

Re-evaluating focus, forum and frontiers within the Academic Writing classroom

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The advent of quality assurance stipulations at tertiary educational institutions has renewed the drive within academics to evaluate, defend and revise educational practices. Stakeholders from the corporate world, university faculties and the student body are being invited to provide feedback on the applicability of courses to their outlined objectives, goals and purposes. Educators within the area of academic writing are given the responsibility of preparing university students to ‘write’ at a standard deemed acceptable and appropriate, with the aim of fulfilling their discipline specific writing requirements. Despite attempts made by educators, there is an underlying sentiment among stakeholders about students’ ability to write well. There is the collective recommendation of increasing the writing requirements in academic writing courses, matched with issues of students and educators becoming overwhelmed by writing and feedback demands respectively, as well as time and budget constraints. This research sought to derive an actionable direction for Academic Writing at the tertiary level based on a critical review of existing scholarship informing current practices in the field. It involved the review of course content, teaching strategies and forums, while also examining pedagogical advances, with the primary aim being to improve teaching and learning within the academic writing classroom. This research revealed the existence of a service course underscored by thorough teaching and learning ideologies whilst highlighting scope for continued reflection and advancements.

Key words: academic writing; foundation courses; best practice

Introduction

Academic writing is a term largely used to describe written works presented from an informed stance that is reflective of significance, criticality, detail and organisation, and designed for review by a wider audience. In most instances, the term is used primarily to describe a style of writing specific to a discipline within the academic sphere. It is an integral part of teaching and learning at the tertiary level as it is the primary measure by which educational success is judged. It is also perceived as the most widely acceptable form of writing demanded at the tertiary level (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997). For Sullivan and Tinberg (2006) this type of writing reflects higher level analytic skills, an ability to adhere to established rules of spelling, punctuation and grammar and the capacity to organise material coherently.

At The University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus (UWISTA), students are required to complete compulsory writing courses geared towards preparing them to produce high quality written works deemed acceptable at the tertiary level. The English Language Foundation Programme of the University is responsible for the design and delivery of these courses. The centrality of academic writing courses at UWISTA is acknowledged by the courses' designation as foundational dimensions of the curriculum. They may further be described as 'service' courses offered by the Faculty of Humanities and Education. The quality of a service course is measured by its ability to meet the needs of the department for which it is designed (Hativa, 2000, Lueddeke, 2003). Therefore, these courses are intended to account for shifts in contextual variables – institutional, departmental, and discipline specific – from a standpoint of contending with the demands of effectively teaching students to write. However, where students show inability to meet the writing requirements of their disciplines this reflects negatively on the 'service' courses' success. As such, there is a need to review the facilitation of student realisation of educational goals within these courses.

At present, there are four courses which cater to the discipline specific writing needs of students at UWISTA. Students enrolled in the faculties of Social Sciences, Natural Sciences and Agriculture, Humanities and Education, and Law are required to read for specific academic writing options. Within the Faculty of Humanities, students registered for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Literatures in English are mandated to complete Option A: Writing about Literature. This course focuses specifically on preparing students to write about the different literary genres explored as part of their discipline. Students are introduced to conventional literary genres, theoretical perspectives and literary devices, as well as possible strategies for use in the production of critical literary arguments. The course is intended to equip students with the skills necessary to produce writing reflective of higher order thinking skills. Although teaching methods have been modified to incorporate advancements in the field of academic writing, a general consensus is held by faculty about students' inability to produce written works reflective of critical thinking and organisation skills. A brief review of writing samples produced by students supports the claims of staff. The samples demonstrate an inability to effectively describe and document occurrences within a literary work, as well as a failure to conceptualise meaning or intent informing the work. This is indicative of a need to devise strategies aimed at identifying and addressing the factors affecting students' writing within the discipline of literature in English.

This paper examines course review as a strategy to improve the quality of students' writing within their discipline. It charts the discipline specific writing requirements and examines the extent to which the compulsory academic writing course – Writing about Literature, is designed to facilitate these needs. Emphasis is placed on teaching strategies, course content and evaluation, and the extent to which the conceptualisation of these areas within the course is geared towards preparing students to write. It seeks to promote the notion of stakeholder

inclusion (Kalish, 2009) as an integral component of course reform, as input from all stakeholders in the teaching and learning process is reflected upon, and the possibility of incorporating suggested modifications is considered against the backdrop of pedagogical best practice.

