CSSHE
SCÉES
Canadian Journal of Higher Education
Revue canadienne d'enseignement supérieur
Volume 38, No. 3, 2008, pages 21-36
www.ingentaconnect.com/content/csshe/cjhe

Writing Tutors in the Economics Classroom: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a pilot study that involved introducing writing tutors or writing fellows into a compulsory, third-year economics course with the intent of incorporating both writing across the curriculum and writing intensive elements. The connections and interrelationships between writing and writing intensive courses are set out briefly first of all; the connections among writing, critical thinking, and knowledge acquisition are emphasised. The course and the writing tutor system are both described, along with their connection to the Writing Centre at the university, and then comments from the tutors and the students in the course are presented. The study appears to be successful and some thoughts to consider when introducing this system elsewhere are given.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article rapporte les résultats d'une étude sur l'insertion de tutrices et de tuteurs en écriture dans un cours d'économie obligatoire de troisième année. Nous établissons d'abord les liens entre écriture, pensée critique et acquisition de connaissances, puis nous décrivons le cours et le système de tutorat en écriture ainsi que le lien avec le centre d'aide en écriture de l'université. Enfin, nous rapportons les commentaires des tuteurs et étudiants qui ont participé au cours, indiquant que l'initiative semble remporter du succès. Nous concluons l'article avec certaines considérations à envisager dans l'adoption de ce système de tutorat.

In the past several decades there has been a growing emphasis on integrating writing into all disciplines and courses at the university level, and increasingly writing is thought to be best placed within the confines of a discipline, rather than in a detached program outside of the student's area of study. Responses to this emphasis on writing have included the Writing-Across-the-Curriculum movement or WAC, writing-intensive programs, and literature that connects writing and critical thinking, such as John Bean's *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. Combined, these initiatives suggest that writing belongs within specific courses if real integration of course content and critical thinking is to occur. Yet, the challenge of bringing this integration about remains. How does a professor – unfamiliar or uncomfortable with writing instruction, or simply too busy with course content – provide writing support to students who are increasingly seen to be less prepared for academic writing than previous generations? One approach is to use "course-linked" writing tutors (Mullin 2001), and this is the option we chose to try out in Economics 381, a course on economic research methodology.

In Economics 381 students have to write a 30-page research proposal worth 45% of the final mark, yet students in this program, at least at the undergraduate level, have few opportunities to write such a long paper. Since economics students do not have many chances to engage seriously in the process of writing a major paper, they understandably feel under-prepared and apprehensive about such a demanding assignment. Therefore, Economics 381 was an excellent choice for a pilot project on course-based writing support, and in this paper we report on the project as a case study.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

That university professors should find students unprepared for academic writing and unable to live up to their expectations is nothing new. The literature shows (Russel, 1992) that going back to the 1880s, there have been several waves of students seen to be inadequately prepared for the demands of university-level writing. Well known to most is the one that occurred with open admission in the United States in the 1970s (Russel, 1992), and more recently we have encountered the "millennium student" (Mullin, 2001), more comfortable with electronic media than books. Faculty response to the 1970s wave was to begin emphasizing writing in all disciplines or across the curriculum (WAC), and in the intervening years this initiative has become a movement that now has international reach. In the 1990s, WAC evolved in some places into what came to be called writing-intensive courses, again in many disciplines. The fundamental characteristics of WAC and writing-intensive courses were brought together when we introduced writing tutors into Economics 381.

The basic idea behind WAC is, according to Margot Soven (2001), to emphasize writing as a tool in order to promote learning in all disciplines, not just in English courses or composition classrooms. In fact, the responsibility

for helping students learn the conventions for writing in the disciplines is from a WAC perspective seen to rest with *all* faculty. One thing all faculty members can do, even those hesitant to take on any form of writing instruction, is to engage students in the writing process and have them hand in drafts for feedback before final submission of their papers. This approach is, in fact, fundamental not only to WAC and writing-intensive programs but also to "course-linked" writing support because it encourages revision and involves all students in the classroom – and not just the weak writers – in improving their writing skills, (p 202).

