The Ban Righ Centre, in seeking to further support the academic pursuits of students at Queen’s, hosted a writing event in May 2015. The BRC provided registered students with the opportunity to dedicate writing time to their graduate projects by setting up stations throughout the house from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm twice weekly.

To accommodate various schedules students could select either the morning, afternoon or all-day to write. The interest from students was overwhelming; spaces filled up quickly. Time was scheduled for structured group discussions; students were grateful to Valerie Ashford and Claire Hooker from the Writing Centre for the informative content and support they provided during these short sessions. Melissa Stire led some stretching exercises before the afternoon session recommenced.

The house is quiet and writing spaces are private, which allows students to feel as though they are home but without the distractions of a load of laundry or sink full of dishes. And of course, the provision of food is always welcome! Students were offered a variety of snacks and lunch daily. Students were also encouraged to take regular breaks from their writing, to stretch, eat and re-focus.

Ashley Vanstone, a graduate student counsellor with Health, Counselling and Disability Services, believes that “in the end, all of the thesis writing support programs are about removing obstacles to thesis work, whether the obstacles are logistical, academic, or emotional.” The mini-mization of obstacles enhances a student’s ability to achieve writing goals and to complete more substantive portions of a research project. For a number of students, the importance of distraction-free writing time is essential, and the Centre’s supportive environment made all the difference, allowing them to achieve writing goals. Students reported having completed significant sections of their theses or dissertations.

The motivation that students gather from their peers is also vital; this interaction is what Marcea Ingersoll, a Faculty of Education alumnae calls “writing alone together.” According to Ingersoll, the process of writing alone together provides students with camaraderie while engaging in the often isolated activity of writing. Adriana Lopez Villalobos, a doctoral candidate, who participated in the Studio, noted that, “having other people (also working) around me helped me to increase my level of concentration and the time...
focused on a task.” Ultimately, students often feel a sense of support and motivation from peers who are, independently, engaged in a likeminded task. It can be beneficial for students to share their experiences in academia, which often provides a “little bit of inspiration” for their own writing process (Lopez Villalobos).

Beyond the obvious benefits of the Writing Studio, the event also promoted the Centre and its services; as one participant noted, “I had never been to the Ban Righ Centre before the writing studio. I wish I had known about it in year one of my PhD!” (Rachel Herron, doctoral candidate, Department of Geography).

The Ban Righ Centre supports the continuing formal and informal education of undergraduate, graduate and professional women students on campus, particularly those who have experienced a break from their studies and those with dependents. In light of the success of the event, the Centre anticipates that it will host more Writing Studio events in the future.

Thank you to the students who participated in this event and provided additional comments for this article. A conversation with Colette Steer from the SGS also proved insightful in preparation of this piece.

Students guide BRC service: responses from the 2015 student survey

By Lindsay Rodgers, BRC project evaluation assistant

“I would not have graduated without this place.”

-Queen’s student

This quote expresses a sentiment that we hear often at the Ban Righ Centre: the students who visit our space find a refuge from the competitive, fast-paced, emotionally and intellectually exhausting culture that is a feature of post-secondary education. What is it about the Ban Righ Centre that promotes student success and well-being? In an effort to hear directly from students about their experiences at the Centre, we recently sent out a survey. We found that 82% of respondents feel that the Ban Righ Centre was either essential or very important in helping them achieve their educational goals.

Below and on the following page are some of the themes we found resonated with our patrons:

A culture of acceptance:

“Whenever I come, people of different cultures are together.”

“The feeling, the culture, the sense that someone wanted to take care of me. I don’t usually experience that. It felt like I had a big sister who wanted to care for me if I could only come over for some soup and tea.”

“I love that this is a place that you can just go and sit...
down and talk to anyone—staff and students alike. It’s the one place where there isn’t such a focus on grades or where you are in your university career.”