Literature review

Student academic writing is at the heart of teaching and learning in higher education. Students are assessed largely by what they write, and need to learn both general academic conventions as well as disciplinary writing requirements in order to be successful in higher education.

(Coffin, Curry, Goodman, Hewings, Lillis & Swann, 2005, p.3)

Within recent times, the reform and review of academic programmes at the university level have come to the forefront as critical aspects of scholarly university teaching. These acts of intellectual invention are crucial to students' learning processes, as the hallmark of efficacious teaching is actual student learning. Despite the criticality of academic writing courses, there is an overtone in existing literature regarding the treatment of these courses by students, academics and administrators (Sullivan & Tinberg, 2006); conflicting ideas held by teachers and students about what type of writing is expected at the tertiary level (Clughen & Hardy, 2012), and a significant shift in teaching and learning paradigms, for which students were inadequately prepared (Husain & Waterfield, 2006). Addressing these issues from the standpoint of the practitioner is of paramount importance. For Shulman and Hutchings (1997) practitioners should view their work as a continuing process of reflection and inquiry for which they must bear responsibility. Strategies to increase learning levels, as well as improve the quality of teaching ought to be of primary importance to all practitioners. This holds true with regard to the teaching of academic writing at the tertiary level. The placement of academic writing courses within the University's compulsory foundation programme depicts their criticality to the overall degree awarded. Successful completion of an academic writing course suggests an ability on the part of a student to demonstrate writing skills deemed acceptable at the tertiary level. Therefore, discipline specific writing courses should reflect currency and grounding in the respective field (Shulman, 2000). Students' inability to meet the writing requirements of discipline specific foundation writing courses coupled with an ability to meet the writing requirements of their discipline is indicative of a need for review at the foundation level.

Writing within the disciplines

The validity of a course modification exercise is inextricably linked to its ability to satisfy the demands of stakeholders. Thus, changes to an academic writing course must also be informed by the writing demands of the discipline. Discipline

specific writing necessitates a specific skill set governed by discipline specific lexis, conceptualisation and contextualisation (Nesi & Gardener, 2012). Discipline specific writing courses are viewed as an avenue to provide instruction within a disciplinary context geared towards assisting students in their attempt to demonstrate a grasp of knowledge (Bazerman & Russell, 1994). In this way, an opportunity is granted for students to benefit from experiencing how the forms of writing specific to their discipline work. These courses are intended to provide students with the knowledge framework to inform functionality within their specific fields. Therefore, the academic writing offering: *Writing about Literature*, should expose students to the different genres of literary writing, as well as strategies of sequencing, conceptualising and writing about these genres. As such, there is a requirement for teaching staff to be familiar with disciplinary practices, trends and advancements, or work closely with lecturers in the field (Graal & Clark, 2000). Like many other disciplines, students of literature are expected to demonstrate an understanding of writing as text, process and practice (Coffin et al., 2005). Consequently, a discipline specific writing course should equip students with this proficiency. Works produced should “be organised according to a logical plan or purpose and proceed by a series of logical steps from its initial premise to a logical conclusion” (Bloom, 2006, p.73). The course should therefore be designed, modified and maintained in keeping with the discipline specific writing requirements of stakeholders in the field of literatures in English. This study acknowledges that continuous reflection and investigation is necessary as shifting student schemata and advances in discipline curricula should be considered in the planning process of service courses such as *Writing about Literature*. Consideration must also be given to demands made for students to write across disciplines as a part of their discipline requirement and the structures in place to support students in such situations. Within this context, student support is aligned to course effectiveness, thus a review of the *Writing about Literature* course offering should be grounded in best practice scholarship.

