as demonstrating that the community-driven and ad hoc nature of these writing initiatives raise questions about the sustainability of these programs. This report outlines the research undertaken and provides eight specific recommendations to fully realize the potential of faculty writing supports at Carleton University.

Process & Data

This mixed-methods research study employs a comprehensive survey and semi-structured interviews to assess the effectiveness of two faculty writing programs at Carleton University. All participants are faculty members at the university who have participated in at least one of the programs. The first stage of the study was an anonymous online survey that assessed participants' current writing practices and their experience in the writing



support groups. Following the survey, key informants were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews, which allowed the research team to obtain more information on their experiences and perceptions of the faculty writing programs. During these interviews, questions focused on participants' motivations, experiences, and insights, as well as soliciting suggestions for writing supports based on their experiences. We are in the process of writing up an academic article for publication based on this research, but we believe it is critically important that this research inform Carleton University decision-makers in a timely manner. As such, we have created this public access research report to share eight recommendations informed by our research.

Recommendations

To foster nurturing and responsive writing cultures for faculty, we recommend that Carleton University:

1. **Recognize that writing supports constitute an investment in the Carleton University community.** Investments in writing supports produce dividends in community building, research production, and worker well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the need for supportive and flexible workplaces, as well as making clear the perils of not providing these for individuals and organizations. Responsive and innovative approaches to writing supports will help prevent burnout, support mental health, and maintain or increase writing productivity.
2. **Implement and fund systemic and structural institutional supports to adequately sustain writing throughout different stages of an individual's academic career.** This requires recognition that different career stages foster different approaches to writing, as well as different writing outputs.
3. **Recommit to creating an "enabling environment" for faculty (as specified in Carleton University's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Action Plan).** Faculty writing supports directly contribute the university's larger commitment to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Decolonization. Building on the EDI Action Plan's vision, this may necessitate writing programs and supports specifically for equity-seeking faculty.
4. **Foster cross-disciplinary connections through writing supports.** Writing practices are not bound by disciplinary silos. A productive facet of writing supports is connecting faculty across different fields. Writing supports can strongly contribute to nurturing a sense of belonging within the Carleton University community that is not specific to one's home department or unit.
5. **Enact policies and programs that value a wide range of writing endeavours.** Writing practices and outputs are varied across the university (including publicly accessible blog posts, policy reports, reviews, journal articles, book chapters, monographs, textbooks and more). Diverse and responsive faculty writing initiatives are needed to ensure that faculty are supported in all writing and knowledge mobilization activities.
6. **Support writing as a process, as opposed to writing outputs alone.** We recommend a holistic approach to academic writing as a creative practice. Attention should be paid to its means (e.g. how does one establish a sustainable and productive writing process? how can one break bad writing habits?), rather than merely the ends (e.g. publication metrics).

7. **Formally recognize the work of faculty facilitating writing supports in their workload.** At present, writing supports at Carleton University are ad hoc and contingent on volunteer labour. Recognition of the workload implications for faculty facilitating writing supports is necessary to sustain these programs, especially as, to date, they have all been spearheaded by individuals from equity-seeking groups.
8. **Adopt an evidence-based approach to offering writing supports.** To best ensure the effectiveness and utility of these programs it is vital to continue to assess how writing supports benefit faculty members. Key areas for future analysis include the experiences of faculty members by race, gender, and disability. To foster a vibrant and responsive writing culture at Carleton University, ongoing consultation, feedback, and evaluation are needed. We strongly urge the university to monitor the changing context as we navigate the ongoing pandemic to ensure that the provision of appropriate writing supports continues.



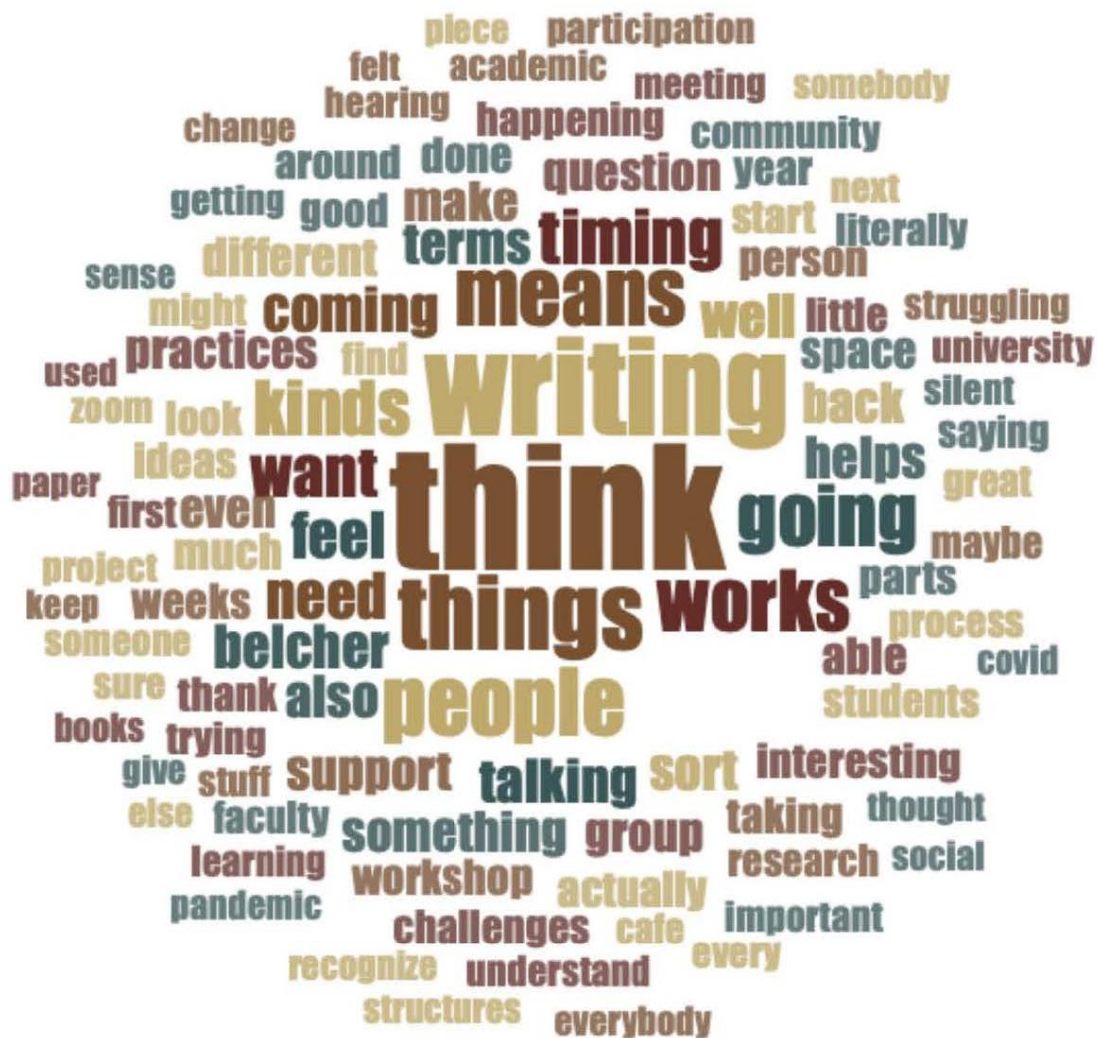


Figure 1. This word cloud illustrates key terms from interviews with faculty on their writing practices.

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