Provost's Advisory Task Force on the Student Learning Experience

Interim Report

May 2013

Executive Summary

This report represents the interim recommendations of the Student Learning Experience Task Force, a group of 15 faculty, staff, and students brought together by the Provost to propose recommendations for improving the student learning experience at Queen's University. The recommendations below build upon general recommendations from the Senate Academic Planning Task Force's *Academic Plan* (2011), in particular Pillar I: The Student Learning Experience. The report is directed to the University's Provost, and to the broader community, to solicit feedback and suggestions.

The following five recommendations will be the primary focus for the remainder of the task force:

1. Review student learning support services
2. Align teaching and learning support units
3. Develop a strategic teaching enhancement program
4. Create mechanisms for integrated data gathering and dissemination
5. Coordinate technology-enhanced learning supports

Seven additional recommendations are equally important, but are longer-term issues or need to be addressed by other groups.

6. Review the approach by which the university assesses teaching quality
7. Review processes for evaluating teaching for the purposes of merit, annual review and RTP decisions
8. Create mechanisms to hire faculty focused primarily on teaching, with expectations for the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education
9. Develop Queen's-specific and program-specific learning outcomes
10. Ensure that Queen's University Quality Assurance Processes and Cyclical Program Review emphasize collaborative program improvement within units
11. Implement degree, diploma or certificate program in teaching and learning in higher education
12. Create a standing committee for strategic planning in teaching and learning support units

The final report, intended for presentation in fall 2013, will include specific timelines and processes for the first five recommendations.

Comments on the recommendations in this report should be sent to provost@queensu.ca.

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Introduction

The Student Learning Experience Task Force (Task Force) was given the mandate to recommend specific initiatives and processes to enhance the student learning experience, and support innovative and effective teaching. In the first phase of our work, we focused on four areas:

1. Academic and learning support units
2. Initiatives to support Queen's University Quality Assurance Processes
3. Processes to assess student learning outcomes and use them to improve quality
4. Recognizing and rewarding innovative and effective teaching

The full mandate statement and the process followed in developing these preliminary recommendations is included in the Appendix.

The Task Force members include individuals representing

i. each faculty, as nominated by respective deans;
ii. the libraries, nominated by the Head Librarian;
iii. academic support units; and
iv. undergraduate and graduate students bodies.

The members of the Task Force are listed in the Appendix.

The Task Force identified four principles to guide the development of recommendations. Recommendations must:

1. have sustained and broad impact on student learning;
2. be evidence-based, either from research literature or institutional data;
3. include processes to measure impact; and
4. consider resource implications.

The remainder of this document includes:

- five key high-priority initiatives that the Task Force will pursue for the remainder of its mandate;
- seven high-priority initiatives that are longer term, or that we believe need to be addressed by other groups on campus; and
- an Appendix which includes the mandate statement, Task Force membership, and a summary of the process followed.

The recommendations are more heavily weighted to undergraduate programs, reflecting the mandate statement. However, most of the recommendations apply to both graduate and undergraduate students and programs.

Recommendations

The Task Force identified the twelve key recommendations below to improve the learning environment at Queen's University. For the duration of 2013, the Task Force will pursue the first group of recommendations; the second group of recommendations is equally important, but in some cases they are longer-term goals and in other cases they need to be addressed by other groups.

Part I: Priority activities in the second phase of the Task Force

The Task Force has identified five high-priority areas on which it will focus for the remainder of its mandate.

1. Coordinate student learning support services

The student learning experience is strongly affected by learning support services, including those offered through Student Affairs and Queen's Learning Commons, and these services support learning across the university (see *Academic Plan* p. 24). These services are particularly important for first generation university students, international students and students from under-represented groups.

