



UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY  
QATAR

جامعة  
كالغاري  
قطر

# The Writing and Research Process: An integrated Learning Commons approach

Martin Holock  
Writing Centre Specialist  
Learning Commons, University of Calgary-Qatar

# Who am I?



- **Martin Holock**
- **Writing Centre Specialist at University of Calgary-Qatar since August 2009**
- **PR Officer for MENAWCA since March 2010**
- **Writing Centre Coordinator at University of Ottawa, Canada 2004-2009**
- **Consultant in developing first writing centre in India at Chowgule College in Goa 2008**
- **Founder and former president of the Canadian Writing Centres Association 2006-2008**

# The Writing and Research Process: Overview



1. What is the Writing & Research Process?
2. What is a Learning Commons?
3. How the WRP came together
4. Delivery and Products
5. So what?
6. Next steps

# What is the Writing and Research Process?



- A combination of the Writing Process and the Information Search Process
- A result of the collaborative environment of the UCQ Learning Commons
- A joint project between Library Services and the Writing Centre

# What is the Writing and Research Process?



## An opportunity for students:

- To recognize that writing and research are inextricable
- To see that you cannot write without thinking about your research, and you cannot do research without thinking about your writing
- To develop their critical thinking skills
- To build on the knowledge they have acquired in class
- To improve their writing and research skills

# What is a Learning Commons?



“A Learning Commons is a dynamic, collaborative environment on campus, often physically in the library, that provides assistance to students with information and research needs. It combines individual and group study space, in-depth reference service, and instruction from a variety of sources, including librarians and information technology staff. Some of its key concerns are learning, writing, technology use, and research. Its main purpose is to make student learning easier and more successful.”

**York University,**

<http://www.library.yorku.ca/ccm/Home/preview/infolit/commons/learning-commons.en>

# What is a Learning Commons?



The Learning Commons brings together services that support students in their learning, writing, research, numeracy and use of technology. In addition, we provide expertise and resources for faculty, staff and TAs to support and enhance learning in their courses and across the curricula.

University of Guelph,

<http://www.learningcommons.uoguelph.ca/>

# What is a Learning Commons?



UCQ Learning Commons mission:

To provide resources and services that enable the University of Calgary-Qatar community to discover, evaluate, apply, and communicate information for learning, teaching, and professional practice.

