

**Learning Commons Meeting**  
Jan 16<sup>th</sup>, 2.00-4.00 p.m.  
Room 108C, Scott Library



**Agenda**

- 1. Welcome and introductions**
- 2. Discussion of new/current services in the Hub and plans for Winter Term 2017**
  - a. Peers service at Learning Commons Welcome Desk (Peers training/meet and greet session on Jan. 26<sup>th</sup>), Learning Skills Learning Lounge, Citation Station, ESL OLC.
  - b. Collaborations with Teaching Commons
  - c. Workshops update
- 3. Learning Commons & future strategic priorities – Update/discussion**
- 4. Assessment of LC Hub services**
  - a. Current practice and need for more data/new tools
  - b. Statistics, user surveys/focus groups
- 5. Hub services promotion and signage**
  - a. Integrative/higher profile signage for pods and workshops – rationale. Sharing of ideas
- 6. Hub facilities**
  - a. What is lacking or needed? (Sophie to share input to date, other input welcome)  
Learning Skills proposal of Learning Commons Library and display area

# Learning Commons Meeting

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## Notes

### Present:

Sophie Bury [Chair, Libraries], Geoff Lawrence [ESL OLC], Tom Scott, Norda Majekodunmi, Janet Cheng [Libraries], Cathy Boyd-Withers, Mona Frial-Brown [Learning Skills Services], Natasha May [Teaching Commons], Dianne Twombly [Career Centre], Stephanie Bell, Ron Sheese [Writing Department]

### 1. Introductions

Sophie began by welcoming everyone. She also alluded to recent changes in leadership roles at the Libraries, some of which relate to Learning Commons (LC), coupled with some developments in the LC Hub during last fall. Sophie acknowledged, for example, the addition of ESL OLC to the LC. They will be continuing to offer service throughout the winter term. The meeting began with a round of introductions including an invitation for partners to highlight key developments or news from their areas.

### 2. New & Current Services in the LC Hub

- **Learning Skills Services** have changed location at York since last summer and are now based at Scott Library. They continue to run a drop-in service in the pod, while offering one-on-one consultations in their 2<sup>nd</sup> floor offices.
  - **Peers:** 8 peers man the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Welcome Desk, and engage in triage for questions to other LC units including key library service points located beyond the LC Hub. The peers received some 1200 queries at the Welcome Desk in Fall 2016 and Cathy and Mona have shared a rough breakdown of categories. LSS invited any comments on statistics categories that might be useful to add or adapt. The LSS peers are part-time staff and cover the desk usually from mid-morning to afternoon, though there is not as much coverage on Monday and Friday mornings. Sophie has organized a "Meet & Greet" & Training session for the Peers on **Tuesday, Jan 31**, between 10:30 am -12:15 pm. This is a chance for everyone to get to know each other better and for the peers to learn about all partner services. Anica and Norda will cover the library services. Sophie encouraged each unit to send a representative. Peers will also provide an overview of their tasks and experiences.

