



POLICY PAPER

Teaching and Assessment

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Prepared by:

*Eric Chappell, Undergraduate Student
Students' General Association (SGA-AGÉ), Laurentian University*

*Kathryn Kettle, Vice President (Policy & Advocacy),
Students' General Association (SGA-AGÉ), Laurentian University*

*Auston Pierce, Provincial Advocacy Committee Co-Chair
Alma Mater Society (AMS), Queen's University*

*Munro Watters, Vice President (University Affairs)
Alma Mater Society (AMS), Queen's University*

With files from:

*Eddy Avila, Research and Policy Analyst
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance*

*Martyna Siekanowicz, Research and Policy Analyst
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance*

ABOUT OUSA

OUSA represents the interests of 150,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight student associations across Ontario. Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable, and high quality post-secondary education in Ontario. To achieve this vision we've come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby government to implement them.

The member institutions and home office of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance operate on the ancestral and traditional territories of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat, Leni-Lunaape, Anishnawbek, and Mississauga peoples.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As technology advances and as the skills graduates needs to succeed in the workplace changes, post-secondary education needs to continue adapt. Students are interested in addressing the gaps in university teaching and learning, exploring more high impact learning opportunities, and highlighting the need for better inclusive learning experiences on campus. OUSA's hope is that students, staff, and faculty-alike will benefit from these recommendations to improve teaching and assessment in Ontario's universities.

THE PROBLEM

Gaps in Teaching and Learning

Students are concerned that not all faculty and graduate teaching assistants are formally trained in teaching, leading to difficulties in developing effective teaching methods and that some faculty may not follow best practices in the current post-secondary climate. They are concerned that there are no incentives for faculty to achieve pedagogical excellence, all while current post-secondary academic structures continue to favour traditional, lecture-style learning environments that do not provide as effective opportunities for deep learning and experiential learning for students. Additionally, contract staff often work in precarious conditions, are underpaid, and are under-recognized for their contributions and opportunities for professional development and training in teaching are not well incentivized and promoted to faculty.

Undergraduate teaching assistants provide positive experiential learning experiences for students, but current structures and practices used for supervising undergraduate teaching assistants are not effective and a lack of regulation may compromise the learning of students. Moreover, they are often not provided with the same resources, supports, and protections as graduate teaching assistants. Students are also concerned that outside of student evaluations of teaching, student feedback mechanisms are limited and the rates at which students complete teaching evaluations has declined since institutions have switched to online systems. They also acknowledge that biases, prejudices, and stereotypes can negatively impact teaching evaluations and that student evaluations of teaching do not always provide a balanced perspective due to the nature of certain courses. Additionally, students are concerned that there is limited research surrounding the effectiveness of contract staff resulting in preconceived notions of contract staff and that there is not enough research surrounding labor disputes between contract academic staff and tenure-track staff, which impacts quality of student experience.

Limited High Impact Learning Opportunities

Students are concerned that some disciplines and programs, such as arts, social sciences, and humanities, provide comparatively fewer opportunities for recognized experiential learning than others, especially when discussing undergraduate research opportunities. Additionally, undergraduate research opportunities are often poorly advertised, decentralized, and inconsistent across degree programs. There is also concern that significant costs associated with participating in experiential learning, including undergraduate research opportunities, disproportionately affect marginalized students and is a barrier to accessing these opportunities.

Students have identified that they struggle to articulate the skills and learning outcomes they achieve after completing experiential learning and co-op opportunities, often referred to as a "skills awareness gap" and are concerned that few post-secondary institutions have implemented a recognition system to support students in the process of being accredited for experiential learning experiences and co-ops. They know that the implementation of co-curricular recognition systems can be costly and require large administrative power. Additionally, students are concerned that placement opportunities for professional students across all areas of study are increasingly competitive and limited and travel costs associated with transportation to remote placements is a financial barrier to finding adequate placement opportunities.

Inadequate Inclusive Learning Experiences

Students are concerned that there is a heavy reliance on a narrow group of assessment types that do not encourage deep learning and are less likely to give an encompassing demonstration of what a student has learned when compared to differentiated evaluations. Furthermore, there is a lack of variety in assessment opportunities for students in discipline-specific programs to develop generic and transferable skills in literacy and numeracy. Additionally, students note that final examinations can be a large cause of stress in students, which can cause students to underperform on final examinations when compared to their actual level of knowledge in a less stressful environment.

