

CHAPTER 36.

A WRITING CENTER JOURNEY AT SABANCI UNIVERSITY, ISTANBUL

By **Dilek Tokay**

Sabanci University (Turkey)

This profile focuses on Sabanci University's [SU] Writing Center in Istanbul, which serves the university within another unit called the Center for Individual and Academic Development (CIAD). As the Writing Center's institutional, societal, and international roles and practices are reflective of its objectives in line with Sabanci University's vision and mission, a synopsis on the university and CIAD will serve as a prologue to closer focus on the Writing Center's work and an overall evaluation of what has been experienced as well as what still remains to be accomplished.

Sabanci University's founding *raison d'être* and operational philosophy is to be an innovative institution, responsive to the needs of its constituents and society through a participatory, team-based culture where interdisciplinary infrastructure is the backbone to create and disseminate knowledge. Established in 1996 by the Sabanci Foundation, the university began its first academic year in 1999 on a state-of-the-art campus. In its twelfth year now, SU has a total number of 3,470 students (2,836 undergraduate, 634 graduates) and 374 faculty members. The average number of students per faculty is 14, reflecting focus on small size and close interaction, which is electronically supported by 11,812 Internet connection points. As a member of the European Foundation for Quality Management, implementation of curriculum is in line with the Bologna Criteria for evaluation and enrichment of learning outcomes, pursuing education for all as well as lifelong learning (Sabanci University, 2011)

SU aspires to develop competent and confident individuals, capable of independent and critical reflection within the interdisciplinary framework of three Faculties: Faculty of Engineering and Natural Sciences (FENS), Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS), and the Faculty of Management (FMAN). For the incoming students to meet the expectations of the university, where instruction

is in English, the School of Languages (SL) provides the Foundations Development Year Program. As Faculty Programs are built around a blend of disciplines that leverage scientific developments and equip students with a wide diversity of mental tools and skills, the Center for Individual and Academic Development (CIAD) is engaged in uplifting students' oral and written communication and research skills. The multi-functional role of CIAD's four units, including the Writing Center, is unique to SU among Turkish universities.

CENTER FOR INDIVIDUAL AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT (CIAD)

The mission of CIAD is to support and facilitate SU students' adjustment to the uniquely participatory and interdisciplinary nature of SU. CIAD's subunits are (1) The Writing Center and Academic Support Program; (2) Disability Services Program; (3) Advisory System, comprising Academic Success Monitoring and Counseling, Foundations Development Year Counseling, Peer Tutoring, & Individual Counseling; and (4) the Course Evaluation System.

Activities of each sub-unit provide feedback to the other subunits. For example, through Peer Tutoring, students are directed to either the Writing Center for their skills development needs at all levels, or to the Academic Support Program, for remedial group activities concerning courses such as Physics or Calculus. For better self expression, time management, or study habits, Individual Counseling is the right address. Through the Course Evaluation System, the SU community has access to statistical reports on course evaluations, the types of instruction, and statistics on student satisfaction. Hence, CIAD, with a working team of 21 persons, promotes student-faculty-administration interaction for efficiency, productivity, and accessibility of methodological and pedagogical innovations.

SABANCI UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER (SUWC)

The following synopsis of SUWC considers the Center's mission, programs, and future plans for viability and recognition.

PHILOSOPHY, HISTORY, AND STRATEGIES OF THE SUWC

All SU Faculty Programs necessitate critical thinking and academic writing. Forms include essays, project/internship/case reports, response or research

papers, conference papers, and theses, as well as discussion-debate strategies, impromptu talks, presentations, and interviewing techniques.

To fulfill its goals of creating interest and establishing the concept of writing as a discipline, SUWC encourages and assists students to become expressive, persuasive, critical, and creative thinkers and writers both in English and Turkish. It facilitates students' development throughout their education at SU with programs focusing on Writing across the Curriculum or in the Discipline, plus thesis preparation, helping them seek for high achievement in careers or jobs in Turkey and abroad.

SUWC builds students' abilities to think, write, and speak in English through workshops, tutorials, study groups, and adjunct courses that promote student writing, by engaging them in contests, conference presentations, and publications. In these activities, sample student essays, proposals, reports, abstracts, response papers, presentations, CV or personal statements, and theses are used, accompanied by Essay Evaluation Checklists that serve as benchmarks.

In tutorials, SUWC does not proofread or edit student writers' work but helps them learn about writing by providing lead-in questions and ample samples in different genres, using different rhetorical styles, and initiating care for organization, structure, layout, and format, with documentation styles for integration of evidence as support, and citation techniques to avoid plagiarism.

