

## Editorial

# The Role of the Student Experience in Shaping Academic Writing Development in Higher Education

This issue of the *Journal of Academic Writing* contains selected, peer-reviewed articles based on presentations given at the EATAW 2011 conference. The conference, held on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2011 at the University of Limerick, Ireland, and hosted by the Regional Writing Centre at the University of Limerick, took as its focus *the role of the student experience in shaping academic writing development in higher education*. The EATAW 2011 conference brought together 280 participants to contribute to discussion of how to enhance the student experience through writing development. Conference delegates included writing teachers and researchers, writing centre and writing programme administrators, staff developers, and professional and peer writing tutors. A focal point of the conference was a keynote panel featuring peer tutors in writing from three universities. A reflection on this keynote, along with narratives written by peer writing tutors working in universities in Europe, is included in the new 'Dialogues' section of this issue.

If one wishes to grasp the importance of the student experience to teaching and learning, then one need only type the phrase in an internet search engine. In Ireland, such a search takes one straight-away to a link to the Student Experience Office at the University College Cork (<http://www.ucc.ie/en/vpse/>), followed by links to a number of other colleges and universities advertising the experience that prospective students can expect. From Harvey, Burrows and Green's early 'Quality in Higher Education' survey, which found that over 4,000 student and staff prioritised 'the learning process experienced by students' as the most significant factor in judging the quality of higher education (1992: 6), to a recent OECD report (Hénard 2010), which testifies to the European, if not global, scale of the attention devoted to measuring and assuring quality in teaching and learning, the student experience is key. The implications for writing developers in third-level institutes for supporting the student experience continue to be hammered out.

With implications for teachers, tutors, and administrators of academic writing in mind, this issue of the *Journal of Academic Writing* enters the discussion on enhancing the quality of the student experience through writing. Enhancing the student experience is central to the vision and mission of most higher education institutions in Europe and beyond. How both undergraduate and postgraduate students experience academic writing has a major impact on the students' participation in academic and disciplinary environments and on the development of their identities. Writing programmes and initiatives that actively engage students in the practices of their academic communities can enhance the quality of the student learning experience.

Contributions in this issue speak to some of the thematic strands that were identified in the call for papers for EATAW 2011. Articles on student writing in transition (Carvalho; Cole), on the evaluation and monitoring of writing through feedback and assessment (Williams), and on research that informs writing pedagogy (Keranen and Munive; Kruse and Chitez; and Baratta), constitute a strand that inquires into pedagogical practices that aim to enhance the student learning experience. Alternatively, articles that address issues related to writing centres and writing tutoring (Girgensohn) and that enquire into Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) or Writing in Disciplines (WID) initiatives (Lievens; Groppe-Wegener) might best be thought of as enquiries into the role of writing programmes, writing centres, writing initiatives or writing research projects in enhancing the student learning experience.

The thematic clusters portrayed above are only a guide to how one might categorise the offerings in this issue. The difficulty in situating the submissions in distinct categories testifies, perhaps, to the complexity of the field of academic writing pedagogy. Perhaps, too, it is this very complexity that allows readers to advance their own work through parallels drawn from, and correspondences detected in, each of the submissions published in this issue of the *Journal of Academic Writing*. It is hoped that each article will find a home in readers' reflections and translate eventually into a beneficial student learning experience.

The publication of this second issue of the *Journal of Academic Writing* owes much to the heroic efforts and determination of Dr. Elizabeth Hough of Coventry University's Centre for Academic Writing, who was instrumental in organising this issue's progress and pushing it to its completion. For those efforts, all involved are infinitely grateful.

Íde O'Sullivan

Lawrence Cleary

*University of Limerick, Ireland*

## References

Harvey, L., Burrows, A. and Green, D. (1992) *Total Student Experience: A First Report of the QHE National Survey of Staff and Students' Views of the Important Criteria of Quality*. Birmingham, UCE, QHE [online] available from:  
<<http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/Harvey%20papers/TSE.pdf>> [16 December 2012]

Hénard, F. (2010) *Learning our Lesson: Review of Quality Teaching in Higher Education*. Paris: OECD