

Compendium2: Partnerships in Writing, Teaching and Learning



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Partnerships in learning can happen in many ways and at different levels, from the individual class to the discipline and beyond. Dalhousie's *Compendium2* project offers a vivid example of how fruitful partnerships can facilitate teaching and learning for both faculty and students.

A multidisciplinary, collaborative, and open-source publication, *Compendium2* is an online journal published through Dalhousie's Electronic Text Centre (ETC). Subtitled *Writing, Teaching, and Learning in the University*, the journal considers submissions from university instructors at all levels and from all disciplines. The three annual issues so far published include contributions from diverse regions, from New Brunswick to Arizona, and from different kinds of universities, including general, liberal arts, polytechnic, and even aeronautical. In its geographical and institutional breadth, the journal makes visible the partnership of research and teaching inherent in all disciplines and at all institutions, and also makes explicit the necessary partnership of theory and practice. The journal publishes conventional article-length works, from an explication of narrative's

role in student engagement to an exposition of the overall importance of teaching writing. *Compendium2* also publishes shorter, more "hands-on" pieces that explain, for instance, how one might use the TV shows *CSI* or *House* in teaching first-year writing.

Though *Compendium2* represents the field of rhetoric and composition (long established in the US, but a relatively new specialty in Canada) as well as writing studies (an overlapping area focused primarily on composition), its content and its appeal are broadly interdisciplinary. Given that all university teachers are at least implicitly engaged in the teaching of writing, if only by way of communicating in a particular disciplinary discourse, *Compendium2* publishes work by scholars and teachers who may not specialize in either field. The journal, in other words, encourages university teachers interested in effective communication to make explicit what they've learned through pedagogical practice.

Articulating in a paper what might otherwise remain only implicit in their classroom teaching, such teachers inevitably forge connections with other instructors based on common experience, creating partnerships that may be too often overlooked by those who tend not to share what they

do in the classroom, or perhaps even devote much attention to examining the reasons why they do it. Urging even non-specialists to think critically about composition pedagogy and to articulate the results, the journal's mandate of inclusion benefits authors as much as readers and, by so doing, encourages the kind of reciprocity that is the hallmark of true partnership.

Produced through the cooperation of various departments and units in the university as well as students at varying levels of study, *Compendium2* represents partnerships in more than its

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substance. The journal was inspired by the format of *Learning through Writing: A Compendium of Assignments and Techniques*, a collection of faculty-authored pieces on teaching writing first published by Dalhousie's

Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT) in 1993. The *Compendium2* project was initiated by me with the support of Dr. Dean Irvine, my departmental colleague, as well as Margie Clow Bohan, Manager of the Dalhousie Writing Centre, and start-up costs were covered by the Teaching and Learning with Technology Grant for which we jointly applied. Given the CLT's interest in teaching and learning partnerships, the award supports projects focused on teaching in general and on collaborative teaching in particular. Because

the journal is open source and published through Dalhousie's ETC, and actual publication costs are therefore low, the grant was used to hire graduate and undergraduate students to help get the journal up and running. Acquisition and substantive editing were largely undertaken by the students in my third-year experiential-learning class

in conjunction with the Writing Centre, while the journal's publication was undertaken by Dr. Irvine's Editing and Publishing class, a fourth-year English seminar whose participants carefully prepared the first issue for electronic dissemination.

With contributions solicited, selected, and substantively edited by members from the English Department, the CLT, and the Writing Centre, we are now putting together the journal's fourth issue with the help of this year's Writing Practice (ENGL3113) students. As its title implies, this upper-level English class puts student learning into practical application, and it does so through two kinds of partnerships: the first involves working closely with first-year students to improve their writing, and the second entails working with the journal's contributors in preparing *Compendium2* for publication. Through the close work of copy and layout editing, the students learn a great deal and, in the process, also discover how much they already know. Because of their attention to detail as well as their fresh perspectives, the students find themselves able to help more experienced writers in ways they would not have

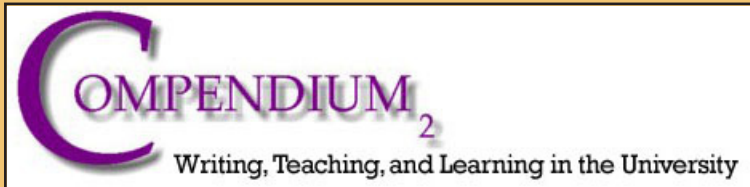
previously imagined. They are, in fact, often pleasantly surprised at just how much they have to contribute in their partnerships with authors, with other students, and with their professor.

The many partnerships vital to initiating, launching, and sustaining

Compendium2 have everything to do with its success. That the journal is a success is attested to by an increasing number of submissions as well as consistently positive feedback. *Compendium2*'s contributors often go out of their way to note how impressed they are with the caliber of the copy and layout editing and the quality of the overall product. Given that

these are academic writers who have no doubt published in other venues, their responses validate not only the diligent and conscientious work of the students, but also the value of learning partnerships more generally. Working collaboratively makes all the difference for the students, and the partnerships in which they engage have much to teach us about the possibilities of our own. Though the students sometimes agree to disagree, as do all academics, it is their multiple points of view, their extended discussions, and their negotiation of even the finest textual details that bring about a better result. In its many and multi-faceted partnerships, the example of *Compendium2* reminds us of what we know but too often ignore – that the best writing and thinking isn't done alone.

For more information about the journal, visit www.compendium2.ca



CALL for SUBMISSIONS

The editors of **Compendium2: Writing, Teaching, and Learning in the University** invite contributions for online publication in the Spring of 2012.

Compendium2 publishes theoretical and practice-based essays that address writing development in post-secondary education. For the journal's fifth issue, we are interested in hearing from a range of disciplines, and invite submissions that consider the integration of writing and critical thinking as well as those that describe more specific assignments and teaching techniques.

Recommended length is 3000-5000 words for articles and 500-2000 words for assignment and technique descriptions. *Compendium2* accepts MLA, APA, and Chicago styles. Submissions received at www.compendium2.ca by August 2011 will be considered for the next issue.

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