Best practice in the teaching of academic writing

To assess the effects of course reform in a discipline specific writing course, existing literature on academic writing best practice was examined. Shulman describes scholarly teaching as reflective of “a thoughtful selection and integration of ideas and examples, and well-designed strategies of course design, development, transmission, interaction and assessment” (2000, p.50). While the academic writing offering - *Writing about Literature*, holds true to Shulman’s characterisation, there is a need to advance teaching and learning strategies employed with a primary aim of improving course effectiveness. In an attempt to advance the scholarship of teaching academic writing courses should be perceived as community property. This perspective is primarily informed by Kreber’s (2002) study on scholarly teaching where ideals about teaching and learning are adapted and incorporated; as well as Clughen and Hardy’s (2012) work on writing within the disciplines and, as such, this paper seeks to discover, integrate and apply strategies geared

towards course improvement. It is premised primarily on ideas expressed within constructivist learning philosophies, where learners are viewed as self-directed, active participants in the construction of knowledge, and student learning should be facilitated through the use of organisers.

While many perspectives surrounding constructivism exist, this study is premised on positions put forward by Svincki (1999), Gardener (2000), Vrasidas (2000) and Atherton (2011). These theorists identify three major phases of curriculum development – analysis, design, and evaluation – which overlap and are on-going. It is from this standpoint that the parameters for this study were established. Constructivist arguments propel the questioning of all aspects of the course, as well as the structuring, organising and sequencing of course material to facilitate effective learning and consider not only the input of learners, but the position of all other stakeholders as critical to the process of knowledge formation. Here “learners interpret their world and educators have to account for the meaning and perspectives of the learners, and for their interpretations of the world” (Vrasidas, 2000, p.7). Constructivism provides a framework to probe existing understanding with the aim of maximising learning. This approach supports the use of what is known to build on existing knowledge as a strategy to enhance teaching and learning. From this perspective, students should be taught to organise their thoughts, decision making approaches and their contemplative capacities (Hativa, 2000, Polya, 1965). Knowledge transmission should be limited to primary topics, with a greater focus on discovery and application of knowledge to meaning formulation. This approach to teaching and learning is likely to result in shifts along the teaching continuum aimed at facilitating student understanding within their discipline (Kember 1997).

It is here assumed that dialogue with other members of the professional community provides a context from which teaching and learning strategies can be reviewed and critiqued for the purpose of improvement. Attempts to facilitate such dialogue have been made by The University of the West Indies in the form of cross campus visits to Mona Jamaica campus by the coordinator and other staff members of the English Language Foundation programme (UWISTA) as well as continued dialogue between practitioners from all four UWI campuses (St Augustine, Mona, Cave Hill and the Open Campus). Contributions to the field have also been identified in the publications of staff members attached to the English Language Foundation programmes at the Mona and St Augustine campuses as well as the UWI Cave Hill campus in Barbados. Therefore, the questions which guide this study are as follows:

1. In what areas can the existing course content and teaching strategies be improved to further meet the academic requirements of stakeholders (academics, students, field specialists)?
2. How can pedagogical advances be incorporated to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in academic writing courses at the tertiary level?

Research methodology

This section provides information about the strategies applied. Qualitative inquiry was used to collect data for the study. This provided an avenue to examine contributions of all stakeholders and construct meaning geared towards improving the course based on their shared opinions and experiences. This study used descriptive and comparative analysis involving:

- Mapping of the course from initial development to the current offering. This included a compilation of information about course developments from its inception to the current version, as well as information pertaining to advancements in the teaching of academic writing.
- Charting of the rationale and literature informing changes.
- Comparison and assessment of stakeholders' suggestions to determine the extent to which they informed course modification.

Key informants/ stakeholders

The research was divided into two subsets based on the need for primary and secondary data. Primary data collection involved the amassing of input from stakeholders, while secondary data collection. Key stakeholders comprised 12 informants who were selected from four categories: student, practitioner, academic and academic related. From each of the identified categories, three individuals were selected and individually interviewed once over the duration of eight weeks. These individuals were selected as follows:

- Three representatives were selected and interviewed as members of the category, 'Student'. Since the research is geared towards evaluating the course in its present form, only student representatives from the academic years 2011/2012 (1) and 2012/2013 (2) were selected. These students were asked specific questions about the current course offering and their opinions about how the course could be improved.
- Participants representing the category, 'Practitioner' were drawn from individuals who were experts in their respective genres. The selected individuals were also present or past practitioners at the tertiary level. One of the individuals selected was knowledgeable about the course, as she was a past lecturer with the programme. All three individuals were knowledgeable about the quality of student writing, as they were all engaged in student assessment at the tertiary level. In addition to this, they all served as guest lecturers in the academic year 2011/2012 invited to inform students about genre specific techniques.
- The category 'Academic' accounted for lecturers involved in the teaching of discipline specific *Literatures in English* courses on all three levels. One of

these individuals was responsible for the initial design of the course, while another was directly involved in the teaching of the initial version of the course. The third individual was a faculty member involved in decision making at the administrative level.