Finally, students identify that learning is negatively impacted when they experience feelings of isolation and exclusion in the classroom. Students are concerned that instructors may lack accurate information on how to effectively support marginalized students, especially given that instructors in post-secondary education are not required to complete inclusivity trainings, such as gender sensitivity training, cultural sensitivity training, accessibility training, decolonial training, or sexual violence education and training.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving Teaching and Learning

Students recommend that the provincial government support ongoing learning opportunities for faculty through envelope funding for university Teaching Centres with an emphasis on innovation in pedagogy. They recommend that the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) establish metrics for quantifying varied learning experiences and engagement levels to assess teaching excellence and recommend that Strategic Mandate Agreements be adapted to reward increased engagement through deep learning and experiential learning. Additionally, students recommend that the provincial government allocate funding to post-secondary institutions to provide undergraduate teaching assistant opportunities and to ensure that training and protections are given to these undergraduate teaching assistants.

Furthermore, students recommend that HEQCO continue to develop standards for assessing the quality of evaluations of teaching, investigate and promote best practices in the design and implementation of evaluation tools for faculty to receive ongoing feedback, and develop metrics to account for biases and prejudices against instructors in evaluations. Students encourage the provincial government to work with institutions to develop a framework that combines peer review and student evaluation of teaching as a uniform way of quantifying teaching quality and recommend that the provincial government establish best practices and set metrics for the evaluation of teaching to be negotiated into future Strategic Mandate Agreements. Additionally, students recommend that the provincial government mandate that student and peer evaluations of teaching are taken into consideration in the assessment and renewal of instructors after HEQCO has developed metrics to account for biases and prejudices against instructors in evaluations.

OUSA recommends that the provincial government work with institutions to create a sector-wide strategy on faculty hiring and renewal and that HEQCO conduct research on contract academic staff in comparison to general faculty trends in Ontario to examine impacts of current trends on students, instructors, and universities. Students also recommend that the government create a Select Committee to establish best practices for faculty protections that prevent labour disputes and the adverse effects they present to students.

Expanding High Impact Learning Opportunities

Students want to see HEQCO expand its definition of experiential learning, while ensuring opportunities are associated with clear learning outcomes, and provide institutions with a framework to assess and credit experiential opportunities as they evolve. HEQCO should also work to develop a toolkit that provides faculty with greater resources and information on how to incorporate experiential learning opportunities into their courses. Additionally, students recommend that Council of Ontario Universities (COU) set best practices for universities and faculty to effectively develop, implement, and promote experiential learning experiences to students.

OUSA recommends that the provincial government work with community-based partners to incentivize experiential learning opportunities that can benefit students, as well as the broader community, and that the government uphold the commitments outlined in the Highly Skilled Workforce strategy to ensure every student has at least one experiential learning opportunity by the time they graduate from post-secondary education. The provincial government should also implement a needs-based bursary to allow students with financial accessibility concerns to have access to experiential learning opportunities and commit to investing in a diverse range of high-quality experiential learning opportunities through envelope funding across all areas of study to address equalizing opportunities across different fields of study.

To address students struggling to articulate the skills they have acquired through their experiential learning opportunities, students recommend that HEQCO conduct more research on how institutions can set and incorporate learning outcome frameworks and standards for experiential learning opportunities and co-ops. HEQCO should also develop a co-curricular recognition framework that institutions can utilize when implementing a form of recognition on their campuses and the provincial government should continue to support efforts of HEQCO to develop a system-wide learning outcomes framework for Ontario institutions. The Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities should provide envelope funding for the development and implementation of co-curricular recognition systems.

Additionally, OUSA recommends that the provincial government provide funding for undergraduate research opportunities for undergraduate students in non-STEM fields and create bursaries and grants to lessen the financial burden of students who choose to undertake undergraduate research. The Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities should adopt undergraduate student research opportunities as a metric used in Ontario's Strategic Mandate Agreements. Furthermore, students recommend that the provincial government provide incentives to businesses, government organizations, non-profits, or other relevant parties to create more placement opportunities for students and also offer financial assistance through grants or bursaries to reduce financial barriers associated with travel to mandatory student placements.

Enhancing Inclusive Learning Experiences

Students recommend that the provincial government incentivize institutions to help faculty with the development and implementation of evidence-backed, differentiated evaluations through grant funding. Students would like to see HEQCO conduct research on the effectiveness and fairness of final examinations practices and establish a best practice framework for final examination pedagogy. Additionally, students recommend that the provincial government develop and commit to an inclusive education strategy at the post-secondary level, with adequate consultation from students, faculty, and institutions and that provincial government identify Equity and Inclusion offices as an essential service to be utilized as a resource for the creation of these trainings and invest in their creation and maintenance. Lastly, OUSA recommends that the provincial government mandate universities establish a baseline, minimum standard level of training to provide faculty and student-facing staff with inclusive educational tools and sensitivity training and principles and also mandate that universities include a mandatory renewal cycle, not greater than five (5) years, to ensure training remains appropriate and relevant.