- **Learning Lounge:** In Fall LSS began a new service from the SMIL Screening room every Friday from 12 noon to 2 p.m. – the Learning Lounge – to help students get support and gear up for the exam period. At least one peer is available during this time to lend support to students with learning skills advice.
  - **Workshops:** All LSS workshops are being held in the SMIL screening room these days.
- **Library Citation Station** – at the reference desk a substantial number of questions relate to citing including using APA, MLA and Chicago style. To address this need, the Libraries are offering four hours of service every week at the previous Research drop-in pod [winter hours: Tuesday 12 noon-2 pm and Thursday 2-4 pm]. Zotero questions will be answered as well. It went well despite little promotion in the Fall. Partners were asked to spread the word.
- **ESL OLC** – Geoff expressed enthusiasm at being part of the hub services. Christine Wiseman has been facilitating every Monday and Wednesday, between 3-5 pm. It started slowly but as time went on some traffic was being forwarded from the Writing pod. They also offer workshops on pronunciation and presentation skills and a “Book Club,” as well as working with instructors who may have students that need their support. Amy Poon is the liaison librarian for the ESL program and has been helping to promote this service in the Library. Geoff acknowledged Writing who have allowed his unit to use their online system for booking one-on-one meetings or “small group” sessions with tutors.
- **Writing** – In response to student demand, Writing’s pod services have been extended on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday [from 1:30 to 4:20 pm], while maintaining the same hours on the other days. Though some improvement has been made to address the line-up issue, including the provision of a waiting space with chairs, traffic is still a problem. Students get anxious about wait times. Stephanie stressed that peers should be aware that the Writing Department is offering drop-in services in their department [S311 Ross] Monday to Friday 10:30 am to 3:30 pm from January 30<sup>th</sup> through March 31<sup>st</sup>. Peers are encouraged to promote this service when there is a line-up. It can be useful to first phone over to the Writing Department [via ext. 55134] to confirm availability before sending people. Writing is currently thinking about space revisioning and may change their space into a study hall setting with round café style tables in order to draw more people to use their services there.
- **Career Centre** – is offering drop-in services every Thursday 1-3 pm. The demand has been relatively quiet for their services in the LC hub. Dianne said this may be because students do not expect to see Career Services in the library.
- **Collaboration with the Teaching Commons** – Sophie reported on the workshops that have been offered recently in partnership with Teaching Commons including two on teaching critical writing and research skills (Sophie and Ron) and one on fostering integrity in the classroom (Stephanie). A new workshop on using SPARK and Zotero to foster student success also happened in May 2016. Stephanie recommended that workshops could be strengthened through collaboration of students and faculty working together to design content and activities.

- **LC partners' workshops** are currently included under the Passport to Success program. Students must do eight workshops to earn the Passport. Six need to be LSS workshops but up to two workshops may be from other LC partners (Libraries, Career Centre, Writing). The Library workshops were recently revamped thanks to the work of Amy Poon and Genny Jon and they are promoted under the Passport umbrella. Much has been done to promote them. Attendance could be better but feedback has been positive. The need for the Learning Commons to develop more visible, attractive space for workshops was highlighted.

### **3. Learning Commons & Future Strategic Priorities**

Sophie updated the group about ongoing discussions between herself, the University Librarian, Joy Kirchner, and LC unit chairs or directors about future planning for Learning Commons. Learning Commons is a priority in the recently compiled new library strategic plan (2016-2020). Joy and other directors support a goal of revising LC to strengthen it, and to review possibilities for new directions. The group was also informed that the Libraries are undergoing a reorganization at the current time.

To date the Learning Commons has lacked a budget, any formal governance or structure, and has been thin on the ground in terms of human resources. A lot of good will has fuelled it to date. Ongoing discussions between the directors of LC units have taken place on this theme since last Fall. Joy would like to see a new framework document evolve including stated mission, vision, values, goals and outcomes for Learning Commons. Sophie also mentioned that new activities may be embraced by Learning Commons in the future. For example, some elements of what constitutes a Research Commons may come under this umbrella, or be located in a revised space alongside Learning Commons. Some discussion ensued regarding the nature of Research Commons in academic libraries.

Future planned steps on the road to make this happen will be a retreat for LC partners and other invited guests, which is currently planned for May 10<sup>th</sup>, with May 8<sup>th</sup> as a backup date. We are likely to invite Susan Killick's unit – Talent Acquisition and Development – to help facilitate the day. A Retreat Working group will be struck to plan this event, including engaging in research on best practice examples by drawing on the literature and connecting with Learning Commons administrators elsewhere, especially in North America. Sophie stated that all units are being encouraged to have a volunteer on this working group. The group will likely have meetings at least once monthly (probably a minimum of four meetings) in the run-up to the retreat.

Sophie referred to the former LC structure or governance including a steering committee with four sub-working groups: Faculty, Student Engagement, Workshops and one for Virtual matters. Due to the limited resources available at the current time, and the revising process underway, the main group working on LC planning in upcoming months will be the Retreat Working Group.