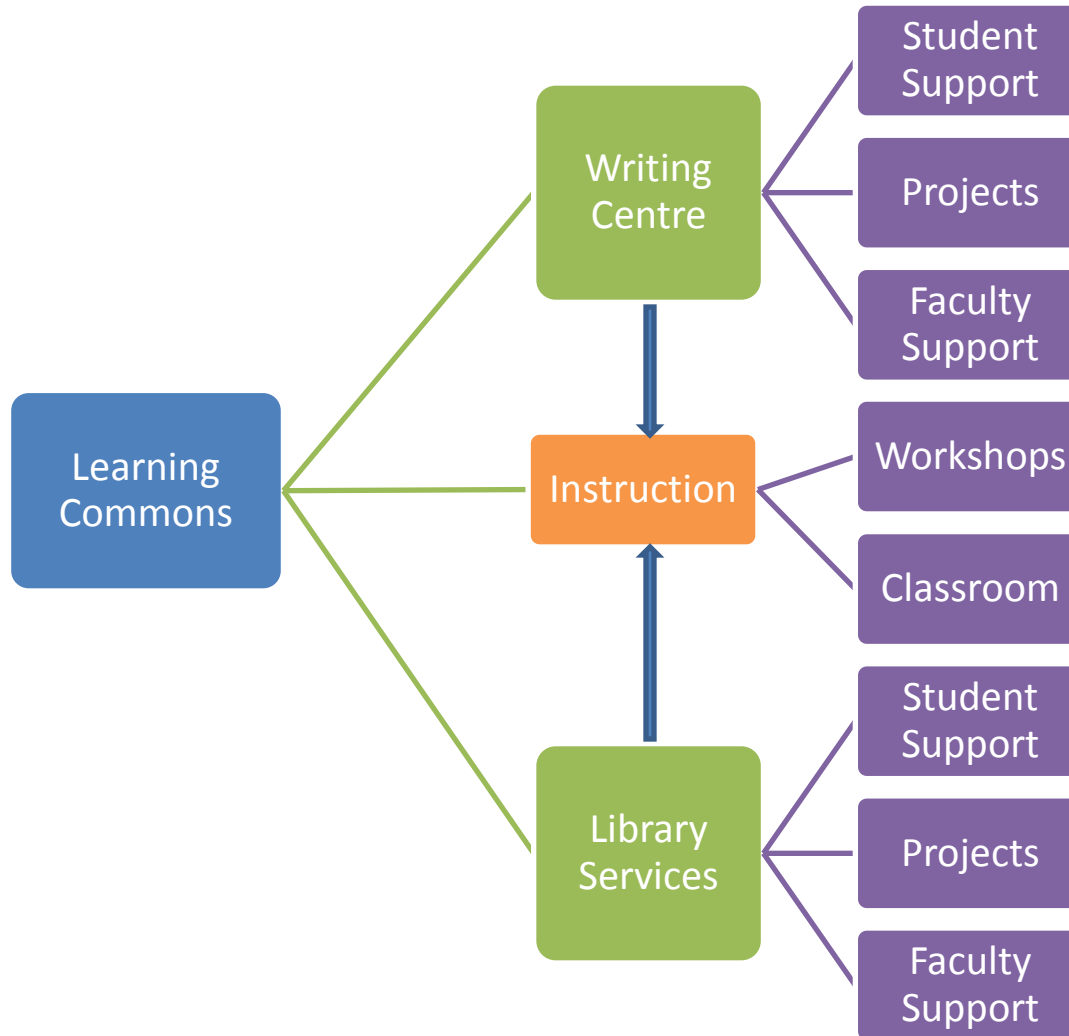
**The University of Calgary-Qatar,**

[http://www.qatar.ucalgary.ca/learning\\_commons](http://www.qatar.ucalgary.ca/learning_commons)





