

# Learning Skills Technology Removing Barriers with Online Resources



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## Who are we?

### *Brock University*

- 2<sup>nd</sup> highest growth of any Ontario university
- 18,000 students
- Undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs

### *Learning Services*

- Over 5,000 Brock students used our services in 2013/2014
- Services include workshops, drop-in academic support, tutor registry, on-line resources, and at-risk student support programming



## Discussion

- Why use online resources?
- What is Academic-Zone?
- Sharing our experience
- Partnerships and growth



## What is Your Experience?

- What are the key issues with student writing?
- What writing skills do students need to develop?
- What learning strategies would be most helpful to students?
- What challenges do writing centres/services face regarding student engagement?



*Once upon a time . . .*

Focus on in-person support

*Our Goal*

Expand service via online resources that are inviting and interactive

*Outcome++*

- Faculty and Service partnerships
- College and University Partnerships
- 24/7 student resource





## What is Academic-Zone?

**Essay-Zone:** Academic Writing

**Numeracy-Zone:** Calculations, Algebra, Statistics

**Essay-Zone Transitions:** Secondary to Post-Secondary

### Add-On Modules

Essential English Grammar (ESL Focus)

Advanced Grammar

Lab Reports

Essay-Zone: Aboriginal Focus

Business Formats

Grammar and Business Writing (Co-op)

***BONUS: 2-Day [Academic-Zone](#) conference access code: TdNEAsPOc***



# Integration Across Programs and Faculties

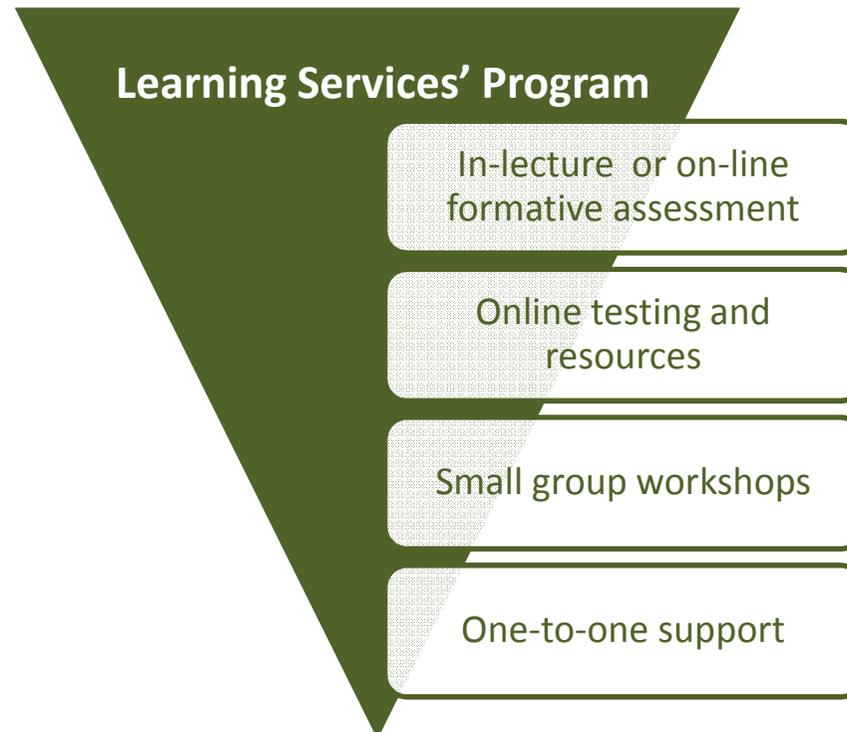
## Academic-Zone is implemented in various ways

- At-risk programming
- Supplement for drop-in and workshop support
- Embedded in course delivery
- Academic-Zone is used across discipline and year  
Management, Accounting, Economics, Operations Management, Political Science, Education, Sociology, Communications, Psychology, Geography, Biology, Recreation & Leisure, Sports Management, Tourism & Environment, Music, Aboriginal Studies, Drama, History, Linguistics, English Literature



## Strategic Support Response

- AACSB Accreditation, raising writing expectations
- Partnering with Faculty to create needs-based, program-embedded, efficient Learning Services' programming





## The Process

- Faculty member choose module based on course/skills needs
- Work with Faculty to create implementation plan
  - Within or without testing
  - Voluntary/Required student participation
- Implement pro-active or re-active support services
  - Provide in-person support to prevent students from falling through the gaps
  - In-lecture or learning Centre group support
  - One-to-one student support



## Faculty Comments

- “Overall, student writing has improved. Students have a better sense of what is involved in writing an essay (the thesis, the sections, etc.). It also helps consolidate skills and techniques for the better students who look at Essay-Zone to make sure they are doing the essay correctly” (Tourism and Environment, 2014).
- “Both the instructor and the students were enthusiastic about the usefulness of Essay-Zone; the students recommended it as an effective writing tool for students in any year of the a degree program” (Mount Royal University Student Learning Services, 2011).
- “I am very pleased to say there has been an improvement over past terms. The lowest score was 46, and there were only two scores below 50, and 20 scores below 60. The highest score was 96, and there were two of them. Further, 27 students got over 90...” (Goodman School of Business, 2012).



## Faculty Comments

- “We had the CHEM 5N01 and PHYS 5N01 grad students do the Grammar Pre-test and Post-Test. I think that what was good about using this module instead of doing a lot with grammar in the sessions is that it didn’t take time away from the sessions.”
- “For the ESL students, it was very helpful for them to do the exercises and be able to take their time with the learning.”
- “For the non-ESL students, they were able to quickly figure out what they knew and what they didn’t know. They found it helpful, but it was a short amount of time that we worked together, so it’s difficult to say how much it helped.”

(Brock Student Learning Services, 2014)



## 2013/2014 Student Survey

- $n = 407$
- Majority of respondents from Biology, Business, and Social Sciences.
- Majority of students indicated that the module(s) helped improve the quality of their course assignments.
- Majority of students indicated that the module(s) helped improve their grades.
- Majority of ESL graduate students and students in Applied Health Studies stated that after completing the module(s) they were more comfortable asking questions about course assignments.



## Student Comments

- “Easy to use and find resources” (PSYC 2P35 - 1,2,3,5).
- “The content was very well organized and relevant. The exercises were helpful and taught me how to improve my course work” (PSYC 1F90 - 1,5).
- “I really liked that I was able to go back a re-try certain questions after attempting to answer during the modules. Also, I liked viewing the videos and readings before answering questions. I found I was able to learn more with these visual aspects” (BIOL 1F90 - 3,5).
- “Everything was made so easy to understand and it improved my learning skills. Thanks everyone!” (BIOL 1F90 - 1,2,3,4,5).
- “I liked the focus on basic grammar and usage. Many students seem to have trouble on that, and even for those of us who feel comfortable with our writing it was a good refresher” (BIOL 3P90 - 2,4,5).



## University and College Partnerships

- Academic-Zone, the social enterprise
- Has been licensed by 20 Colleges and Universities
- No set up: External website [academic-zone.com](http://academic-zone.com)
- Option to customize (e.g., institution logo and URL links)
- Track identified student groups or courses
- Benefit from strong Faculty Partners

*Sharing of Best Practices and Resources*

**Thank You**  
**academic-zone@brocku.ca**

## **CWCA Academic-Zone Access**

Essay-Zone: **TdNEAsPOc**

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