INTRODUCTION

A fundamental aspect of an undergraduate student's experience is the education they receive throughout their years at university. Successful post-secondary education requires comprehensive teaching and learning techniques, skilled faculty, and fulfilling learning opportunities for all undergraduate students. However, as universities continue to grow in size, as technology continues to advance, and as the skills graduates need to be successful after graduation changes, the way students learn and are taught at universities also needs to adapt.

This policy paper will present a series of recommendations, written by students, on how to improve teaching and assessment for undergraduate and professional students in Ontario. OUSA has focused its analysis on three broad themes: teaching and learning quality, high impact learning, and inclusive learning experiences.

Students believe that university faculty members play a vital role in improving the quality of teaching and learning of undergraduate and professional students. It is important that as post-secondary education evolves, institutions support and encourage faculty members to use teaching techniques that prioritize higher-level thinking and provide students with experiential learning opportunities. Additionally, students discuss the impacts of labour disputes and precarious employment not only on faculty, but on student experience and learning.

More university students are interested in innovative, student-centric teaching techniques that encourage high impact learning both inside and outside of the classroom. High impact learning encompasses a wide variety of opportunities that help students become career-ready, including experiential learning opportunities like co-ops and participating in industry-recognized projects. Furthermore, students are continuing to develop skills in non-academic environments through co-curricular activities, like volunteering in the community, but are often struggling to articulate their learning outcomes. The provincial government, institutions, and stakeholders in the post-secondary sector all play a part in helping students graduate with meaningful learning experiences outside of the classroom and bridge the skills awareness gap between education and the workforce.

Lastly, students deserve to learn in inclusive and safe learning spaces while attending university. This section expands on need to diversify the types of in-class teaching assessments to more fairly assess a wider range of students with different learning styles. Additionally, students identify the lack of gender, cultural, and sexual violence education training available for students and faculty across universities and the need to increase training opportunities to better support marginalized students in Ontario.

The following principles, concerns, and recommendations have been compiled by students, for students, and represent their view on how to improve the quality of teaching and assessment in post-secondary education in Ontario.

TEACHING AND LEARNING QUALITY

PEDAGOGY

Principle: All faculty and graduate teaching assistants should be encouraged and should have the opportunity to be engaged in ongoing professional development related to teaching.

Principle: Teaching excellence should be evaluated, framed, and recognized in a similar style to research excellence in post-secondary environments.

Principle: A variety of deep learning opportunities including engagement within the academic community better prepares students for post-graduate experiences.

Concern: Not all faculty and graduate teaching assistants are formally trained in teaching, leading to difficulties in developing effective teaching methods.

Concern: Contract academic staff are not provided with enough training opportunities to enrich teaching excellence.

Concern: Some faculty are less likely to perceive value in self-reflection of their approach to pedagogy and may not follow best practices in the current post-secondary climate.

Concern: There is currently incentive for faculty to further achieve research excellence in their fields, but there is no equivalent method to incentivize the pedagogical side of post-secondary education in Ontario.

Concern: Current post-secondary academic structures favour traditional, lecture-style learning environments that do not provide as effective opportunities for deep learning and experiential learning within a student's academic community.

Concern: Contract staff often work in precarious conditions, are underpaid, and are under-recognized for their contributions.

Concern: Opportunities for professional development and training in teaching are not well incentivized and promoted to faculty.

Recommendation: The provincial government should support ongoing learning opportunities for faculty through envelope funding for university Teaching Centres with an emphasis on innovation in pedagogy.

Recommendation: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should establish metrics for quantifying varied learning experiences and engagement levels to assess teaching excellence.

Recommendation: Strategic Mandate Agreements should be adapted to reward increased engagement through deep learning and experiential learning.

The post-secondary environment is dynamic and has the capacity to drive economic and political change. When post-secondary instructors remain in education for a number of years, their philosophies and views may not always evolve as quickly as the overall changing academic climate.¹ To counteract this trend, post-secondary educators should be provided with ongoing opportunities to partake in professional development related to teaching. Students perceive value in the different perspectives that are brought to

¹ "Why Colleges are So Hard to Change," blog entry by Robert M. Diamond, September 8, 2006, <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2006/09/08/why-colleges-are-so-hard-change>

them through different academic staff. These opportunities would ensure that all faculty members and graduate teaching assistants are formally trained and effective in their teaching content and methods.