In particular, three themes have emerged as important for supporting student learning:

1. Support for student transitions; important transitions include from high school to university, from a general first year program and living in residence to picking a major and moving to off-campus housing in second year, from fourth year to employment or further education, and from an international country to Kingston.
2. Support for making connections: student success and persistence is strongly dependent on social connections with peers, instructors, staff, and graduate students.
3. Support for experiential learning, service learning and community-based learning

This group will examine student learning support services as offered through Student Affairs and the Learning Commons, which may include:

- how to be a university student, for example a set of programs targeted at first-year students;
- targeted support for international students in making a smooth transition;
- peer mentoring opportunities and programs;
- programs that offer a variety of methods for students to create connections on campus, particularly when they first arrive, such as an alternative to traditional Orientation activities;
- support transition to employment by supporting experiential and entrepreneurial learning opportunities (curricular and co-curricular);
- expanding the Queen's Undergraduate Internship (QUIP) program, possibly including offering shorter duration programs;
- reading break programming

2. Align teaching and learning support units

The first recommendation focuses on learning supports for students; this recommendation focuses on supports for instructors and staff for teaching and learning.

In order to provide appropriate support for individual course instructors, for a university-wide competitive program for program-wide learning improvement initiatives (Recommendation #3), including technology-enhanced learning, and for Cyclical Program Review, the Task Force proposes better coordination and alignment of academic and learning support units, including the Centre for Teaching and Learning, teaching and learning support resources within Information Technology Services, Continuing and Distance Studies, and the Queen's Library. A coordinated suite of resources would best serve instructors and programs, including educational developers, eLearning specialists, technological supports and other services (see *Academic Plan* p. 25).

The Task Force will make recommendations regarding a governance model for these services to give voice to and obtain accountability from all relevant stakeholders. Key to this process will be to provide equivalent foundational support for all, with distinctive elements developed at the local level, for example eCourse development and online offerings. The aim will be to establish a prioritization system for all projects to ensure effective and strategic use of resources and to determine whether "one-stop shopping" is the preferred system approach for teaching and learning support services. In the next phase of our work, the Task Force will address the question regarding the location of such services as centralized in the university or located at the faculty level or a combination of both.

A further benefit of a better alignment of support units would be to provide quality training for all new faculty and graduate students in teaching and learning. Finally, such an alignment would enable an expanded notion of educational supports, including experiential learning, community-based or service learning, alternative assessment approaches, and a range of technology-enhanced learning modes. Currently the university provides significant support for lectures and exams (through Timetabling and the Exams Office), but there are few institutional structures to support the innovative forms of learning mentioned above. This recommendation pertains to undergraduate curriculum enhancement, but the Task Force may consider making recommendations pertaining to graduate course redesign and curriculum development.

The expected outcomes of this project will include recommendations regarding:

- Structures and governance models for teaching and learning support units
- Appropriate resources for teaching and learning support units
- A suggested timeline for implementation
- Methods for measuring the impact of teaching and learning support units

3. Develop a strategic teaching enhancement program

The Task Force strongly recommends that the university develop a program that strategically supports the enhancement of the student learning environment. This would involve a university-wide competitive program, to which groups or units would apply for funding and support from an integrated suite of services, such as educational developers, eLearning specialists, librarians, and assessment specialists (Recommendation #2). This would require the support of appropriate dean and heads of relevant units, some resources from the units and faculties, a commitment to assessing the impact on student learning, and a commitment to maintaining the initiative for a determined period of time. Instructors involved in these initiatives might require some reduction in other workload (research or teaching) as well as support from their Head and Dean to acknowledge that USAT scores may be adversely impacted during the transition.

One such initiative should target first-year courses taken by a large number of students to maximize impact. The redesign could support objectives including supporting transition to university life, providing small-group learning environments, and a diversity of learning experiences and assessment approaches. The group proposes to examine processes and delivery of such initiatives at other universities, including University of British Columbia's Science Education Initiative, and to consider the experience of external groups, including the National Centre for Academic Transformation.

The expected outcomes of this project will include recommendations regarding:

- Application processes, including the group to review and oversee the process
- Resources to support the learning enhancement program
- A timeline for implementation
- Methods for measuring success of the initiative

4. Create mechanisms for integrated data gathering and dissemination

The foundation of a successful teaching and learning change program is accurate and timely information about the context in which a change is to occur. At the present time, we have insufficient evidence of student learning in fundamental academic skills (e.g. problem solving, critical thinking, communication and independent learning skills; see *Academic Plan* p. 22-23) over the duration of our programs. We also have insufficient information about faculty attitudes and dispositions.

