

February 12 2015

Recently the SUS was approached by students, alumni and faculty members to express concern surrounding some decisions made by senior UFV administration with respect to the Writing Centre. As elected representatives of the UFV student body, we take these concerns very seriously and began meeting with administration to make further inquiries as to the facts surrounding this new development.

After discussing the situation with Administration and hearing from multiple students, alumni, and faculty, the SUS Board of Directors, at its February 11 Extraordinary Meeting, decided to tentatively support the redevelopment of the Writing Centre into the Academic Success Centre. It is the Board's belief that UFV Administration is working with the best intentions for the diverse range of students and their associated needs. However, the Board expresses its disappointment with the level of communication and lack of active consultation both in the decision making process, and in the announcement and release of information.

The Writing Centre provides a valuable service to a specific set of needs, none of which the Board dispute. However we also recognize that there are a variety of needs currently underserved or unserved among the current offerings of the Writing and Math Centres, and various Student Learning Group (SLG) offerings. A significant majority of academic areas have little to no formal or informal academic support. This change in service truly is an expansion of student services: a change yes, but certainly with potential for improvement.

Some concern has been raised about the use of student tutors in the operation of this service. While the Board is not unreceptive to the difference between an accredited student tutor and a staff member, we also believe that this is a fantastic opportunity to provide significant student employment and experiential learning on campus. There has been no evidence beyond personal anecdote and opinion to show peer tutoring cannot meet broader student needs, while in contrast the use of student tutors is supported in academic literature, and has been well received already at UFV in SLGs, and on multiple other university campuses.

Having now confirmed factual information, the Board also wants to provide clear and unambiguous information on some topics where conflicting or confusing points have been presented to students:

- The Writing Centre will continue to operate until the Winter exam period, as it normally does for any other semester
- The Academic Success Centre transition and training will occur over the summer months, with the Centre fully operational for the Fall 2015 semester
- The Centre will be overseen by highly qualified individuals, including a one holding a PhD and two individuals with their Masters, all of whom will be available for tutoring
- The Centre will be accredited through the College Reading & Learning Association,
- Individual peer tutors will receive professional accreditation through a training regime lasting 40-60 hours, and will receive continual assessment and feedback throughout their employment.
- The Centre will continue to provide support for writing

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The primary criticism from the Board is the poor level of communication and lack of active consultation with student representatives which, has resulted in alarm and misinformation amongst the UFV community. While a survey was distributed in the Fall semester, it did not address potential changes to the Writing Centre. A major change to a front-line student service should require clear student consultation and constructive feedback. Furthering the problem is that UFV failed to provide clear information and the supporting rationale in a timely manner to the student body. This resulted in word-of-mouth information sharing among faculty, staff, students, and alumni which so often results in misinformation snowballing out of control and unnecessarily creating panic. UFV must learn from this incident and dramatically improve its consultation with student representatives on such changes, and ensure that information is communicated clearly and accurately at the soonest possible opportunity.

Subsequent to the Board meeting and decision, UFV administration offered to create an oversight committee for the transition to and launch of the Academic Success Centre which will include representation from SUS. We are pleased with this development and look forward to continuing to learn about the new Centre, and help facilitate the sharing of information to and from the UFV community.

Again, the Board currently is optimistic that the Academic Success Centre will be able to serve a greater number of students than the current model and can meet the needs of students throughout their university careers. SUS will work to assist in the development of a strong support service, and continue to bring feedback on this matter, and others, to UFV.

On behalf of the SUS Board of Directors,

Ryan Petersen  
President

