

How to create and develop writing centres:

Challenges and experiences on collaboration and pedagogical development within two Norwegian writing centres in Higher Education

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Outline

- What is a writing centre?
- Our pedagogical framework and point of departure
- Our writing centres

- The challenges

Writing task 1

What comes into your mind when you hear the word

'writing centre'?

Write for 3 minutes without lifting your hand from the keyboard, or your pen away from the paper.

Start when I say 'start'; when you hear the bell ring immediately stop writing.

What is a writing center? – Some background

The 'Quality reform' in 2001 represented a shift from lecturing based teaching to student active teaching.

- more student writing
- close follow-up of each student and regular feedback on papers

Dysthe (2003, p. 164) placed the responsibility to teach writing within the discipline itself and university professors were encouraged to learn writing pedagogy.

The results

- Difficult to place the responsibility on faculty
- Students still find the transition from high school to higher education to be challenging; especially the academic language and writing.
- Online tutorials and books with guidelines on how to write and how to cite are trending.
- Online resources or books on writing are insufficient; an increasing need for face-to-face communication on writing.
- Norwegian writing centres are often placed in the libraries.

Writing centre as social space



A writing centre is a social learning space

- Joan Lippincott uses libraries and writing centres as examples on social learning spaces. The library is seen as a place to learn:

An 'Information Commons', [...] "provide users with a seamless work environment so that they may access, manage, and produce information all at the same workstation." (Lippincott, 2006, p. 2).

- This often requires a physical space; a place you also can meet up with writing tutors, librarians and IT staff.

From an instrumental approach to writing as a process

A challenge when talking about writing is to move from stressing **'how to write correctly'** to **'how to reach an understanding'**.

Through writing you write your way to understanding, so the writing itself is a thinking tool and a method (Johansen, p. 15, 2012).

Levels of learning

Wingate (2007, p. 462) points out that academic writing moves through three stages:

1. Selecting evaluating information sources
2. Synthesising the ideas/ arguments from other sources with one's own ideas/arguments
3. Writing ideas/arguments up into a structured, coherent text.

Dialogue-based and process-oriented

Academic discourses are manifold and polyphonic. The dialogical perspective of Bakhtin points to the value of the polyphonic (Bakhtin, 1987).

Dialogical strategies can lead the way to what it means to write, think and work within an academic milieu (Dysthe et al. 2012; Elbow 1998).

Dialogic guidance strategies involve open-ended questions, confrontations and discussions to explore academic writing, for instance connected to specific aspects and uses of voice (Brodersen & Kavli, 2019, p. 49).

- Guidance is face-to-face
- There is no 'proofreading'

The writing process ...

is not a linear process

Good, finished texts are created by unfinished texts which are rewritten many times

(Heger & Hvass, 2018)

How to not write correctly

- A tool we use to loosen up the focus on how to write an academic coherent perfect text is to start up writing with:
 - Non-stop writing
 - Five paragraph method
 - Speed dating
 - Creative writing

What students find challenging

- Referencing (4)
- How to structure the assignment (4)
- To get started with writing (4)
- To find sources (3)
- Argumentation and discussion (3)

- *Answers from online survey April 2021 (n = 29)*

Students' thoughts on academic writing

“ I find it challenging to search for literature, to decide and sharpen a research question. Further I find it challenging to know how much I can write without having to ground my claims with references.”

“ feel that I do not know enough to write well, so it's difficult to get started, struggle to get started with the reading and then it gets terrible late before the writing actual begins.”

“ To always back up every sentence with a good enough source.”

(Answers from online survey April 2021, HVL Writing Centre)



The UiA writing centre

The writing lounge (Skrivestua)



Mainly one-to-one guidance on academic writing



Officially opening in October 2019 (2 years old!)



7 student writing mentors



Open Monday to Friday (September-June)



Present on both campuses (digital due to covid)