The Writing Center has thrived within the frame of CIAD since its inception in 2000, serving the university community through five elements: (1) Foundations Development Year, (2) Undergraduate, (3) Graduate, (4) Career and Academic Advising, and (5) Creative Writing. By encouraging students to pursue competence in academic discourse and contribute to local and international networks through participating at conferences and organizing websites, SUWC fulfills its institutional responsibilities. Top administration's support from its groundwork until present, faculty's familiarity with the notion of Writing Centers, as well as the hard work of the Center's academic staff, have been crucial factors in SUWC's success.

LOCATION

Both CIAD and SUWC are conveniently located on the campus, and can workshop up to 60 participants; it has a Study Group Studio for 10. SUWC has access to all the SU studios for larger workshops. For the five academic staff of SUWC and the Help Desk, six offices are well-furnished and equipped with technology and internet.

ARCHIVES

SUWC has its program-based materials as workshop PowerPoint handouts, Study Group activity sheets, checklists, sample student outlines/essays, portfolios, reports, conference abstracts, presentations, CV and SOP samples, supplementary guidelines, reading lists, attendance lists, a database for statistics, semester-end reports, proposals, CDs of interviews with TAs and mock job interviews, and program leaflets. Materials are kept both electronically and in hard copy, including feedback letters and Evaluation Checklists as testimonials.

COMPOSITION

The five members of the SUWC academic staff have their degrees in English Literature, Law, Archeology, Mass Media, and Public Relations. Some have additional certificates and experience in English Language Teaching (ELT), teaching of English Literature, Expository Writing or Composition, and/or have been involved in curriculum design, materials production, and teacher training, with 8-40 years of experience per person. Throughout the years, SUWC has had a Coordinator, a Help Desk, and two to seven assistants for office work and peer-tutoring. The current assistants are SU Graduate Program students in Political Science, International Relations, and Cultural Studies, with BA degrees from universities such as Cornell, UC Berkeley, University of Chicago, University of Florida, Boston College, and Cambridge. Two assistants are junior and senior in SU, FENS, and FASS. Assistants' recruitment is a two-tier process: submission of CV and two essays, followed by two interviews to measure teaching and communication skills.

ACTIVITIES/ PROGRAMS

The five program elements of SUWC are designed based on feedback collected from students, course assistants, and faculty at meetings, study groups, and tutorials. Each program holds six to 26 two-hour workshops with a range of eight to 257 students (course-based) per semester. The number of appointment-based tutorials has a range of 125-882 per semester. Study group sessions range between 16 and 77, with an attendance of 3-562 participants per semester. The number of students benefitting from any one of the SUWC services per semester is approximately 1,700 out of SU's 3,470 student population, mostly undergraduates.

FOUNDATIONS DEVELOPMENT YEAR PROGRAM (FDYP)

The goal of the FDYP is to support the English language development of FDY students to ensure a smooth transition between the academic English expectations of the FDY and undergraduate programs. Although this program promotes the growth of all interrelated English language skills, it focuses most strongly on advancing students' academic writing abilities.

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM (UP)

Similar to the relationships built by many established writing centers (see, e.g., Pemberton, 1995; Thaiss & Porter, 2010; and the Gustafsson/Boström , , McConlogue/Mitchell/Peake, and McMillan essays in this volume), the SU-WC's Undergraduate Program (UP) aims to strengthen students' writing skills through Writing in the Disciplines (WID) and Writing across the Curriculum (WAC), supporting their development as confident and effective communicators, researchers, and presenters, but primarily analytical and critical readers, thinkers, and writers with a voice. In workshops and tutorials, different strategies are practiced to help participants shape and refine their writing to achieve and maintain academic standards concerning content, organization, and format of their written work. Activities are designed in consideration of the interdisciplinary nature of the curriculum.

For example, English 101 and 102 are composed of workshops and tutorials concerning

- writing processes
 - rhetorical styles
 - documentation techniques
 - research papers
 - film analysis
 - book reviews
 - presentation skills
 - effective interviews
 - the Speakers' Corner
- all of these topics applicable in any discipline.

WAC IMPLEMENTATION

Within the interdisciplinary context of curricula at SU, students are required to write competently in all the courses. They are expected to write response/

research papers and essays, exam essays, case/project reports, and dissertations. SUWC's WID workshops started at the time of its foundation in 2000, with 11 workshops that found ground for WAC with the support of faculty.