Contract academic staff are vital contributors to dynamic education models by bringing recent and relevant educational material to institutions. However, contract academic staff often work in precarious conditions and are underpaid for their workloads.² Contract academic staff may consequently be unable to dedicate significant time to participate in professional development opportunities. Reducing barriers for institutions to provide mandatory training would make additional training opportunities more accessible to contract academic staff. Students believe that the provincial government should support ongoing learning opportunities for all post-secondary faculty and graduate teaching assistants through envelope funding for university Teaching Centres with an emphasis on innovation in pedagogy.

Provincially, there are few standards set for teaching excellence and very little incentive to achieve it. Teaching excellence should be framed and adapted in a similar way to research excellence among post-secondary faculty, where Canada Research Chair holders receive grants to further achieve research excellence in their respective fields. In order to effectively define teaching excellence many factors must be assessed. Setting metrics and rewards for teaching excellence would help assure the quality of education being delivered in Ontario.

Post-secondary institutions commonly utilize traditional, lecture-style learning environments and assessment styles. Unfortunately, these learning environments often do not promote effective, deep learning among students.³ The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) defines deep learning as “a motivation to seek meaning, understand underlying principles and identify relationships between ideas or concepts”.⁴ When students take classes that they are actively participating and learning in, deep learning is promoted, which benefits students’ futures in the workforce.

Additionally, classroom and tutorial spaces are not always equipped to support the use of basic technology in the classroom, and some classroom and tutorial spaces can be inaccessible and pose barriers to students with disabilities. There are often limited opportunities for collaborative and community-based learning experiences for students. Students are more likely to gain an all-encompassing knowledge of course content through non-traditional, participative styles of learning. OUSA recommends that the provincial government use strategic mandate agreements (SMAs) as a tool to facilitate teaching excellence. SMAs should be adapted to reward universities who emphasize and support positive teaching results and methodologies. This addition to the SMA process would encourage universities and faculty to provide more active learning in the classroom.

UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Principle: Institutions should have structures in place to support undergraduate teaching assistants and provide these learning opportunities for the development of upper year students’ knowledge in their field.

Principle: Undergraduate teaching assistant opportunities are positive experiential learning opportunities.

Principle: Undergraduate teaching assistants should be afforded the same training as graduate teaching assistants.

² Foster, K. and Louise B. Bauer. *Out of the Shadows: Experiences of Contract Academic Staff*. Ottawa: Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2018, 5. Accessed September 28, 2018. https://www.caut.ca/sites/default/files/cas_report.pdf

³ Kerr, A. *Teaching and Learning in Large Classes at Ontario Universities: An Exploratory Study*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2011, 4. Accessed October 18, 2018. <http://www.heqco.ca/sitecollectiondocuments/teaching%20and%20learning%20in%20large%20classes%20eng.pdf>

⁴ Lenton, R., Sidhu, R., Kaur, S., Conrad, M., Kennedy, B., Munro, Y., & Smith, R. (2014). *Community Service Learning and Community-Based Learning as Approaches to Enhancing University Service Learning*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 15.

Concern: Current structures and practices used for supervising undergraduate teaching assistants are not effective and a lack of regulation may compromise the learning of students in the tutorial.

Concern: Undergraduate teaching assistants are not always provided with the same resources, supports, and protections as graduate teaching assistants.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to provide undergraduate teaching assistant opportunities.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to provide training and protections for undergraduate teaching assistants.

Many post-secondary classes, especially with large class sizes, often require teaching assistants to help the instructor conduct the course. The responsibilities of teaching assistants can include marking, holding office hours, lecture preparation, tutorial facilitation, and laboratory assistance.⁵

When upper-year undergraduate students are offered teaching assistant positions, these students are given further opportunities to expand on their knowledge in their respective fields of study. Acting as an undergraduate teaching assistant promotes deep learning in a student's field, while allowing upper-year students to contribute to their academic and professional development.⁶ The experience of being an undergraduate teaching assistant allows for undergraduate students to gain valuable, transferable skills that can be applied elsewhere in later fields of work. Presentation skills, communication skills, and a greater confidence in discipline-specific skill sets are all positive results of undergraduate teaching assistant experiences.

However, methods for training undergraduate teaching assistants are limited and vary across post-secondary institutions, and within these institutions themselves. There are various inconsistencies in the level of training teaching assistants receive or are mandated to complete.⁷ Moreover, undergraduate teaching assistants are rarely provided with any supplemental resources to improve their teaching skills. Undergraduate teaching assistants should be given the ability to grow in their roles. This could be achieved through gradual increases to the teaching assistants' workloads and expectations or adding more to the teaching assistants' job descriptions in a similar way to the way a course develops over time.

Currently, institutions have more consistency in the protections they offer graduate teaching assistants than what is given to undergraduate teaching assistants. The provincial government should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to ensure that undergraduate teaching assistants have similar protections to their graduate counterparts.