- The category 'Academic Related' comprised members of staff within the English Language Foundation programme. These individuals were aware of all dimensions of the course: content, assessment, teaching/learning strategies. Two of these individuals were directly involved in coordinating and amending the course. The other individual, although never directly involved in course delivery, was trained in teaching and assessing the course.

Research process

An initial email was sent to the 12 participants requesting a brief individual meeting/interview and outlining the purpose of the meeting. Individuals were made aware that their contributions were being included as part of an academic study and they would be offered an opportunity to verify representation of their contributions. All individuals responded expressing a willingness to participate in the study.

Each interview began with a brief overview of the course, outlining its development over the past 12 years and, the current content, assessment and teaching strategies employed. Participants were asked to share their opinions on the current course design and invited to offer suggestions about how they felt the course could be improved. They were provided with information about the current course structure, assessment and teaching/learning strategies currently employed. All suggestions and comments made were documented.

The outcome of interviews was listed under four classifications:

1. Course content – This section accounted for all suggestions made about course content. It incorporated suggestions about new content for inclusion, existing content for removal and general comments about existing content.
2. Course evaluation – This section included comments about assignments used to assess student learning. It also accounted for suggestions about new assignments and assessment strategies for inclusion as well as areas for exclusion from the current offering.
3. Teaching and learning strategies – Comments pertaining to teaching strategies employed were listed in this section. It included all suggestions about new areas for possible inclusion, comments about existing strategies and possible areas for exclusion.
4. Non-actionables – This section incorporated all areas which were viewed as outside of the scope of the course. It also accounted for information presented that was not in keeping with best practice principles as well as

areas that were deemed significant to the teaching of academic writing but not necessarily in keeping with course objectives.

While this study accepts that all suggestions offered have a level of validity, consideration is given to the applicability of suggestions to course aims and objectives. It also accepts that philosophies held by participants about teaching and learning may directly contradict discipline specific best practices and can be documented solely for informational purposes. The use of key informants allowed for descriptive content analysis. This strategy was used to identify responses specific to key research areas – course content, evaluation and teaching strategies. Key words specific to each of the focus areas were highlighted, coded and organised to allow for the easy extraction of information relevant to the study.

Findings

The research findings were divided to reflect information derived from secondary and primary sources. In the first instance, data pertaining to course developments from original design to the current offering was documented. This information was divided to reflect modifications to course content, teaching and learning strategies and assessment, as well as the pedagogical positions informing these changes.

Information from secondary sources

Table 1 documents modifications made to course content. The table is divided into three columns: the first column lists the course content at inception, the second reflects changes made to the course over the years of instruction and the third column shows the current course content. The table also identifies the three primary focal areas within the course. ‘Genres’ highlight the different literary varieties which students are instructed about, while ‘Writing content’ stresses the writing skills that are targeted for mastery during instruction. The third focal area, ‘Tools for writing about literature’, identifies course content employed to facilitate instruction.

Table 1. Modifications to course content

Initial content	Modifications over time	Current content
<i>Genres</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poetry • Prose • Drama 	<i>Genres</i> (no modifications)	<i>Genres</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poetry • Prose • Drama
<i>Writing content</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essay structure • Researching strategies • Documentation 	<i>Writing content</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal of researching and documentation strategies (2007/2008) • Introduction of extended essay outlining strategies (2009/2010) 	<i>Writing content</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essay structure/outlining
<i>Tools for writing about literature</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literary elements • Reading strategies 	<i>Tools for writing about literature</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revision of reading strategies (2011/2012) • Concept mapping (2010/2011) 	<i>Tools for writing about literature</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literary elements • Reading guides • Concept mapping frames

While the genres explored have not changed, the course was modified to reflect changes in existing scholarship as well as changes to other service courses. The documentation aspect was removed as students received instruction about documentation in another compulsory writing course. Guidelines on documentation were also made available through the online learning resource database employed. Course content was also modified to provide students with more hands-on writing strategies and guidelines about structuring written documents (Coffin et al 2005).