WAC implementation is geared towards the needs of the following 15 courses, with their inception semesters in chronological order: HUM 201 Major Works of Western Literature (S 2002); SPS 101and102 Social and Political Sciences-Man and Society (F 2004); SPS 303 Law and Ethics (S 2002); POLS 302 Political Science (S 2002); HUM 203 Major Works of Ottoman Culture (S 2004), ANT 469 Writing Culture (S 2004); CULT 250 Oral History (S 2004); HUM 204 Major Works of Western Music (S 2005); HIS 227 History Goes to the Movies (F 2005); PROJ 102 Report Writing for FASS, FENS, and FMAN (F 2006); HUM 214 Major Works of the Opera (S 2009); HUM 224 Major Works of Twentieth Century Music (S 2010), IR 201 International Relations Theory (F 2010), HUM 205 Major Works of the Cinema (S 2011). Each of these courses has one to four workshops.

Workshop attendance is made compulsory by the faculty teaching the course. If the times are inconvenient for the students, make-up workshops are arranged. Among all the courses for which WAC workshops are tailored, PROJ 102 (Report Writing for FASS) has the highest attendance.

Face-to-face tutorials are set by appointment. Each WAC tutorial is run by the responsible person of the program or a peer-tutor. The tutorial includes two hours of lead-in questions, attention pointers, and suggestions on the draft, with a revised version by the end of the session. Here, the aim has always been to make student writers "editors of their own work."

To encourage more courses to participate in WAC, we give best attendance awards and present facts and figures to the administration in our end-semester reports.

For the WAC project to turn into an institutionalized Program, concerned faculty have made the following recommendations:

- A University wide WAC Committee that would begin with an analysis of WAC programs in US universities
- A credit course for WAC TAs
- A credit course, Academic Writing, which could be made compulsory for undergraduates
- Funding for graduate assistants that would allow us to invite PhD candidates from US institutions with effective WAC training backgrounds

GRADUATE PROGRAM [GP]

The GP facilitates the acquisition of effective research principles, sound expression in scholarly discourse, and mastery of the specific conventions related

to a graduate student's particular discipline. Such discourses include research/course papers and assignments, theses and dissertations, journal articles for publication, and academic correspondence, as well as conference and classroom presentations. How the SUWC works with graduate students is in some ways unique to Sabanci, but its commitment to graduate education is similar to that in the Gustafsson/Boström, Solé/Teberosky/Castelló, and Thaiss/Goodman essays, among others, in this volume.

All graduate students send course papers, conference publications, and presentations, as well as grant and research proposals, to the SUWC for assistance. Writing tutorials for completion of the doctorate, proposals, and defense are also offered. Additionally, since 2005, GP offers the FMAN 621 Modules, Writing and Presentations for Doctoral Students. With GP support, doctoral students have published their research in academic journals. Since 2004, all second-year MBA students have received support in the form of individual tutorials and workshops in writing and the presentation of the cornerstone projects of the MBA: the Company Action Project (CAP) and the Value Added Presentations. All CAP Projects are read by GP faculty.

CAREER AND ACADEMIC ADVISING PROGRAM [CAAP]

The CAAP assists undergraduates and graduates in their career search as they prepare for employment or post-graduate education in Turkey or abroad. It provides support for graduate school and scholarship applications, internships, research, and grant proposals. Advising students in the decision-making and application process, the program contains a pedagogical component with workshops, study groups, and tutorials concerning preparation for standardized tests—GRE, GMAT, TOEFL, IELTS—plus writing the CV and personal statement, submitting sample papers, and practicing mock interviews. Based on 2004–2010 data, approximately 90% of the SU graduates accepted by post-graduate programs had used CAAP services.

CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM (CWP)

The CWP's goal is to instill a love of writing with imagination and creativity, as well as clarity; CWP encourages students to develop their own voices and visions. The program aims to develop empathy and fosters an appreciation for human diversity, as students engage in the process of writing short stories, poems, personal essays, or novels. CWP has small interactive workshops and tutorials with undergraduate and graduate students, SU administrative staff, and the students of a foundations high school in the vicinity. The Program also

designs two contests every academic year— one in short stories and the other in essay writing. The action plan for the program includes inviting prominent writers for panels, conferences, and Writing Contest Awards Ceremonies; such contests encourage writing in different literary genres such as poetry, mini-saga, novella, and poster design.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT - TA/ PEER-TUTOR TRAINING

Professional Development activities occur in three categories. In Category I, TA Classroom Management Techniques workshops for all new FASS, FENS, and FMAN TAs, as well as SUWC assistants, are given at the SU Orientations in mid semester and the end of each semester. In Category II, workshops for TAs of the courses within the WAC program guide the TAs in composing written prompts and designing rubrics for assessment of students' written work. In Category III, we arrange group meetings for workshop and peer-tutoring assistants for each program. These sessions range between 4 and 9 per semester for specific strategies.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