The Ban Righ Centre, though a relatively small unit on campus, takes pride in its ability to provide an accepting, warm atmosphere for the women who enter it. In addition to the advisors who offer support to students who have questions or concerns with navigating the administrative requirements of obtaining a degree, or simply offer an ear or smile to a student who wants to share a stressful or joyous experience, the students have come to befriend one another and create a culture of caring.

Financial support:

“The bursaries have made it possible for me to stay enrolled in school. Otherwise, financially, I don’t think I would be able to continue.”

The financial burden associated with attending any post-secondary institution is one that is, at times, for some, prohibitive. The Ban Righ Centre offers financial support in the form of emergency bursaries that ease the pressure on students, and thus enable them to return to or continue their studies.

Thank You!

The Women in the Class of Science ’81 Bursary

When women from the Queen’s University class of science ’81 get together they have a laugh. They also share a network of support that sees them through the challenges of working life and helps them stay connected to their shared love of math and science.

Women with children:

“I was the only person in my program to have a child and I found it difficult not knowing anyone else in the same situation.”

“Moms in school get sick, but cannot afford to take sick days…I have utilized the nap area on four different occasions when I have felt that I cannot get through my day…and it helped!”

Women with children, though not a majority on campus, have particular needs that the Ban Righ Centre aims to accommodate. The Centre provides space for women to take naps, have warm soup on cold winter days when there wasn’t enough time to prepare a lunch, and converse with other parents and staff members who understand what it is like to juggle family life with studying.

In addition to the positive feedback that assured the Centre we were moving in the right direction, we did receive suggestions for improvement, or potential routes to take in further cultivating a culture of acceptance and support, including: develop a network of care-givers for young children, and establish a community garden, or have gardening workshops on-site. We are appreciative of the suggestions that come from those who visit and make use of the BRC; together, we hope to continue supporting mature women students in accordance with their particular needs.

Katherine Crewe contacted the Ban Righ Centre to talk about extending this shared support more broadly and the idea of a bursary for women took root.

It is the goal of the founding members to invite their female classmates of Science ’81 to collectively make contributions to recognize their upcoming 35th reunion and celebrate the 175th anniversary of Queen’s University. The founding donors also hope that members of entire Science ’81 class may direct further post-reunion donations to this fund to build towards an endowment in perpetuity. Already the bursary will help women for many years. Preference will be
Congratulations to all Ban Righ Foundation Spring Award recipients!

We spent a lovely day with family and friends on May 2nd. Donors and other supporters mingled with women students and their families, and had the opportunity to see first hand the impact of their support. The spring celebration is an annual event that allows all of us to recognize the intelligence, hard work, and dedication that enables women students to succeed.

The late Larry Gibson was a generous philanthropist who worked tirelessly to run senior centres that would care sensitively for those too frail to care for themselves. Upon his retirement, he sold the nursing homes and spent time and energy funding several hospice and hospital projects. Each project was selected carefully; it was important to Larry that funds were used for viable, authentic and caring community facilities.

Larry’s longtime partner, George Hutcheson, and friends Jay Rayner and Graeme Fraser have continued doing his work.

With a gift from the Gibson Estate the Ban Righ Centre has been able to maintain all services to students while restructuring to work with a smaller staff. It is somehow fitting that the gift from the Gibson Estate has enabled the Centre to continue being just what Larry valued: a viable, authentic and caring facility. We are truly grateful and honoured to work in support of this community.

Female faculty and female students connect

Female students and faculty will be coming together regularly again this fall in the lounge of the BRC to share ideas and experiences relating to women in academia, from the practical issues of family responsibilities and finances to issues relating to intellectual rights, pedagogy and post-doctoral work. The initial request sent out to female faculty members last year was responded to so enthusiastically and the lunches went so well that we have a full slate with even a few repeat faculty this term! Thanks to all who have made these lunches so exhilarating and if you are a faculty member interested in participating, please just drop us a line! A list of who is coming when will be posted on our Facebook page and web site.