This group will propose a strategy for integrated data gathering and dissemination in order to better inform decisions regarding improving teaching and learning supports. This may include mining the Student Information System and Learning Management Systems to track student success, engagement, competency mapping, retention, graduation rates, outcomes and accreditation requirements. This may be linked to external information to track development, support advising, and identify at-risk students (while respecting privacy).

One possible outcome could be to recommend a web-based tool that allows groups to easily locate and compare aggregate data including NSSE, CUSC, and exit surveys, and direct evidence of learning. This may include visualization tools for reporting data, for example Stanford's D3 project, and University of California Davis's visualization project. The strategy should include plans for including evidence of learning outcomes when that data becomes available.

The group will also examine the management of surveys that go out to students, staff, and faculty. There may be opportunities to cut down on the number of surveys conducted by running a small number of regular and centrally-administered surveys of faculty and students. This would eventually encompass the student learning experience, program achievements, learning outcomes, faculty experience, external perceptions, and the long-term success of students.

Given that Queen's teaching faculty play a central role in delivering the program, we suggest that the university collect and make available data annually on faculty attitudes with respect to those attributes that motivate faculty to engage in activities that enhance the student learning experience.

The expected outcomes of this project will include recommendations regarding:

- Frequency and types of data to be collected
- Making data accessible
- Support needed to ensure the proper use and interpretation of the data
- Resources to support the initiative
- A suggested timeline for implementation
- Methods for measuring the success of the initiative
- Intervention strategies

5. Coordinate technology-enhanced learning supports

Currently, there are a variety of technologies supported across the university without a coherent strategy for evaluating and selecting tools best suited to the university's needs. There are several Learning Management Systems (LMS) in use at Queen's: The Faculty of Arts and Science uses Moodle, the Faculty of Health Sciences uses MEdTech Central and Entrada, and a variety of units and faculties are using or moving toward using Desire2Learn. Multiple classroom response systems are also in use. Although experimentation is important and faculties have the ability to purchase their own tools, there are significant resource implications in using and maintaining multiple learning platforms. Learning platforms must be supported around the clock and should be designed to support learners (user friendly, standardized across units, integrated with other information systems), and designed to support teachers (embedded course design features, functionalities to allow active learning, student monitoring capability, implementation of Learning Outcomes, development of e-Portfolios).

Collaborative decision-making around technology solutions may lead to efficiencies in terms of servicing, contract negotiations, and training for faculty and staff. The goal of this subgroup will be to recommend a specific LMS solution and associated tools for in-class response and feedback (e.g., iClicker, Turning Point Response Card, TopHat, etc.) to be supported centrally. Any campus-wide LMS must also support unit and institutional priorities, including the potential to easily collect and retrieve meaningful data for evaluation purposes, to track and supports a learning outcomes framework and to assist in early identification of at-risk students.

This group will examine the three LMS platforms currently in use, determine similarities and differences, and which interactive technologies are supported by them, and recommend a path forward for the university.

The group will also engage with the recommendations made by the Senate Academic Planning Task Force (SAPTF) on Virtualization and Online Learning to identify successful strategies for further developing online offerings at Queen's and to ensure good oversight of technology-enhanced education, whether in blended or fully online offerings. The report of the SAPTF, received by Senate in April 2013, makes eighteen recommendations in total, but its most important message is that the quality of the student learning experience is independent of medium, in other words that the form of course delivery does not determine the pedagogical success. The SAPTF writes: "The teaching technologies employed are less important than the fundamentals of course design" (4) and further states that,

success of a technology-enhanced, blended or online courses is more likely when,

- *efforts are made to ensure that the course uses evidence-based approaches to ensure standards for quality,*
- *the course is designed in a way that uses online resources optimally,*
- *support exists when faculty and students experience technical problems, and*
- *the course provides students with the appropriate skills in the context of academic programs and their long term goals. (34)*

The SAPTF suggests that Queen's at this point not engage in developing Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) but that the university be involved in the development of the Ontario Universities Online (an initiative of the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents). The Task Force agrees with these recommendations and will take them into consideration in the next phase of its work.