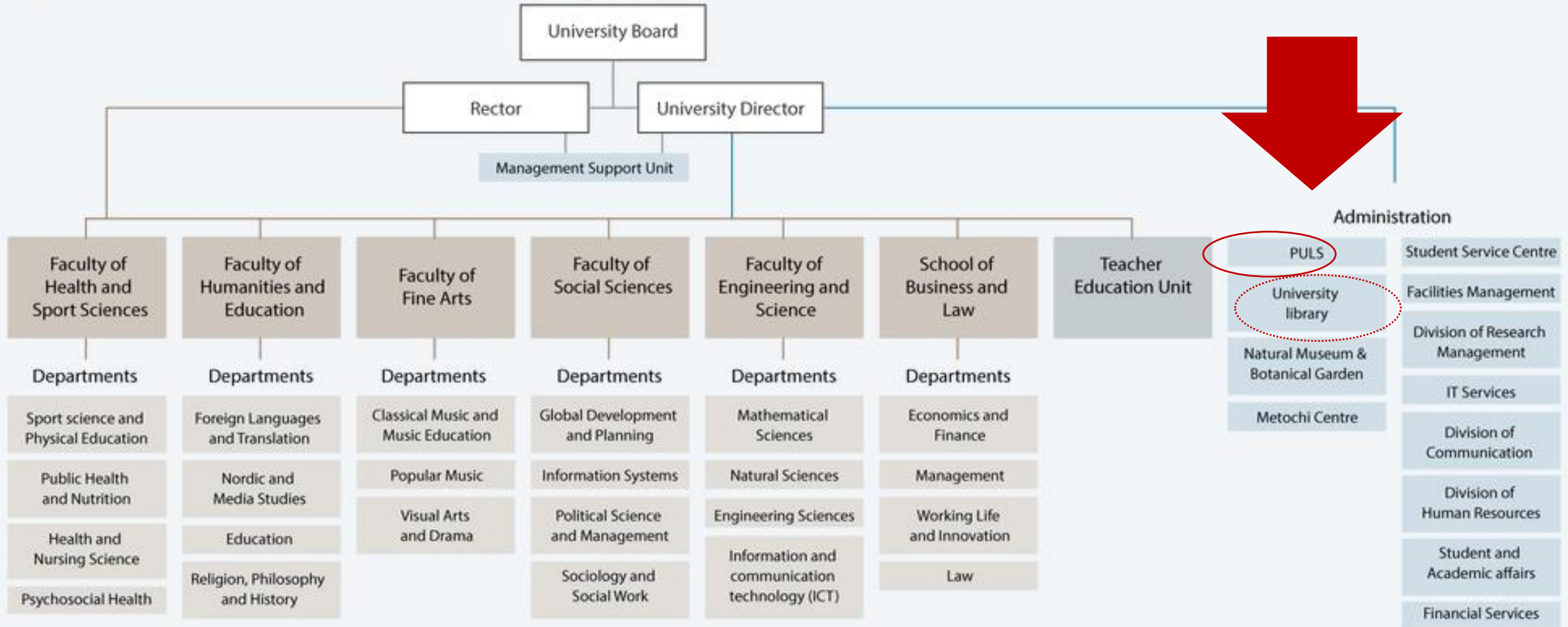


2 coordinators sharing a 100 % position



400+ booked appointments this semester

Organisation chart for the University of Agder



The HVL Writing Centre (Bergen)

- Began as a pilot tailored for the MAstudents at the teacher education spring 2015.
- 2 years funding from HVL
- Spring 2016 one-to-one tutorial
- Staff from BA-education both from kindergarten and TE asked for workshops
- From 2017 we also offer workshops to health education and engineering.
- Spring 2020;
Digital one-to-one tutoring



The founding mothers of the HVL Writing Centre Bergen, spring 2015

The HVL Writing Centre

- The Bergen model's writing centre is a close collaboration between the library and the faculty of education.
It is runned by the library and consists of:
 - Two university librarians
 - One associate professor from the Norwegian section
 - One associate professor from the English section
 - Two MAstudents from the teacher education work part time as trained tutors on the one-to-one tutorial 'Skrivehalvtimen'.

The HVL Writing Centre



The student mentors – Who are they?



Writing night in the library, one-to-one consultation

The student mentors – Who are they?

- Trained students with a special interest in guidance and academic writing
- A person who engages the students through asking questions
- Points to possibilities in the student's texts
- A good reader
- A 'sensor' for the relationship between students and the writing centre
- A safety net for students in despair
- Guides the students to the next step in their writing process

Why students visit the one-to-one tutorial

- *I used it to get some help from someone outside; not the supervisors.*
- *To get a second opinion on my theory chapter that I thought had a poor flow.*
- *I recently found out that you exist and now I have booked assistance from you.*
- *It is unique to discuss different aspects of the assignment.
It does not have to be a problem that is hard to solve, sometimes it is just nice to have someone to talk to about the writing process.*
- *Because it helps:).*

(Answers from online survey April 2021, HVL Writing centre)

Legitimacy in the organization

– no writing centre is an island



Rektor Sunniva Whittaker sto for åpningen.

- Bottom-down initiative, but a top-down decision
- Legitimacy among the academic staff
- Legitimacy in in the administration and the organization

Writing task 2

- How can a writing centre contribute to your library/university?

Write for 3 minutes without lifting your hand from the keyboard, or your pen away from the paper.

Start when I say start; when you hear the bell ring immediately stop writing.

Discussion in breakout rooms

- Which challenges would you face if you created a writing centre?

Discussion in plenary

- How do we sustain as a writing centre without being too dependent on individual persons as driving forces?

Staff policy

- To create a sustainable writing centre staff policy must encourage professional development that cater for meeting students and faculty needs for academic writing.
- Offer courses in how to tutor not only how to search; but also how to talk about academic writing and point to possibilities in text; not the errors.
- Make sure the writing centre is known in the library and in the institution; **keep track of numbers** (of workshops, courses, one-to-one consultations etc).
- Give time and space to staff!

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Thank you for your attention!

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