In addition, a LC Project Coordinator position [YUSA] has been approved for three years and is expected to start this summer, quite largely funded by Will Gage's office (VP Teaching & Learning) with funds also contributed by the Libraries. This position will have an emphasis on e-

learning and experiential education with primacy given to the student-facing role. Kathleen Winningham, the YU Experience Hub Director, will be an important resource person with respect to the experiential education piece, and she will be on the new LC Retreating Planning Working Group. The new YUSA position will also help with the running and promotion of LC programs generally, and will assist with the reconceptualization of LC. A final job description was recently approved in consultation with LC unit heads and Will Gage's Office.

There were some comments and discussion in response to what Sophie shared. Ron Sheese encouraged group members to seriously consider having someone from their units be on this planning group to ensure LC is a combined effort of all partners working together. He also stated that while it can be beneficial to look at models elsewhere, we need to think about what makes the LC strong as it is right now, and what is important to preserve and strengthen in a York-specific context. He also advocated that a bottom-up or grassroots approach to LC planning can have benefits.

The importance of contributing to student success and retention at York was also stressed. The role of LC in the first-year experience is also important. There should be considered reflection on the Research Commons theme as this might mark a shift away from students. It is important that we continue to be readily available to students and continue to offer robust support. Stephanie Bell stressed that she thinks more faculty/student collaborations are needed to strengthen LC in terms of workshop planning and service design. She also stated she thinks research to strengthen a future LC model is important.

Some concerns about the current space available for LC were raised. Tom mentioned that there is a master plan underway to fundraise for improved library spaces.

#### **4. Hub Services Promotion & Signage**

There has been feedback that improved signage in the LC hub space would help users to understand the services as they exist right now, including the interconnection between services on the main floor of the library and the second floor. Sophie showed pictures of the pop-up banners and other signs used for AskUs, Library Research Assistance and Building Services on the main level of the Scott Library. It was recommended that it would help if each pod had a sign outlining the top areas that each service can help with in a similar vein to these signs. These LC signs might have a similar look and feel to downstairs but have different colours to distinguish them as LC signs. The group liked this idea. Sophie will followup with each unit to see what they would like to see listed on such a sign.

Cathy and Mona have also recommended that a White Board could be used near the entrance to the LC space to profile what services are available each day and to profile workshops and other information. This is something that is done in Vari Hall, for example. Sophie will followup to aim to secure one.

Stephanie Bell recommended that it would be useful for Learning Commons to think about new branding and a new logo. They have done this at the Writing Dept with good results. The work

that SCLD has done in terms of branding was also highlighted. She stated that York communications will support a theme idea.

It was recommended that it would help if there were a flyer, brochure or website redesign that would help students through mapping tools to show the locations of partner services on campus. It was recommended that reviewing the promotional materials of other campus units who may have taken this type of approach could be useful.

## **5. Assessment of LC Hub Services**

Sophie stated that it is probably timely to review statistics gathering in the hub. In addition, at the retreat a review of these statistics could be needed to show usage patterns.

The question was asked as to whether partners would benefit from moving to an online stats recording system such as the one used by the Libraries and she showed this tool briefly. It would be easier to generate reports from an online system and to analyze data. There was a concern that most partners do not have laptops or tablets in the hub right now, so that it is not easy to enter data in this way.

Partners briefly reviewed the Statistics sheets currently used by Learning Skills, the Career Centre and ESL OLC. The question of whether referrals to other LC units should still be documented was asked. We will continue to use these sheets for the current time. The Writing Department is now using a different statistics gathering system, and Stephanie said she will share Fall statistics with Janet soon.

Sophie shared a student experience survey, which Writing has been using in the Hub without much success in the Fall term. This is partly because the surveys seem to be disappearing. Sophie said that doing such a survey for the services generally in the LC Hub during Winter term would be beneficial. It could help us gauge awareness, past and present usage of services, satisfaction with service etc. This data could then be shared at the May retreat. Norda shared that they had administered a quick five minute online survey as part of the AskUs pilot. They approached students in line-ups in December with an iPad and plan to run this again in February 2017. Sophie will followup with administering such a survey during the Winter term in consultation with partners.

Meeting adjourned at 4 pm