EVALUATIONS OF TEACHING

Principle: Student evaluations of teaching provide important feedback for faculty and universities on student learning experiences and teaching quality.

Principle: Student evaluations of teaching should be balanced with peer review-based assessments of teaching throughout a course.

Principle: Evaluations of teaching should be implemented throughout the duration of a course, and not just at completion.

⁵ Carol Rolheiser, Tricia Seifert, Cora McCloy, Pamela Gravestock, Graeme Stewart, Emily Greenleaf, Megan Burnett, Sara Carpenter, Benjamin Pottruff, and Stephanie McKean, *Developing Teaching Assistants as Members of the University Teaching Team*. Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. Toronto: Higher Educational Quality Council of Ontario, 2013, 27.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Rolheiser, Seifert, McCloy, Gravestock, Stewart, Greenleaf, Burnett, Carpenter, Pottruff, and McKean, "Developing Teaching Assistants", 31.

Concern: Biases, prejudices, and stereotypes can negatively impact teaching evaluations.

Concern: The rate at which students complete teaching evaluations has declined since institutions have switched to online systems.

Concern: Outside of student evaluations of teaching, feedback mechanisms are limited.

Concern: Student evaluations of teaching do not always provide a balanced perspective due to the nature of certain courses.

Recommendation: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should continue to develop standards for assessing the quality of evaluations of teaching.

Recommendation: The provincial government should work with institutions to develop a framework that combines peer review and student evaluation of teaching as a uniform way of quantifying teaching quality.

Recommendation: The provincial government should establish best practices and set metrics for the evaluation of teaching to be negotiated into future Strategic Mandate Agreements.

Recommendation: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should investigate and promote best practices in the design and implementation of evaluation tools for faculty to receive ongoing feedback.

Recommendation: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should develop metrics to account for biases and prejudices against instructors in evaluations.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that student and peer evaluations of teaching are taken into consideration in the assessment and renewal of instructors after the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario has developed metrics to account for biases and prejudices against instructors in evaluations.

Evaluations of teaching are critical to achieving and maintaining a satisfactory level of teaching from post-secondary instructors. Students are the largest stakeholder group in post-secondary institutions and as such, anonymous student evaluations of teaching should be highly valued. Furthermore, students yield the largest sample size to conduct evaluations of teaching. Students' financial contributions as well as time investment in their post-secondary education makes their perspectives extremely valuable in the process of teaching evaluation.

There are inherent disadvantages to relying solely on student evaluations of teaching; some faculty are graded more harshly than others based on personal attributes, course content, or program-specific issues.⁸ Students should be made aware of existing biases before and during the completion of these types of evaluations. A greater self-awareness of potential unfairness in evaluating would help mitigate bias and make student evaluations of teaching more effective. Questions on student evaluations of teaching should be developed in a way that reduces bias in responses from students. Additionally, HEQCO should conduct research to understand and mitigate bias in student evaluations of teaching. This would make student evaluations of teaching more reflective of the overall success of a course and its instructor.

However, evaluations of teaching are more effective when different perspectives, not only student perspectives, are incorporated into the process. These strategies rely on multiple factors to yield a more accurate, consistent, and well-rounded assessment.⁹ The implementation of metrics to quantify self-evaluation of teaching would contribute to more effective teaching evaluations. When instructors self-

⁸ Michelle Falkof. "Why We Must Stop Relying on Student Ratings of Teaching". *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 25, 2018, 1-2.

⁹ *Ibid*, 2.

evaluate their teaching, student feedback is easier to contextualize because it becomes possible to determine whether student concerns are legitimate or if other factors are causing bias.¹⁰ Additionally, peer review is an important means of receiving expert assessment from individuals with similar teaching experiences to evaluate their peers at the faculty level.¹¹ Peer evaluation would help balance out flaws in the teaching evaluation system while maintaining the student perspective. It is important to acknowledge that peer evaluations of teaching may also be influenced by biases, prejudices, and stereotypes. The provincial government should mandate the use of evaluations of teaching from both students and peers when looking at faculty appointment and renewal, after HEQCO has developed metrics to effectively account for biases and prejudices against instructors in evaluations.

As HEQCO continues to work to develop standards for the quality of teaching evaluations, they should consider how frequent and at what point during the course these student evaluations are administered. Instead of having one student evaluation of teaching toward the end of the academic term, ongoing evaluations should be implemented throughout the duration of a course. Ongoing evaluations would allow for collective growth and allow professors to address persisting issues in the course before the end of the term. HEQCO should also identify whether online or in-class student evaluations are more effective for provide student feedback on teaching.

FACULTY RENEWAL

Principle: Institutions need diverse perspectives, which can be achieved by hiring new faculty.