Table 2 depicts modifications to assessment strategies over time. The course is assessed in two ways: in-course assessment and a final examination at the end of the semester. The final examination is administered by the Examinations section of UWISTA. While these strategies have not changed, the content of the assessment has undergone significant changes. These are elaborated upon below:

Table 2. Modifications to assessment strategies

Initial assessment	Modifications over time	Current assessment
<p><i>In-course assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poetry analysis (writing a formal essay individually) • Prose analysis (writing a formal essay individually) • Drama analysis (writing a formal essay under examination conditions) 	<p><i>In-course assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal of prose evaluation (2005/2006) • Removal of in-course drama examination (2007/2008) • Introduction of Drama portfolio (2009/2010) 	<p><i>In-course assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poetry analysis essay (writing a formal essay working in pairs based on a provided poem and two possible questions) • Drama analysis portfolio (producing a group portfolio based on the viewing of a selected production)
<p><i>Final examination</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poetry, prose, or drama analysis (writing one formal essay 500-750 words based on a selected extract and provided questions) 	<p><i>Final examination</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in examination format to prose assessment only (2005/2006) 	<p><i>Final Examination</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prose analysis (writing one formal essay 500-750 words based on a provided prose extract and two provided questions)

In-course assessment was changed from individual writing assignments to group assignments. This was informed by scholarship supporting the development of learning communities and the benefits of collaborative learning (Kalish and Stockley 2009). This was also adopted to meet the need for improving feedback to the growing student body, as group assignments lessened the number of scripts to be evaluated. There was also a shift towards assessing students' understanding of each genre separately, as opposed to earlier strategies of optional genre selection during examinations.

Table 3 depicts modifications made to teaching and learning strategies employed. Course design deals specifically with the number of contact hours allocated weekly and the ways in which they are distributed. The forms of support available for content delivery and the technological advancements used to facilitate learning are also documented along with additional support measures used. These are listed as follows:

Table 3. Modifications to teaching and learning strategies

Initial teaching and learning strategies	Modifications over time	Current offering
<p><i>Course design</i> (24 contact hours)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One weekly two hour session 	<p><i>Course design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacement of one weekly two hour session to three weekly contact hours: one two hour plenary and one, one hour tutorial (2005/2006) 	<p><i>Course design</i> (36 contact hours)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactive two hour lectures (one per week) • One hour tutorial (one per week)
<p><i>Content delivery support</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conventional lectures • Tutorial discussions 	<p><i>Content delivery support</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moodle introduction (2005/2006) • Audio visual resources (2005/2006) • Introduction of a student manual (2008/2009) • Introduction of plenary activities (2008/2009) • Guest practitioner visits (2010/2011) 	<p><i>Content delivery support</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online database • Electronic resources/forums • Plenary PowerPoint (available online after plenary) • Tutorial worksheets • Guest practitioner visits
<p><i>Additional support measures</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class hand-outs • Skeletal outline 	<p><i>Additional support measures</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class hand-outs removed (2006/2007) • Course outline revised in keeping with instructional best practice proposed by IDU(2008/2009) • Introduction of practice writing sessions (2009/2010) 	<p><i>Additional support measures</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modified course outlines • Practice writing sessions

Modifications to teaching and learning were informed by Gardener's Multiple Intelligence Theory (2000). The initiator of this shift rationalised it as a way of using a web enabled blended learning platform to cater for varied learning styles. Students were also given an opportunity to interface with content at their own pace for a multiplicity of reasons – reinforcement, enrichment or otherwise.

What the main respondents say

The following tables depict responses of participants from the respective categories. The responses were edited to reflect the main ideas presented (repetition and examples were omitted). For example, the response “I dislike group work and I think it is unfair that all of my grades must rely on someone else; if I am being assessed on my ability to write then why must I take a grade for work I did not write?” was modified to “remove group work evaluation component”.