The SUWC contacts faculty and students prior to the start of semesters for collection of feedback on past practices and expectations for the new programs. Contact with the students is maintained through e-mail or when the students drop in for feedback. The assessment of both the contents and the delivery of workshops and tutorials is a two-tier process: first, collection of student feedback on Workshop and Tutorial Evaluation Checklists, and second, checking the value added to student performance by consulting with the course instructors or TAs. Findings from this process show tremendous impact of workshops and tutorials on student achievement. Letters of satisfaction following each activity and letters asking for more sessions serve as testimonials shared in semester-end reports.

LOCAL OUTREACH TO SECONDARY EDUCATION AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

The SUWC fulfills its societal responsibilities through its linkages with secondary education and universities in Istanbul and beyond through organizing seminars and workshops. Because writing has to start at an early age and Turkish secondary education curriculum disregards this fact, linkages with high schools are very important to equip the teachers with methods of teaching writ-

ing. Upon institutions' requests, activities are designed to discuss needs and curriculum design to find thematic overlaps with other courses, to tailor writing projects, and to assign meaningful class/group/home work. Strategies for the formation of a Writing Center are recommended. Current workshops and seminars have either continued weekly through the academic year, or have been presented as compact three-day or one-week programs. Educators, including administrators, have visited the SUWC to observe workshops or tutorials and review workshop materials. An SUWC effort has been instrumental in opening five high school and four university Writing Centers in Istanbul. More high school Writing Centers need to be established, and care must be spent not to let the newly-opened centers close by the change of institutions' administrators.

To reinforce these gains, in September 2011 we held our first Summer Institute for high school writing center enthusiasts. We allocated its three days to writing pedagogy enriched with creativity and critical thinking in Turkish courses. The institute will be followed by a series of subject-specific seminars to encourage WAC in Turkish secondary and higher education. The institute built on the gains of the recent SU Educational Reform Initiative Conference, 2011, which has been exemplary in establishing linkages with the teachers involved in Turkish secondary curricula.

The SUWC has also had some success in stretching teaching/learning spaces for other societal needs, as in CV and application letter writing, creative writing for municipalities and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and presentation skills for the business sector.

INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH

From the very outset of the Center, international outreach has been a goal—widening its scope and recognition. The SUWC has been participating in international organizations and at conferences like INGED, EATAW, EWCA, IWCA, NCTE, and CCCC. Interaction of SUWC members with international colleagues has always been supported by SU's top administrators. SU encourages international outreach through funding because it values the international voice that its academic representatives gain for the university. As we mix with others, we add to the international common core of knowledge, and we then bring back what we have observed and admired as differences, to be shared by others at home and implemented as much as the circumstances allow.

The Center has also benefited from my own active involvement as a member of the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing (EATAW) and as Chair in 2005 of the European Writing Centers Association (EWCA).

The International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) honored me with the “one-time-only” Muriel Harris award in 2010 for my contributions to the organization.

Collegial ties established at conferences and strengthened through networking have brought SUWC prominent visitors from Turkey and abroad during the years 2004-2011. EWCA Chairs and Board members, the past CCCC and IWCA Chairs, Writing Center Directors from Europe and the US, and many international professors have enhanced professional sharing at the events designed by the SUWC in Istanbul, conveying their ideas for new action plans to others during their visits.

Networking through websites has additionally provided a professional medium for the discussion of effective teaching-learning strategies in writing centers. For example, since 2003, the SUWC website has had 290,334 unique visits and the EWCA website 199,151 (as of June 14, 2011). (See <http://www.sabanciuniv.edu/writingcenter> and <http://www.ewca.sabanciuniv.edu>).

EXPECTATIONS

The SUWC's growth in the past eleven years reflects the support by the university's administration. Keeping SUWC networked with an international audience is important, and so professional development of the staff through conference participation needs to be encouraged with funding. To establish further linkages with secondary and higher education, we need to recruit a technical staff to keep SUWC's homepage current and make it interactive, with links to other program websites and an online SUWC newsletter. In the tradition of electronic outreach by writing centers (e.g., Inman & Sewell, 2000; Thomas et al., 1998), we are also aiming to start an on-line service to set up tutorial appointments.

Such new initiatives as the online newsletter and the scheduled summer institute bring hope for the SUWC to carry on as even a better address in Turkey for promoting dialogue in the international writing community.

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