The expected outcomes of this project will include recommendations regarding:

- University-wide supported technology, including learning management system and class response system.
- How a better alignment of learning support units (Recommendation #3) will provide educational development support for technology-enhanced learning tools or "objects"
- Appropriate resources to support the initiative

- A timeline for implementation
- Methods for measuring success of the initiative

Part II: Recommendations for work by other groups

The Task Force identified further recommendations that we feel need to be addressed by other groups on campus. These recommendations are:

6. Review the approach by which the university assesses teaching quality

The university should revisit how it elicits feedback from students on teaching for the purpose of evaluating instructors (USATs). The USAT was not designed for the purpose for which it is currently used and does not provide sufficient information relevant to many forms of course delivery. It is important to gather relevant information on instruction and student learning both to inform decision-making about improving the learning environment (as identified in Recommendation #5), and as a summative assessment of instructors. These two competing roles may need to be separated. This should include adapting or developing another instrument and supplementing a survey with additional means of evaluating good teaching.

7. Review processes for evaluating teaching for the purposes of merit, annual review and RTP decisions

The university should ensure that heads of departments, deans and RTP Committees have sufficient training to evaluate teaching for annual review and for renewal, tenure, and promotion decisions. Orientation sessions for new heads of departments should ideally include an introduction to indicators of quality in teaching and learning with a variety of methods of evaluation, including but not limited to USAT evaluations. The annual review templates and processes should also be reviewed to ensure that they allow instructors to fully document their contributions to teaching and learning and in turn enable heads and deans to appropriately recognize teaching enhancement and evidence-based practices.

8. Create mechanisms to hire faculty focused primarily on teaching, with expectations for scholarly work on teaching and learning in higher education

The university should create a limited number of faculty positions, whose mandate it is to focus on teaching and on the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education. These positions would have a larger teaching load than regular faculty positions and include research related to teaching and curriculum development activities. These positions could allow some faculty the opportunity to devote scholarly attention to curriculum development, educational leadership, and educational research within their discipline. These positions could also allow some faculty the time to teach more courses that usual within a program in order to develop understanding of how courses connect, and support strategic program redevelopment as proposed in Recommendation 3. Several successful models can be found at University of Toronto, McGill University, McMaster University and University of British Columbia.

9. Develop Queen's-specific and program-specific learning outcomes

A Task Force with representation from all the faculties should be created to identify university-wide learning outcomes to be used for resource allocation, instructions to faculties to take action to achieve these outcomes, and to specify the kinds of generic knowledge and skills (see *Academic Plan* p. 8). Queen's graduates can expect to acquire by the end of their degree. These might include outcomes like critical thinking, communications, (including writing), diversity and equity, professional and ethical behaviour, internationalization, and leadership. This project could use the data and processes created as a result of the university's involvement in the HEQCO Learning Outcomes Assessment Consortium project.

10. Ensure that Queen's University Quality Assurance Processes and Cyclical Program Review emphasize collaborative program improvement

The Queen's University Quality Assurance Process (QUQAPs) and the Cyclical Program Review (CPR) should develop and make widely known a vision that emphasizes that program review and evaluation be a collaborative process that entails using the results to improve the student learning experience. The process should respect that individual faculties and academic units may approach and achieve their program review and improvement goals in different ways, driven by evidence gathered. The self-study document should initiate the conversation about quality, learning outcomes and improvement of the student learning experience, and insofar as possible include a curriculum mapping process to encourage departments to identify gaps, redundancies and areas where professional development would be helpful. Developing and sustaining a culture of review and continuous improvement is an important initiative that must be supported at all administrative and academic levels of the university and by sufficient human, financial and technological resources.

An open invitation should be extended to faculty, staff and administrators to the annual QUQAPs CPR Orientation Sessions offered by the Office of the Provost, recognizing that units may begin the process at any time. If the quality assurance processes are to result in real improvements to curricula and consequently to enhancing the student learning experience, they should ideally be proactive in nature rather than reactive. That is to say, these processes should not be a one-time initiative but an ongoing cycle of using data to inform discussion and decision-making regarding program improvement.