Table 4 represents participant opinions about the suitability of course content. Responses were targeted to elicit participant views about the suitability of the current course content, areas they felt should be removed and content they

believed should be included to enhance course quality. These responses are listed as follows:

Table 4. Participant responses to course content

Participant	Current content	Content for removal	Content for inclusion
Student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unequal treatment of genres • Not enough examples • Poor literary selections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Samples in student manual of failing scripts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current examples/samples • Samples selected by students
Practitioner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caribbean specific samples
Academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unequal treatment of genres • Dated content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dated student samples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schemata appropriate samples
Academic Related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate content • Appropriate samples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated samples

The participants of the study held varied positions about course content. While persons directly involved in the teaching of the course felt the content was appropriate but could be updated somewhat, practitioners were of the view that the material being used, to reflect the different genres, was dated. Academics shared the view about content being dated but not from the standpoint of genre relevance. Rather, this view was aligned to content not exposing students to examples of current works in the field to show shifts in the genres. They also shared the view that genres were not treated equally in the course, as more attention was given to one genre (poetry) over the other two genres (prose and drama). A shared consensus was expressed (by all participants who offered a response) about the removal of existing samples and the inclusion of more samples reflective of 'new' literature. Students also felt that they should be allowed to select the samples for use in activities.

Table 5 represents participant opinions about teaching and learning strategies employed. Responses were targeted to eliciting participant views about the suitability of the current teaching and learning strategies, areas they felt should be removed and content they believed should be included to enhance teaching and learning within the course.

Most participants felt that there was too much content to be explored in a semester. Students and practitioners were of the opinion that the course did not allow for sufficient interaction with peers, lecturer or content. Students felt teaching and learning would be enhanced by including more interactive lecture activities and worksheets with clear guidelines on how content should be navigated. Practitioners were against the separate treatment of genres as they felt this gave limited scope to the treatment of the genres and confined them. They felt genres overlapped at several points and the focus of the course should be on exposing students to

a multiplicity of genres and allowing students to form guided interpretations of what they represent. They also stated that students have previous knowledge about the various genres; therefore too much time is wasted discussing the obvious. Participants felt the course would also benefit from exposing students to live genre specific content, documentation assistance, samples of critical analysis within the discipline and relevant literary arguments.

Table 5. Participant responses to teaching and learning strategies

Participant	Current teaching & learning strategies	Content for removal	Content for inclusion
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lectures too long • Lectures boring • Too much content in lectures • Not enough interaction in lectures • Lacks clarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two hour lectures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More lecture activities • More activity worksheets
Practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too much content in lectures • Lacking interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selected genre specific lectures • Lectures on literary devices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live genre specific content
Academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation Instruction • Critical analysis samples
Academic Related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too much content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literary arguments

Table 6 represents participant views about evaluation strategies. Answers were directed towards provoking views about the suitability of current evaluation strategies, possible amendments to these strategies and other possible evaluation strategies which may be used to enhance the course offering. These responses are listed as follows:

Table 6. Participant responses to course evaluation

Participant	Current course evaluation	Content for removal	Content for inclusion
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too many/too much work for no GPA weighting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual in-course evaluation
Practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One group evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More written in-course assignments • In course assessment of all genres
Academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitable for desired outcome • Dated • Group work only for course work not viewed as best/fair form of evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poetry evaluation assignment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current forms of literature writing assessment strategies eg. profiling
Academic Related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group assignments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blended learning evaluation strategies

While Academic Related staff felt the current evaluation strategies were suitable, they felt that students would benefit from the removal of group assignments and the inclusion of blended learning evaluation strategies. Students felt that the course required too much work and they expressed a strong desire to have group evaluation replaced by individual evaluation. Practitioners' views conflicted with those held by students, as they expressed the need for more written assignments and at least one group evaluation. Academics held mixed opinions about the suitability and currency of evaluation, as well as the applicability of group assessment. The poetry evaluation was described as irrelevant and a direct repetition of what students were taught to do in another discipline specific introductory course. The view was also held that students would benefit from the inclusion of other forms of assessment such as character profiling.