The notion of revising and rewriting is explored in some detail by Anne Gere in her book *Writing and Learning* (1985). She argues that revising an initial draft is just as important to the learning process as writing that initial draft itself; revising, or "re-seeing," changes the writing and enables the writer to better show his or her learning to good advantage. Gere argues that learners must have the opportunity to revise and rewrite in many forms: revising the entire document, re-organizing the materials, changing the cohesion of the document, paying attention to style, and simply editing. By having all of these opportunities incorporated into the course, student learning is enhanced.

Other research on writing supports the use of writing as a tool for learning. Janet Emig (1977) has argued that "writing serves learning uniquely because writing as process-and-product possesses a cluster of attributes that correspond uniquely to certain powerful learning strategies" (p.89), and this idea is further explored by Bereiter and Scardamalia in *The Psychology of Written Composition* (1987). They emphasize that the writing process has the potential to "transform" the writer's knowledge of the content through critical reflection. They distinguish between two ways of writing: "knowledge telling" and "knowledge transforming." "Knowledge telling" refers to the writing process often used by immature writers who simply write from memory of content and genre knowledge without engaging in the problem-solving process that characterizes "knowledge transforming." This more complex writing process is typically used by experienced writers whose critical engagement with both content and text form leads them to new insights, and it is the desire to move students from "knowledge telling" to "knowledge transforming" that drives writing in the disciplines and the WAC movement. However, if all students are to be pushed towards critical engagement in the writing process, external support is required.

Writing centres are ideally suited to support WAC-based courses (Mullin 2001) and have sprung up on campuses everywhere in North America in the same period as WAC has come into prominence, but servicing all students in an entire course is rarely possible. In most writing centres, including the one at Laurier, student tutors work with only those students who choose to come to the centre to get feedback on their writing; the rest get no individual writing support unless one of their instructors decides to integrate peer tutors into his or her course. When that happens, all the students get an opportunity to rethink and rewrite before their paper is graded. With formative feedback on their drafts,

students are more likely to discover the connection between critical thinking and writing than without such support, especially when they are engaged in a complex assignment in their major, as is the case with students in Economics 381.

Using "course-linked" writing tutors has therefore been seen as the next logical step in engaging students in critical thinking and writing, and it is now a trend in several major universities across the United States. Brown University was one of the first to establish a so-called "writing fellows" program in the early 1980s, but the idea quickly became popular and spread to several other universities during the 1980s and 1990s in tandem with the development of the WAC movement (Soven, 2001, p. 201). Margot Soven has identified two representative tutoring models, one favouring generalist tutors and the other using expert tutors from within the discipline. Adherents to the generalist approach emphasize non-directive tutoring, while proponents of expert tutoring consider knowledge of the discipline and its discourse conventions to be essential.

The tutoring model used in this project, and at Laurier Writing Centre, is positioned somewhere in the middle between the generalist and the expert models. Traditional writing centre theory favours the non-directive approach to tutoring in which the student sets the agenda and decides what to focus on in a session. This has in the past been the traditional approach both because it is student-centred and because it prevents the tutor from taking over the paper by appropriating voice and ideas. But this is a position that has been challenged, notably by Shamoon and Burns (1995), since it does not allow tutors to share what they know about the rhetorical conventions of academic writing, and it prevents them from identifying writing problems that the student has not put on the agenda for the session. However, striking a balance between the generalist and expert tutoring models is possible without violating student-centred learning or appropriating student writing. Tutors can be trained to give constructive feedback to students, tying this feedback to explanations of academic discourse conventions in general so that the students learns from the tutor. In this model, the tutor is more like a coach (Clark, 1999) than a peer tutor, a term that is therefore deliberately avoided here. We use the term student tutor to refer to the more directive tutor model.