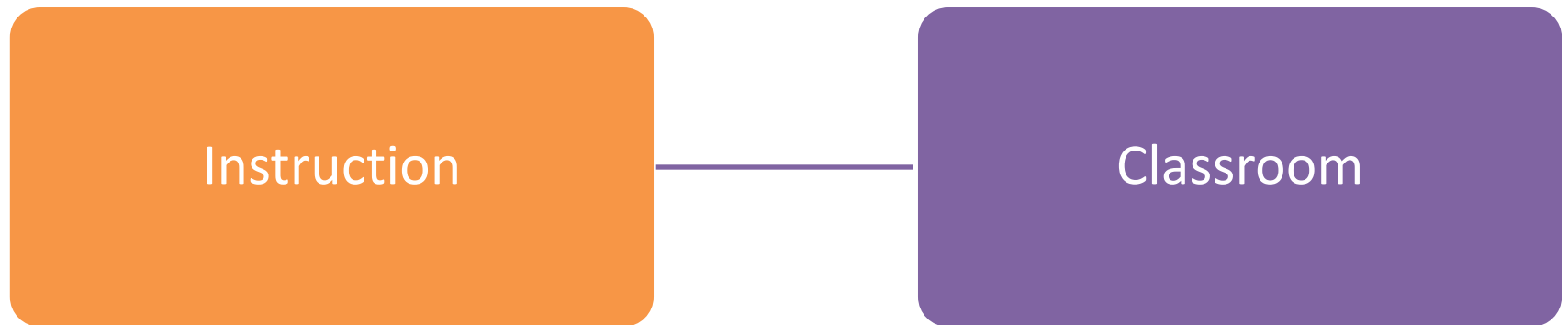
# UCQ Learning Commons



# The Writing & Research Process: How we came together



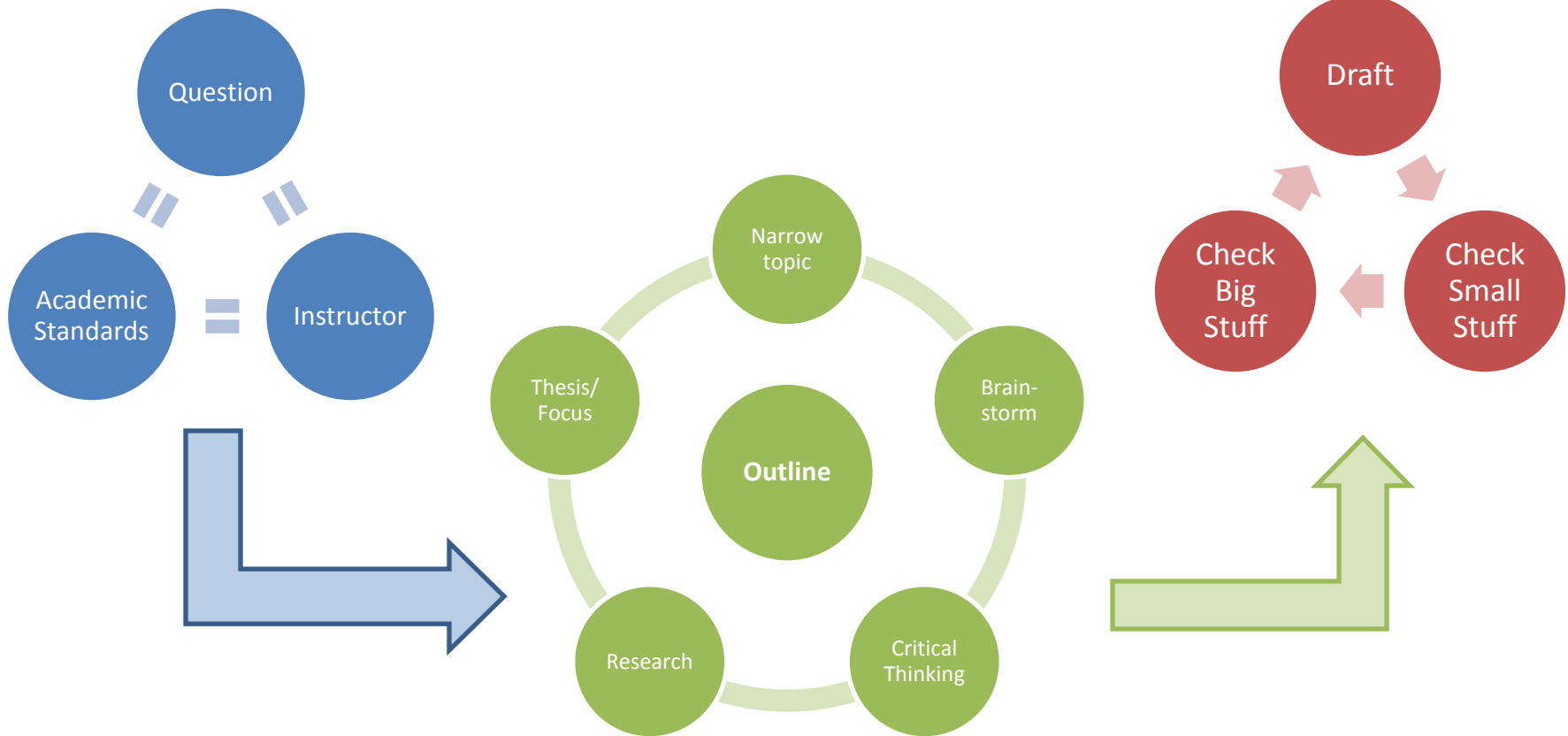
- The library and the writing centre were being invited into classes together to offer support to students and teach their areas of expertise
- Started to see connections between the processes of writing and research, and the way we taught them





# 3-Stage Writing Process

1. Understanding the assignment
2. Planning what to write
3. Writing and correcting



# The Writing Process at uOttawa



This approach to the writing process came from previous work done at the Academic Writing Help Centre at the University of Ottawa:

<http://www.sass.uottawa.ca/writing/kit/writing.php>



UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY  
QATAR  
جامعة  
كالغاري  
قطر