11. Implement degree, diploma or certificate program in teaching and learning in higher education

The university should ensure that graduate-level education in the latest thinking and evidence-based practices in higher education is readily available to those faculty and staff members who wish to deepen their understanding of the core work of our university. Recognizing that this would be a longer-term initiative, we recommend that Queen's develop diploma, certificate or degree-level courses in higher education relevant to both general and disciplinary pedagogy. The university has some of these courses, for example MGMT-993 in Queen's School of Business and formerly CHEE-840 in the Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science.

12. Create a standing committee for strategic planning in teaching and learning support units

This group would be responsible for overseeing many of the initiatives proposed in this document. It would be composed of representatives from faculties, undergraduate and graduate student bodies, and academic support units (or other groups as appropriate) to provide advice or oversight of learning improvement initiatives and academic support units. It should also explore ways to engage students in supporting faculty in improving the faculty element of the overall student learning experience.

Next Steps

In the next phase, the Provost's Advisory Task Force on the Student Learning Experience intends to recommend specific processes, timelines, and resources to support the initiatives described in Part I above. It will also propose methods to measure the success of those initiatives.

The group intends to deliver its final report in the fall of 2013.

Comments on the proposals in this document are welcome, and should be directed to provost@queensu.ca.

Appendix

Mandate

The mandate of the Student Learning Experience Task Force is to recommend specific sustainable initiatives and processes that would enhance the student learning experience, to make recommendations for academic and learning support units, to support the Queen's University Quality Assurance Processes, and to propose infrastructure, policy, and resource requirements related to teaching and learning. The SLE Task Force will create a robust Teaching and Learning Action Plan for the Provost's consideration; specific recommendations will be sent for approval to governance bodies as appropriate.

This initiative builds upon the university's recent strategic planning processes, including Principal Woolf's vision document, *Where Next?* (2010), the Academic Writing Team's *Imagining the Future* (2010), and the Senate Academic Planning Task Force's *Academic Plan* (2011). The SLE Task Force will align itself with the *Academic Plan*, focusing specifically on the Student Learning Experience pillar, and will seek to complement the work of the current Senate Academic Planning Task Force. Where appropriate, the SLE Task Force will also consider the *Institutional Vision, Proposed Mandate Statement and Priority Objectives* report submitted to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities in October 2012.

The specific mandates of the Task Force are to

(i) Recommend specific and clear goals to foster an environment of innovative and effective teaching and learning, including:
   a) recommendations for academic and learning support units;
   b) recommended initiatives to support Queen's University Quality Assurance Processes;
   c) recommended processes to assess student learning outcomes and use them to improve quality;
   d) recommendations on how to recognize and reward innovative and effective teaching;

(ii) propose infrastructure, policy, and resource requirements related to teaching and learning;

(iii) identify mechanisms and processes to reach the recommended goals;

(iv) identify key steps, targets, and a timeline for the realization of these goals, and identify ways of measuring progress toward those goals.

The primary aim of the Student Learning Experience Task Force is not to create a document but to identify specific mechanisms by which to enhance the student learning

experience at Queen's, with a particular emphasis on undergraduate education. Recent and on-going strategic planning processes have engaged faculty, staff and students in broad consultation, and here the emphasis will be on creating a Teaching and Learning Action Plan for the implementation of the recommendations in the *Academic Plan*. The SLE Task Force will consult with stakeholders across the university in regard to specific initiatives, but will heavily draw on the recommendations from the broad consultation described in *Imagining the Future* and the *Academic Plan*.

Process

The Task Force members include individuals representing

1. each faculty, as nominated by respective deans
2. the libraries, nominated by the head of the libraries
3. academic support units
4. undergraduate and graduate students bodies.