Discussion

The study revealed the existence of a well-designed service course informed by relevant and accurate scholarly support that has undergone significant modifications over time. Several of the suggestions made by students and practitioners contradicted existing scholarship as well as identified course objectives. They expressed discontent with the samples used and considered them dated. The samples, however, are simply the tools used to assist in the writing process and can be changed without directly affecting the course objectives. A review of feedback provided by stakeholders and existing literature informing the teaching of academic writing at the tertiary level revealed areas for possible improvement (Nesi & Gardener, 2012). The course design was premised on earlier teaching models of providing students with content as opposed to empowering students to take responsibility for learning and serving as active participants in their learning process (Hativa, 2000). While the study revealed a need for the revision of course content, teaching and learning strategies

and evaluative measures, the common misconception about students becoming expert writers at the end of a one-semester course should be abandoned.

In keeping with Coffin et al (2005) propositions about the teaching of academic writing at the tertiary level, the amount of course content provided should be reduced and students empowered to produce knowledge. Instead of the provision of extensive amounts of content during lectures, there is the need to employ the use of pointer strategies and increased work sheets. This in no way suggests the removal of PowerPoint content provided in lectures. Instead, this information should continue to be available to students through the University's online learning platform as a pre-lecture reading activity to inform sessions. The disciplinary content elaborated upon should be minimised as most of this information is covered in students' compulsory, introductory disciplinary courses. As indicated by Clughen and Hardy (2012), students should be provided with guidelines and a bank of genre specific content only as a pool to inform writing activities. They should also be empowered to produce their own genre specific samples based on guidelines provided. These strategies empower students while shifting the role of teachers to that of learning facilitators.

Teaching and learning strategies may also be improved by some modifications. The current two hour plenary session should be reduced to a one hour session. Where PowerPoints used in these sessions are made available as pre-reading material, there would no longer be the need for these extensive content sessions. This one hour session could be used to disseminate only key information deemed vital to an understanding of specific writing processes. The current one hour tutorial should be changed to two hour workshops. In this way, students benefit from contact in smaller groups with more time to focus on writing related activities (Hativa, 2000). The reality of an existing cost limitation and physical space allocation can be complemented by the creation of online discussion forums where written work can be posted for feedback from peers and instructors. This also speaks to a greater reliance on pedagogical shifts to the promotion of blended learning strategies.

Course evaluation continues to be a major area of concern for all stakeholders. Writing within the discipline requires more than an ability to produce formal essays. While formal essays continue to be the main form of assessment, students are required to produce other types of written documents. The academic writing course should teach and assess these other types of writing. The drama portfolio should be restructured, yet maintained as the only form of group assessment. All other in-course evaluation should be individually weighted. The poetry analysis essay should be modified to a reflective piece and students should be assessed on an ability to do character profiling for all genres. Blended evaluation should be incorporated through weighted forum discussions and online quizzes to test students' understanding of weekly PowerPoint content.

Conclusion

Course review at the tertiary level involves continuous interrogation of practice, policy and advancements to the scholarship informing the way teaching and learning is perceived at the disciplinary level. This holds true to the teaching of Foundation courses at UWISTA such as Option A: Writing about Literature. Like all practitioners at the tertiary level, practitioners involved in the teaching of academic writing at UWISTA are required to be fully aware of their roles in the teaching process and ensure transparency in all aspects of practice. As illustrated within this study, the expectations of stakeholders sometimes contrast with the objectives of particular course offerings. There is the need for clarity to affect changes in attitudes and awareness to service courses. All stakeholders stand to benefit from an alignment of course modification, stakeholder input and literary underpinning from existing scholarship.

The findings of this research can contribute directly to the provision of a framework for review or all academic writing service courses at The University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus. It is possible that such an undertaking may reduce misconceptions about these course offerings while also establishing a collaborative framework with all stakeholders geared towards improving the quality of teaching and learning. Such a network may also be used as a catalyst for informed course development where disciplinary advancements and changes to existing scholarship demonstrate a need for further instruction to address issues such as shifting ideologies and disciplines expanding beyond established borders.

Similar to other forms of inquiry, course review is not without limitations. Effecting change at the level of teaching and learning is sometimes decelerated by administrative 'gatekeepers'. This, along with the time-consuming nature of conducting such research may result in proposed ideas becoming dated. This study revealed that support from administrators and policy makers is crucial to the course reform process. Establishing such a framework will help ensure a powerful impetus for re-evaluating focus, forums and frontiers within the academic writing classroom geared towards enhancing the quality of service courses at tertiary institutions.

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