The Laurier tutoring model (Misser, 2003) works very well with genre theory. A tutoring session creates a situation in which the student, with the help of the tutor, can construct knowledge about the genre of academic writing and how it functions (Clark, 1999). Students gradually come to understand academic writing practices by recognizing recurring text patterns and learning how they are interpreted and understood to create meaning (Miller, 1984). Assisting students in getting this awareness and encouraging them to use it in their own writing is the rationale for using "course-linked" tutors in EC381.

In EC381 generalist tutors are favoured by the course instructor who does not want writing tutors to teach students in the course about economics. However, this choice of tutoring model does not imply that the instructor views the tutoring of writing as a surface activity concerned with superficial correctness

only. The student tutors used in this project are expected to understand academic writing as a complex set of interrelated activities that takes place during the research and the writing process and which hinges on the use of critical thinking and the common rhetorical patterns used in the disciplines. The tutors are asked to assist in the revision process by responding constructively to student drafts in a way that identifies problems, informs about genre conventions of academic writing, and helps students think through their problems. In other words, they provide formative writing support from a perspective that is outside the discipline.

The inside or expert perspective is in this case provided by the instructor. He gives feedback on the economics content of the two drafts before they are handed in and on the students' level of critical engagement with the material in the early stage of the project while there is still an opportunity to improve student learning. In other words, the instructor enhances the link between learning and writing that is crucial to John Bean's (2001) definition of critical thinking. Building on the work of Kurfiss, John Bean says that critical thinking is an integral aspect of academic writing, or more specifically, academic problems, which he defines as "ill-structured," using Kurfiss' term, or open-ended and "therefore must be responded to with a proposition justified by reasons and evidence" (p. 3). The assessment of this response can only be done by the instructor from within the discipline.

The Course

Economic Research Methodology, or Economics 381, is a compulsory course for third-year students in most of the honours economics programs at Wilfrid Laurier University. The main goal of the course is to study the process of doing a piece of empirical research in economics, while more specific and measurable objectives are set for various components of the course. One aspect of that goal is to provide the students with an integrative experience. They are required to bring together and integrate tools and information they have learned in other courses, and to produce a coherent empirical research proposal on some economic topic. In other words, Economics 381 emphasizes the process of doing a piece of empirical research in economics, and the expectation is that the students will have developed the specific methods, or most of the specific methods, in other courses.

The emphasis is also on empirical research rather than on theoretical research. This is not meant to play down the role of theory in research, but to bring out the connection between that theory and investigations that make use of data or information, defined very broadly. Students take more naturally to empirical research than purely theoretical discussion and are interested in thinking about application of the theory that they have learned in other courses to some real-world economic problem.

The focus of the course is on explanatory research, or cause and effect research, or hypothesis testing research. Uma Sekaran, who is the author of the

textbook for the course, calls this the hypothetical-deductive method, which is appropriate because it suggests the deductive method for the research process (theory/model, then hypothesis, then testing). Although the course discusses more briefly other research processes, time constraints and the fact that economists use the deductive method extensively mean that explanatory empirical research, among the three purposes, is stressed. Besides, the students learn that a piece of explanatory research always involves some exploratory elements, such as a literature review, preliminary information seeking, locating statistical methods, and some descriptive elements, such as a description of the data or information that the researcher is using.

The students are evaluated through two or three mini-assignments and one final examination, but the main evaluative focus in the course is their 30 to 35-page research proposal, which forms the basis for the use of writing tutors that will be described in the next section. At the first class of the term, students are given four hypotheses for four pieces of explanatory, empirical, economic research; they must select one of those hypotheses and write their research proposal on that topic. The final research proposal is due at the start of the last week of classes, about 11 weeks later. It will constitute about 75% of an actual piece of research in the sense that the next step would be to collect the data or information, carry out the statistical test, and draw conclusions. Because the students do not do that, this assignment is a proposal only. The process they go through is the following: relating what they do back to the instructor's outline guide, they write the economic problem or the introduction, locate and write the literature review, describe a theory or model, and derive their hypothesis from it. Then they describe the research design that they would use and especially variables that they need to control, locate the data or information that they would use, or describe the method that they would use if the data do not exist and primary data would be used. Finally they suggest a method by which they would analyze the data in light of their hypothesis (usually some econometric method), write a list of references, and, in some cases, an appendix.