The members of the Task Force are:

Jill Scott (Vice-Provost, Teaching and Learning) Co-Chair
Brian Frank (Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science) Co-Chair
Mike Adams (Department of Biomedical & Molecular Sciences)
Jill Atkinson (Department of Psychology)
Mira Dineen (Vice President, University Affairs AMS), replaced by Thomas Pritchard on May 1, 2013
Jackie Druery (University Library)
Don Klinger (Faculty of Education)
Brenda Ravenscroft (Associate Dean Studies, Faculty of Arts and Sciences)
Doug Reid (Queen's School of Business)
Vicki Remenda (Department of Geological Sciences and Geological Engineering)
Matt Scribner (President, SGPS), replaced by Iain Reeve on May 1, 2013
Ann Tierney (Vice-Provost & Dean, Student Affairs)
Denise Stockley (Acting Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning)

The Task Force members were provided some recent reports and references to inform the work. The list included:

- Hattie, J. (2009). *The Black Box of Tertiary Assessment: An Impending Revolution*. In L. H. Meyer, S. Davidson, H. Anderson, R. Fletcher, P.M. Johnston, & M. Rees (Eds.), Tertiary Assessment & Higher Education Student Outcomes: Policy, Practice & Research (pp.259-275). Wellington, New Zealand: Ako Aotearoa
- Kuh, G. (2008) *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*, AAC&U

- Richard Arum, Josipa Roksa, and Esther Cho (2011), *Improving Undergraduate Learning: Findings and Policy Recommendations from the SSRC-CLA Longitudinal Project*, SSRC
- Baker, G. R., Jankowski, N. A., Provezis, S. & Kinzie, J. *Using Assessment Results: Promising Practices of Institutions That Do It Well*. (2012).
- Charles Henderson, Andrea Beach, and Noah Finkelstein, *Facilitating Change in Undergraduate STEM Instructional Practices: An Analytic Review of the Literature*, Journal of Research in Science Teaching, VOL. 48, NO. 8, PP. 952–984 (2011)
- Hattie, J. (2009), *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*, Taylor & Francis.
- Bransford, J. et al. (2000), "How people learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School", National Research Council
- Ramsden (2003), *Learning to teach in higher education*, Routledge
- Biggs, J., Tang, C. (2011) *Teaching for quality learning in higher education*, McGraw-Hill.
- Ambrose, S., et al. (2010), "How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching", Jossey-Bass.
- AAC&U Liberal Arts Education and America's Promise Project

In January the group participated in a facilitated session offered by the Executive Decision Centre to identify key issues and ideas within the four areas of focus. The group was then divided into four subcommittees that largely mapped to the four areas of focus:

1. Academic support units
2. Learning outcomes and QUQAPs process
3. Recognizing and rewarding teaching
4. General teaching and learning environment

The subgroups met independently to work on key issues and specific recommendations in their areas. Subgroup #4 had a broad focus, examining issues not specifically captured by the other three groups.

The groups reviewed literature and data from Institutional Research and Planning, consulted with stakeholders on campus, and undertook two trips in the month of April, including travelling to the University of Guelph to consult with colleagues there about creating institutional supports for teaching and learning, and attending the Council of Ontario Universities Outcomes Assessment Conference in Toronto.

The Task Force also identified a list of issues related to the learning environment at Queen's. All of the recommendations respond to one or more of these issues, including the need:

- for better information about learning and more consistent methods of assessment to inform planning and delivery. For example, are students developing better

skills in generic learning outcomes, such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and collaborative work? How well are knowledge and skills being retained between courses? (Queen's *Academic Plan* recommends that Queen's make the teaching and learning of the Fundamental Academic Skills (FAS) a high priority (p.10))

- to better articulate what we expect students to be able to do in order to drive strategic planning and collaborative development
- to provide effective institutional support for a variety of learning experiences and assessment approaches
- to have integrated support structures to strategically enhance programs
- to ensure that the approach for evaluating and rewarding faculty performance encourages faculty to continue to improve their teaching

At a half-day retreat on May 2, each subgroup identified 5-6 key recommendations for discussion. Each subgroup prioritized the proposals and identified those that should receive immediate attention. The group then collectively divided the recommendations into two groups:

1. those which will be actively pursued by the Task Force, recommendations 1-5 above.
2. those which the Task Force deems equally important but which will require a longer timeframe or which require input from specialized groups, recommendations 6-12 above.

The two lists formed the basis for the recommendations described in the document above.