Principle: Students benefit from diverse teaching styles and perspectives, improving their quality of post-secondary education.

Concern: There is limited research surrounding the effectiveness of contract staff resulting in preconceived notions that are difficult to address.

Concern: There is not enough research surrounding labor disputes between contract academic staff and tenure-track staff in post-secondary institutions, which impacts quality of student experience.

Recommendation: The provincial government should work with institutions to create a sector-wide strategy on faculty hiring and renewal.

Recommendation: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should conduct research on contract academic staff in comparison to general faculty trends in Ontario to examine impacts of current trends on students, instructors, and universities.

Recommendation: The government should create a Select Committee to establish best practices for faculty protections that prevent labour disputes and the adverse effects they present to students.

As academia changes and grows, universities must bring in new perspectives to stay relevant and engaged. Advancements in both pedagogy and research require dynamic post-secondary systems to provide high quality education to their students. Introducing new faculty to an institution promotes innovation in education content, quality and methodology. New teaching styles should be introduced to better interact and engage present day students. Bringing in new perspectives can promote a new, more relevant approach to students and how they learn.

As the workforce changes, the volume of students and demand for instructors differs between fields. The amount of contract academic staff needed compared to tenure-track faculty may change depending on emerging trends of popular fields of study. More research is needed to assess trends in fields of study as

¹⁰ Ibid, 3.

¹¹ Joe Bandy. *Peer Review of Teaching*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Centre for Teaching, 1.

students leave post-secondary education for the evolving workforce, and how faculty trends should be adapted to best suit the needs of different fields.

Often, there are assumptions made about the effectiveness of academic contract staff as educators and researchers. Furthermore, there is little information surrounding the effectiveness of a large population of contract academic staff at post-secondary institutions. Studies have shown that over half of contract academic staff wish to eventually become tenure-track instructors¹² and the Canadian Association of University Teachers determined that job security was the top concern of contract academic staff.¹³ Additionally, students believe that job security for contract academic staff must also be acknowledged when looking at faculty renewal. Job security helps contract academic staff establish themselves within their institution, making it easier to build the relationship between faculty and their students. HEQCO should conduct more research on all types of faculty in Ontario to gain a better understanding of how faculty at different levels affect student learning.

Labour disputes in post-secondary institutions are becoming increasingly common and directly affect the educational experience of students. Labour disputes can push back students' academic terms, add stress, and negatively affect a student's ability to plan out their educational journey. Labour disputes are difficult to resolve and are not easy to come back from for any parties involved. The post-secondary sector requires a better understanding of how contract academic staff and tenure-track staff affect these disputes. The provincial government should task a Select Committee to review research and establish best practices for faculty protections in the prevention of labour disputes and the adverse effects they have on students. A Select committee, comprised of MPPs from different political parties, would serve to examine data and report back to the Legislature with recommendations on this particular issue.¹⁴

HIGH IMPACT LEARNING

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Principle: All students should have opportunities to participate in experiential learning as part of their undergraduate degree.

Principle: Experiential learning opportunities go beyond traditional forms of work-integrated learning and placements.

Principle: Accredited experiential learning opportunities should include activities such as volunteering, industry-recognized projects, mentorship, and leadership opportunities.

Principle: Experiential learning provides valuable skills development, career readiness, and career opportunities for students after they graduate.

Principle: Experiential learning opportunities should provide accommodations for students with disabilities and marginalized students to ensure all students are able to access these same opportunities.

Principle: There is value in including experiential learning opportunities as a supplementary part of course learning.

Concern: Some disciplines and programs, such as arts, social sciences, and humanities, provide comparatively fewer opportunities for recognized experiential learning than others.

¹² Foster and Bauer, *Out of the Shadows*, 4.

¹³ Ibid, 24.

¹⁴ "Committees," Legislative Assembly of Ontario, November 22, 2018, <https://www.ola.org/en/visit-learn/about-parliament/legislative-process-what-a-bill/committees>

Concern: There can be significant costs associated with participating in experiential learning, which disproportionately affect marginalized students.

Recommendation: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should expand its definition of experiential learning, while ensuring opportunities are associated with clear learning outcomes, and provide institutions with a framework to assess and credit experiential opportunities as they evolve.

Recommendation: The Council of Ontario Universities should set best practices for universities and faculty to effectively develop, implement, and promote experiential learning experiences to students.

Recommendation: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should work to develop a toolkit that provides faculty with greater resources and information on how to incorporate experiential learning opportunities into their courses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should work with community-based partners to incentivize experiential learning opportunities that can benefit students as well as the broader community.