Critical thinking is stressed in the students' research proposals in Economics 381. They must read, organize, and prepare a literature review, describe a theoretical model, and then derive a testable hypothesis from their model; they must find and critically evaluate their data sources, present an analytical method that will enable them to test their hypothesis, and present all of that in a written research proposal. As students are in their third year, this proposal may be the most extensive piece of writing that they have done up to that point. In the past, before introducing writing tutors into Economics 381, the instructor of the course provided students with comments on their writing when the graded research proposals were returned to those students. But the thinking was that there should be a more useful means by which the students could receive feedback on their writing as well as on the economic content of their research proposals. The solution was linking writing tutors with the course, a project that was initiated for the fall term of 2006.

Linking Writing Tutors to Economics 381

In order to consider the course writing intensive, the students had to be given some feedback on their writing in the research proposal and then be given an opportunity to revise and resubmit the earlier draft. This is where the writing tutors come in. Three writing tutors, all fourth-year honours English students, were hired after an extensive interview process by the course instructor and the manager of the Writing Centre. She provided the writing tutors with approximately four days of training on important aspects of academic writing, the writing process, providing feedback on a written document, and dealing with students as they receive their feedback.

In the course, four hypotheses were given to the students in the very first class in September. Each student was required to select one of those hypotheses and make it the basis of her or his research proposal. The final research proposal was due near the end of November. Since time did not permit the students to obtain feedback on their writing from the tutors on all sections of the research proposal, a decision was made to provide feedback on what we considered the most structurally complex sections of the research proposal: the introduction and the literature review. We hoped that feedback on those two sections would spill over into the other sections. The first draft of the literature review produced by students was handed in to the writing tutors at the end of the fourth week of classes, and the first draft of the introduction was given to the writing tutors at the end of the sixth week of classes. In each case, the writing tutors read the drafts, made comments before meeting with each student, and then met with each student for about 20 to 30 minutes to provide face-to-face feedback. The instructor also read the drafts and provided the students with his comments on the economic content, trying to avoid making too many comments on details such as organization, style, and punctuation, since that was the job of the writing tutors. With the feedback from the writing tutor, students could revise their drafts of the introduction and the literature review and include these with the final copy of their research proposal.

The Survey: Three Perspectives

There were three attempts to gain some insight into how the writing tutor system was accepted and how behaviour was changed because of that system. First, and perhaps most important, there is the instructor's perceptions on whether or not the students' written work improved. It would have been ideal to use an experimental methodology where some students received feedback from writing tutors while others did not and compare the differences, all else the same, but that was not done here. All of the students in the course received feedback from the writing tutors. Second, a survey was given to the three writing tutors, and they were asked to voluntarily and anonymously fill it out. This provides some feedback about how the writing tutors viewed the experience. Third, a survey was given to the students in the course who came to class on

one day near the end of the term, and they were also asked to fill it out voluntarily and anonymously. Neither the instructor nor the manager of the Writing Centre had access to the completed surveys until the course was finished and final grades had been submitted. Copies of the surveys are available on request from the authors.

The Instructor

From the instructor's perspective, the goals that were established for the "course-linked" writing tutors in EC381 were achieved and even surpassed. The first two goals were to provide students with feedback on the first two sections of the research proposal and to give them an opportunity to revise these in light of the feedback they had received in order that the students would become better writers. This feedback, as we wrote previously, was to go beyond the correction of grammatical and spelling mistakes and examine organization and general presentation. The final drafts of these two sections showed that the students had acted on the feedback they had received.

The third goal was to see the feedback from the writing tutors reflected in sections of the research proposal that did not receive comments from the tutors. Although this is more difficult to judge and must be largely impressionistic, there were indications that the students transferred the feedback in a general way to other sections. At one level, those other sections contained fewer grammatical errors typically present in most undergraduate student writing; but at a more profound level, other sections seemed to indicate that the students had thought about issues like word choice and organization because they had been asked to think about them in the two sections that did receive feedback.