# WISPR: Workshop on the Information Search Process for Research



Source: <http://dl1.yukoncollege.yk.ca/wispr/>

# The Writing Process & The Research Process: Commonalities



- Both have elements of **‘before’, ‘during’** and **‘after’**
- Both stressed **flexibility**:
  - In Writing: The parts of the planning stage are intended to go in any order
  - In Research: Designed to show that researchers constantly bounce between all stages
- Noticed **overlap**:
  - Similar stages - ‘Topic Selection’; ‘Focus Formulation/Thesis’; ‘Information Collection/Research’
  - Related stages – ‘Search Closure/Outline’; ‘Information Refinement/Brainstorm-Critical Thinking’

# The Combined Writing & Research Process

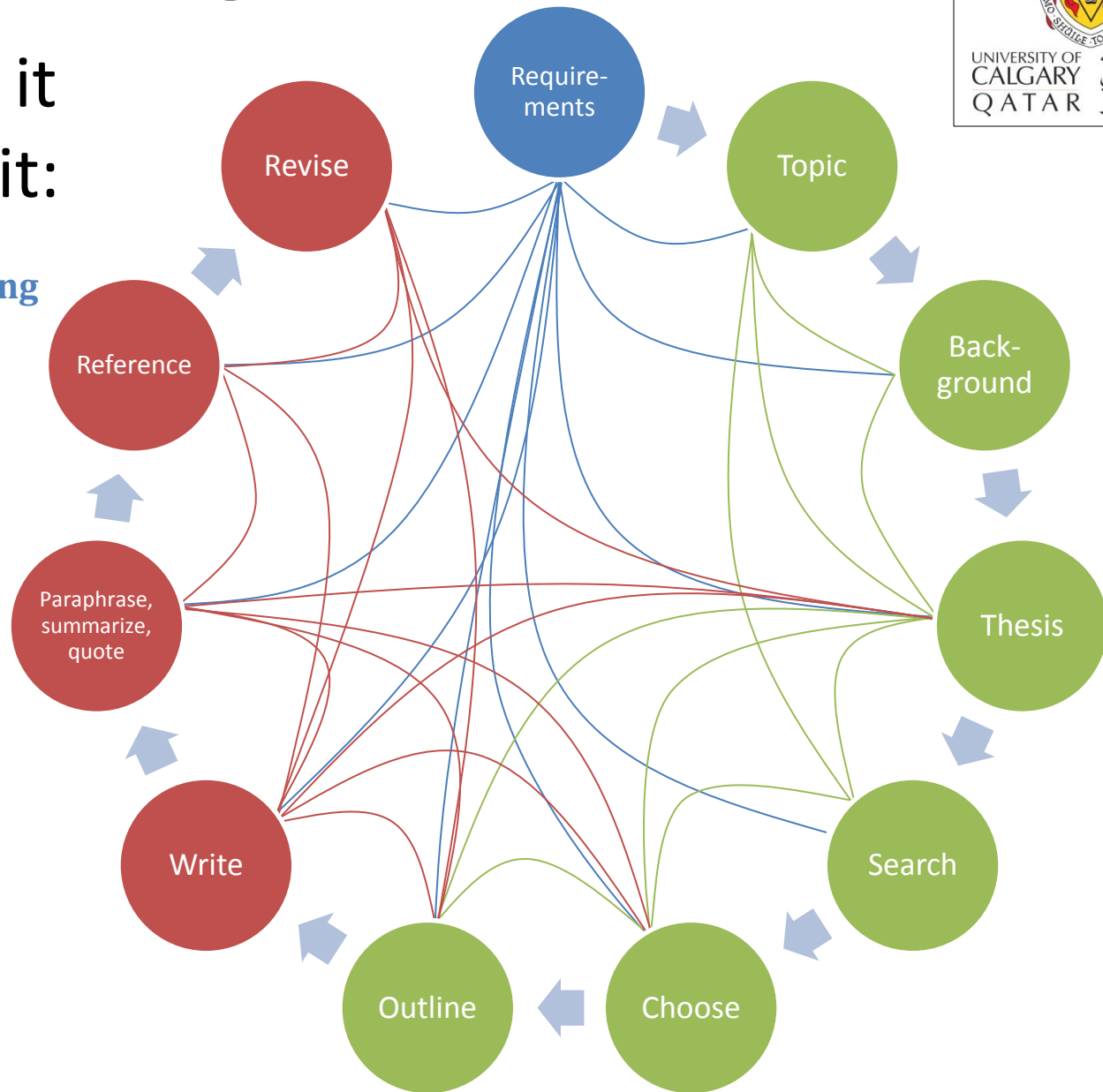


How we see it  
and explain it:

**Phase 1: Understanding**

**Phase 2: Preparing**

**Phase 3: Writing**



# The Writing & Research Process Refined



How we show it to students:



- Instructor
- Question
- Academic standards

- Topic selection
- Background search
- Thesis
- Search
- Choose sources
- Outline

- Write
- Paraphrase, summarize, quote
- References and citations
- Revise



# Delivery and Products



- **Writing and Research Workshop Series**
  - Workshops
  - Web
- **Documents**
  - Poster
  - Handouts
- **Classroom**
  - Assignment-specific instruction
  - WRP in related contexts
  - UNIV205 Class
- **Pedagogical approach in individual support**

# The Writing and Research Workshop Series



- A nine-week series of workshops offered over the course of one semester
- Each workshop is related to the previous one, although it is complete and comprehensible on its own
- The “product” of each workshop’s exercise was used and developed in the next one
- Each session was recorded using “Tegrity” software and made available online
- Certificate of completion given to 24 students who attended all 9 sessions

# Documents



- **Poster**
  - Diagram poster presented at the English Teaching Excellence for Qatar conference 2010
- **Handouts**
  - Available in hard copy at the UCQ Writing Centre and online at [http://www.qatar.ucalgary.ca/learning\\_commons/writing\\_resources](http://www.qatar.ucalgary.ca/learning_commons/writing_resources)

# Classroom



## Assignment-specific instruction

- Invitations to classrooms by instructors
- Situate students in the WRP and guide them through appropriate next steps
- Writing & Research support often present together to demonstrate connections between them

# Classroom



## WRP in related contexts

- When invited to talk about any related issues, we use the WRP as a starting point
- E.g. Plagiarism

# Classroom



## UNIV205

- University preparation credit course
- Collaboratively taught:
  - Philosophy instructor (critical thinking/logic)
  - Student Counsellor (study skills/time management)
  - Chief Librarian (Learning Commons/Research)
  - Writing Centre Specialist (Learning Commons/Writing)

# Classroom



## UNIV205

- Originally designed by the Learning Commons
- 3-Level, 60-hour Academic Skills & Information Literacy component of the Foundation Program
  - 1) 20 hours of teaching them WRP
  - 2) 20 hours of guiding through a WRP project
  - 3) 20 hours of supervising & encouraging them through their own project

# Classroom



## UNIV205

- Adapted content into 39-hour course, which includes:
  - Group work
  - An essay
  - An oral presentation
  - Multiple low-impact assignments
  - Time management
  - Exam preparation
- Optional, though Foundation students are strongly encouraged



# Pedagogical approach in individual instruction



- In writing centre appointments, we work with students to identify at which stage they are (or should be)
- WRP and the Learning Commons relationship enables us to easily refer students as needed



UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY  
QATAR

جامعة  
كالغاري  
قطر

# So what?

# Benefits



## Combining the two has enabled us to:

- Better understand each others' roles and expertise
- More effectively support students
- Step in for one another (to a certain extent)
- Be able to easily direct students to the experts they need
- Develop new ideas
- Create opportunities that would have been impossible, such as UNIV205

# Next steps

# Evaluation and assessment



- Ongoing positive feedback from instructors
- Students showing improvement in writing and in the quality of their research-related questions
- Students now know where to begin, and know where to find answers when challenged
- Learning Commons successfully branded and perceived as an academic support unit



## Evaluation

- UNIV 205 got good student assessment reports in fall semester
- Winter semester to be seen in April



# Questions?

Contact me at [mholock@ucalgary.ca](mailto:mholock@ucalgary.ca)