Recommendation: The provincial government should uphold the commitments outlined in the Highly Skilled Workforce strategy to ensure every student has at least one experiential learning opportunity by the time they graduate from post-secondary education.

Recommendation: The provincial government should implement a needs-based bursary to allow students with financial accessibility concerns to have access to experiential learning opportunities.

Recommendation: The provincial government should recognize and commit to investing in a diverse range of high-quality experiential learning opportunities through envelope funding across all areas of study to address equalizing opportunities across different fields of study.

Experiential learning provides university students with an opportunity to learn and develop skills outside of traditional learning environments and methods, going beyond the traditional forms of “learning by doing” such as co-op, and includes non-traditional forms such as volunteering, apprenticeship, industry-recognized projects, and mentorship.¹⁵ Experiential learning gives students the opportunity to gain real work experience in a sector associated with the field they are studying. However, there is currently no definition that is consistent across institutions and organizations. HEQCO should expand the definition of experiential learning to incorporate a wide variety of meaningful activities and experiences that provides institutions a clear framework to assess and accredit experiential learning opportunities.

Currently, instructors tend to be reliant on traditional forms of teaching and learning. An over-reliance on assessment types such as multiple-choice questions, essays, and knowledge tests do not effectively prepare students for success after graduation. In OUSA’s biennial survey, 50% of student respondents indicated that they wanted more discussion-based learning, seminars, and problem-based learning rather than the traditional passive lecture format popular within Ontario universities.¹⁶ Incorporating non-traditional forms of learning into the classroom also encourages students to engage in deep learning. As such, faculty should be provided with greater resources, through the form of a toolkit, in order to receive greater guidance on how to incorporate more experiential learning opportunities into the classroom.

The value of experiential learning is recognized as being an aspect of the post-secondary experience that provides valuable skills development, career readiness, and career opportunities for students after they

¹⁵ The Premier’s Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel, “*Building the Workforce of Tomorrow: A Shared Responsibility*” Office of the Premier, 2016, 25.

¹⁶ OUSA, *Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey 2017*, data forthcoming

graduate. This type of education gives students flexible and adaptable skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication, teamwork and creativity, to help them thrive throughout their career.¹⁷ Employers have emphasized that as technology continues to transform the workplace, adaptable and flexible core skills will become increasingly important for tomorrow's workforce.¹⁸ However, there continue to be limited opportunities for experiential learning, especially for activities like capstone projects, independent studies, and undergraduate theses. There tends to be inconsistencies among programs, as some areas of study more readily lend themselves to high impact experiences, while others provide limited opportunities to partake. For instance, high impact learning experiences such as undergraduate research opportunities are often undervalued and not prioritized as learning opportunities within the humanities and social sciences.¹⁹ These opportunities need to be more readily available for all students, regardless of their field of study.

Ontario has taken positive strides to invest in work-integrated learning and experiential learning over the last several years. It is crucial that the investments that have been made are maintained and that this framework continues to support students and Ontario workplaces. Students believe that the provincial government should follow the recommendations of the Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel and commit to ensuring that every student has at least one experiential learning opportunity by the time they graduate from post-secondary education.²⁰ Additionally, OUSA recommends that the provincial government should work to support experiential learning in Ontario through targeted funding for a range of experiential learning opportunities.

Lastly, it is important to highlight that students from marginalized communities tend to encounter additional barriers when accessing experiential learning opportunities. Students who are facing financial difficulties may be unable to participate in experiential learning that do not provide financial remuneration, even though they are valuable learning opportunities. As such, the provincial government should provide students with needs-based financial supports to ensure they develop valuable skills to integrate themselves effectively into the workforce.

CO-CURRICULAR RECOGNITION

Principle: Students should be able to easily understand, articulate, and display the skills they acquired, as well as the learning outcomes they achieved, through their experiential learning and co-op opportunities.

Principle: Students should receive institutional accreditation for their experiential learning and co-op opportunities.

Concern: Students struggle to articulate the skills and learning outcomes they achieve after completing experiential learning and co-op opportunities, often referred to as a "skills awareness gap".

Concern: Few post-secondary institutions have implemented a recognition system to support students in the process of being accredited for experiential learning experiences and co-ops.

Concern: The implementation of co-curricular recognition systems can be costly and require large administrative power.

Recommendation: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should conduct more research on how institutions can set and incorporate learning outcome frameworks and standards for experiential learning opportunities and co-ops.

¹⁷ Council of Ontario Universities. *Partnering for a Better Future for Ontario*. Council of Ontario University, 2017, 5.

¹⁸ Ibid, 13.

¹⁹ Wilson, Reed. "Researching "Undergraduate Research" in the Humanities." *Modern Language Studies* 33, no. 1/2 (2003): 75..