The fourth goal was to successfully use the generalist tutor model rather than the expert tutor model. Although a few students in the course did comment that they would have preferred a tutor who could provide feedback on the economic content as well as on the writing, most students accepted the single role of the writing tutors and realized that comments on the economic content would come from the instructor; it turned out to be a good division of labour between the writing tutors and the instructor.

The last goal was to signal to the students that writing was taken seriously in economics as a discipline by providing writing tutors and the chance for revision in one of their compulsory courses. Students commented that this was the only time that they had been given any feedback on their writing with the possibility of revision, and they appreciated that opportunity.

The Tutors

The survey done by the Writing Tutors can in large measure be summed up by comments from one of the tutors:

> I think the Writing Tutor process is an excellent addition to Economics 381. In my opinion, having a second pair of eyes look at your work is

> always an excellent resource when working on a paper. Further, many of the students in my group expressed that they had not had the opportunity to produce a piece of academic writing in a long time. Thus, some students had forgotten many of the simple writing skills learned in high school. Further, the students whose first language is not English responded particularly well to the process, and expressed how helpful it was to have this service available. As a writing tutor, I think it is my job to 'neaten' up the paper, and **help clarify the students' excellent ideas**. Many of the students expressed that this process provided exactly this service, by simplifying and further articulating their sentences and ideas. The meetings were particularly important because it gave me an opportunity to go over each paper with the individual student, and ensure that my suggestions remained true to their intended thoughts. Further, the meeting gave the student the **opportunity to ask me any questions, and clarify why I suggested certain changes.** A lot of the students were unsure as to what a Literature Review entails, and thus we were able to **work together** to ensure they **included the key elements of the assignment, while also conveying the ideas they had intended.** Many students utilized the meeting time to ask specific questions about **problem areas like their tense uses, and word choice, and how they could improve for their next assignment**. It was extremely rewarding when I received the second assignment and saw **improvements** in many of the students' writing. I think the Writing Tutor process is beneficial in developing the writing skills of these students.

By and large this tutor appears to have understood very well the role of the writing tutor and the purpose of an individual tutoring session. Her reflections reveal some of the key principles of tutoring. The individual sessions described by this tutor are student-centred and appear to have given students the opportunity to get their questions answered while also providing constructive input from the tutor. The tutor states that she asked probing questions calling for the students to clarify their ideas and worked with the students to ensure that their ideas came across. But this format has also worked to help the tutor explain why she made suggestions for revision, and to us this suggests that at least some students have understood the rhetorical purpose behind this tutor's suggestions for revision and implemented them in the next assignment, making many of the tutoring sessions a learning experience as intended.

This tutor's desire to "neaten up" the paper does, however, suggest some confusion about her role. In the training it is emphasized that tutors do not work as editors, so it is a misunderstanding for a tutor to think that he or she should make the surface of the text neat somehow, unless this tutor has global structure and paragraphing in mind, in which case she may have a legitimate point. But we are more inclined to think that this tutor simply had difficulties walking the line between legitimate constructive feedback which includes pointing out recurring errors and then crossing the line and correcting those

errors. This confusion is understandable, especially in an inexperienced tutor doing this kind of work for the first time.

In the Writing Centre, we are constantly confronted with both student and faculty confusion about the relationship between correctness and text quality. There is a tendency to think that a text free of surface grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors is automatically a good text, and even if we go through an exercise during tutor training that repudiates this notion beyond any doubt, the belief in the supreme importance of correctness is still hard to shake. The upside is that this tutor has been sufficiently aware of language problems to have identified faulty use of verb tenses. This is a problem that plagues many student writers, particularly in the literature review, where tense tells the reader what the writer's perspective is on the research cited, such as generalizing, analyzing, or giving a chronological account of the research included. However, training undergraduate students to deal with both tutoring and conveying to the students the complex relationship between genre, purpose and language is very difficult.

Providing more tutor training than we can currently do would be desirable, but nonetheless, these surveys showed that the tutors were very positive about the experience. Although they had some specific suggestions to improve the physical process of the tutoring system (such as a dedicated space for them to meet the students), they gave the "course-linked" tutor system a superb endorsement.

The Students

The students in Economics 381 were also asked to voluntarily and anonymously complete a survey in which they were asked to express their opinions on the following:

- Their increase in knowledge about the structure and organization of a literature review and the introduction to a research proposal;
- Their increase in confidence about writing a literature review and the introduction to a research proposal;
- The amount of time that they spent obtaining feedback from the writing tutors;
- Their ability to carry over aspects of writing that they had learned to other parts of the research proposal;
- Whether the writing tutor system should be retained in the course;
- Any other aspect of the writing tutor system.

Reporting first on the so-called bottom line, all students who participated (N=37) in the survey agreed to strongly agreed with the statement: "The writing tutor system should be retained in Economics 381." Recalling that the writing tutors commented on the students' introductions and literature reviews, 99% of the students agreed to strongly agreed that they were more knowledgeable about the structure and organization of a literature review and the introduction of a research proposal after taking part in the writing tutor system. Related to this fact, about 98% of the students indicated that they were more confident about writing a literature review and an introduction to a research proposal after tak-

ing part in the writing tutor system. Since the writing tutors only commented specifically on two of the seven parts of the students' research proposals, it is interesting to find out if the students thought that anything from those two parts could be carried over into the other five parts of the research proposal. Although these are only the perceptions of the students, 98% indicated that some aspects of writing that they learned while writing the introduction and the literature review could be carried over to other parts of their research proposals. One student wrote the comment: *"Gives you a good idea as to what is expected for the rest of the paper"*. This response shows that students felt they could transfer at least some of what they had leaned about academic writing, and that is very significant.

The students were asked the question: "Given the amount of time that I was given to do the research proposal (about 10 to 11 weeks), my involvement with the writing tutors was about right." Only 78% of the students said that they agreed to strongly agreed with that statement. For each question to which the students responded on a scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree, they were encouraged to provide comments if they disagreed with the statement that formed each question. These comments made it clear that the students who disagreed wanted more meetings with the writing tutors on other parts of their research proposals. One student also commented that the writing tutor could give a quick session on writing skills prior to the meetings in which the literature review and the introduction were formally discussed. This comment shows that some students would like writing tutors integrated into the classroom as well as the course, the way it is done in many American universities (Soven, 2001). Another student commented that a third meeting with the writing tutor later in the term where questions about writing on any part of the research proposal could be asked would have been useful. It is clear from the comments on this question and from the comments on the general, open-ended final question that the students would like the writing tutors to provide feedback on more parts of their research proposal. This is not surprising since many students would choose being dependent on tutor input on all their papers rather than learn to revise their papers themselves. But letting this happen would be counterproductive to the philosophy of tutoring which is to create engaged independent learners.

At the end of the survey, the students were asked to share their impressions and comments about the writing tutor system they had just experienced. Mostly positive but also a few negative thoughts were provided. Here are some of the positive impressions written by the students:

> *I liked this idea, my writing tutor was always prepared, organized and helpful. I asked her many questions about writing issues of the research paper and she always gave me clear and professional explanations.*
>
> *I thought it was extremely helpful. In econ, we don't do a lot of writing, and, many of us haven't done a paper since high school. The pointers that the tutor gave us will carry into all of my writing.*

> *My writing tutor provided me with useful help with the grammar of my paper."*
>
> *In terms of formatting and paper style I found it [the writing tutor system] to be of great use. It is a good way of helping students tune up their writing skills since in economics there are few papers.*
>
> *The use of the writing tutor was useful to provide feedback on structure and grammar in addition to the feedback from the instructor. I found this very helpful to have two different perspectives.*
>
> *The help from the professor about the content and help from the writing tutor about the structure makes this proposal less difficult.*
>
> *Conversation with writing tutor is good especially to person whose English is the second language. Check grammar, structure and frame of essay. Provides suggestion under comfortable environment.*
>
> *I think tutors should be included in EC381. It helped me a lot personally.*
>
> *I liked the fact that it kept us on top of doing the work. Tutor has good points that I never thought about.*

Based on those comments, the writing tutor system was a success and should be continued.

Three students did provide impressions that, while not really negative, suggest that flexibility needs to be an important concern with this writing tutor system:

> *Half hour for each conversation may be too short for some students since the different level students in the same course. I prefer more flexible time for the different requirement for individual students.*
>
> *The time [w]as too long. 15 min. would have been better because the tutor would have given you straight forward points to work on.*
>
> *Not just grammar checking. Should share ideas what other did on same topic.*

The last student clearly wanted the writing tutor to go beyond writing and provide feedback and suggestions on the content of the research proposal. The writing tutor system for this particular class was deliberately not set up to follow the expert tutor model. In Economics 381 it was the professor's role to provide feedback about the economic content of each student's research proposal, and the writing tutor's role was to provide feedback on the writing. That division of labour was accepted by almost all of the students.

Although it would have been useful to include some of the students' writing in this paper in order to show the changes that had taken place in their

writing, which was due in part to the use of the Writing Tutor or Writing Fellow program, that is not possible because permission was not obtained from the students to use their writing in this way.

The Lessons Learned

Certain practical considerations are important for projects like this to be successful, and we have included the most important ones here for anybody interested in linking writing tutors to a course.

- Specific, attainable course objectives for which writing tutors will be used have to be set out;
- Students need to be provided with the opportunity to write, receive feedback on their writing, and re-write what they initially wrote;
- Professional standards for hiring and interviewing writing tutors have to be in place;
- The training must prepare the writing tutors to understand the main conventions of academic writing, to provide helpful, constructive feedback, and to interact with students one-to-one;
- Adequate physical space is an important aspect of this project. Writing tutors and students need a private and quiet place to meet;
- Plans for the writing tutor system must be set out in advance and in detail: funds need to be in place to pay the tutors; writing tutors need to be recruited or positions advertised; writing tutors need to be interviewed, hired and trained; physical space for meetings needs to be found; and the logistics of the meetings between the writing tutors and the students need to be discussed.
- Problems should be anticipated, such as writing tutors and students not getting along or writing tutors and students not being able to find a time when they can conveniently meet.

CONCLUSION

Although the Economics Program does not have a senior course specifically designed to teach students writing in the discipline (WID), the integration of "course-linked" writing tutors addresses some of the needs otherwise filled by such a course. With both the course instructor and the writing tutors responding to their drafts, students now get pushed to work on the assignment in a new way. They get engaged more directly in the process of inquiry of a specific economics problem and in thinking and writing about it in a critical way.

Given the limited objectives and goals of this writing tutor project, it is reasonable to consider it a success. All three stakeholders – the instructor, the three writing tutors, and the students – responded positively to the project on the surveys. One response in particular stands out: 98% of the students surveyed indicated that they could transfer some of what they had learned about writing to other parts of their research proposal, and this finding is supported

by the course instructor's overall sense of improvement in the final papers. The "course-linked" writing tutor project for Economics 381 has received the stamp of approval from the Dean of the School of Business and Economics and funding has been granted to keep the project going.

However, the institutional commitment to this project is very small given its low cost, and economics students have to wait until third year to get support for writing in their discipline. More financial support committed to student writing and learning earlier in their university career would be desirable. Some major North American universities such as the University of Toronto (Procter, 2006) and Cornell (Gottschalk, 1997; Munroe, 2002) have made a commitment to first-year seminars designed to help students enter the world of discipline-specific writing from the very beginning of their university education, while other universities have chosen to establish writing-intensive programs to enhance support for academic writing. To get such institutional commitment to writing is difficult, but the success of a project like this one on "course-linked" writing tutors can be used to pave the way.

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