²⁰ The Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel, "Building the Workforce of Tomorrow: A Shared Responsibility" Office of the Premier, 2016, 27.

Recommendation: The provincial government should continue to support efforts of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario to develop a system-wide learning outcomes framework for Ontario institutions.

Recommendation: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should develop a co-curricular recognition framework that institutions can utilize when implementing a form of recognition on their campuses.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities should provide envelope funding for the development and implementation of co-curricular recognition systems.

Within the higher education sector, concerns have been raised about a perceived job skills gap, which is the inability of post-secondary students to make employers aware of the skills they have acquired.²¹ Additionally, this perceived skills gap creates challenges for students as they navigate possible post-graduate pathways, whether this is pursuing academia further or entering the workforce. One of the root causes of this perceived skills gap has been a lack of common terminology and learning outcomes across the post-secondary sector, which has created difficulties for students in how they can express their learning experiences and subsequent skill development to employers, for example.²² A small number of Canadian universities and colleges have developed their own methods of Co-Curricular Recognition as a means to incentive and recognize student engagement in co-curricular opportunities, which research has shown to positively impact student development, retention, and success.²³ These have included methods of recognition such as co-curricular records and e-portfolios. These are a tool to complement the academic transcript, which encourages students to engage in opportunities beyond the classroom.²⁴

However, regardless of if students are developing these skills, there is a perception that students are not well-prepared upon entry into the workforce. Often referred to as an, “awareness gap”, where employers are not able to see, and students are not able to articulate, the skills they have developed through their co-curricular activities.²⁵ As such, a graduating student’s credentials and associated transcript indicate the extent of a student’s knowledge of content, but neither informs employers of the level of a student’s skills. Troy Markowitz, a Vice-President of a social networking platform catered to recent post-secondary graduates, believes that students do have the skills, but neither employers nor the students themselves have an awareness or evidence of this.²⁶ Kimberly Elias, from the University of Toronto, conducted a study which outlined how employers rated the ability of job candidates to describe the competencies and skills developed outside of the classroom as very limited, clearly displaying the lack of awareness and understanding.²⁷ HEQCO has identified that while the current system does well at documenting students’ knowledge of content, it does not provide an overview of the skills that were developed while completing their studies.²⁸ Further to that, this issue can lead to underemployment, and possibly even unemployment, for recent post-secondary graduates. The awareness gap holds recent graduates back from finding appropriate, relevant employment, and employers fail to make the connection between applicants and the skills gained while obtaining their degree.²⁹

²¹ Craig, Ryan and Troy Markowitz. “The Skills Gap is Actually an Awareness Gap – And it’s Easier to Fix.” Forbes, March 17, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ryanraig/2017/03/17/the-skills-gap-is-actually-an-awareness-gap-and-its-easier-to-fix/#228c3b83ff4a>

²² Ibid.

²³ Elias, Kimberly. “Employer Perceptions of Co-Curricular Engagement and the Co-Curricular Record in the Hiring Process.” ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2014, ii.

²⁴ Ibid, 104

²⁵ Harrison, A. *Skills, Competencies and Credentials*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2017, 2.

²⁶ Ibid, 6.

²⁷ Elias, Kimberly. “Employer Perceptions of Co-Curricular Engagement and the Co-Curricular Record in the Hiring Process.” ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2014, 75.

²⁸ Harrison, A. *Skills, Competencies and Credentials*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2017, 5.

²⁹ Craig, Ryan and Troy Markowitz. “The Skills Gap is Actually an Awareness Gap – And it’s Easier to Fix.” Forbes, March 17, 2017. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ryanraig/2017/03/17/the-skills-gap-is-actually-an-awareness-gap-and-its-easier-to-fix/#228c3b83ff4a>

In order to provide students with a clear understanding and ability to articulate their experiences effectively, learning outcomes must be clearly conveyed to students. This task requires the effort and attention of faculty and organizations like Ontario's University Quality Council, to set standards and articulate how programs and curriculums define the intended learning outcomes. Currently, there is no standard for what qualifies as an experiential learning opportunity, nor is there a standard for the way in which these experiences are recognized. OUSA recommends that HEQCO be tasked with conducting more research on how institutions can set and incorporate learning outcomes as they apply to experiential learning. Additionally, HEQCO should set a framework and definition for experiential learning to better guide faculty and universities in accrediting co-curricular activities and other forms of experiential learning as well. Further to that, HEQCO should develop a co-curricular recognition framework that institutions can follow when implementing their own systems, to ensure the aforementioned components are considered. In order to achieve all of this, the Ontario government should provide envelope funding to contribute towards the high costs of implementing these programs.

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES (UROPS)

Principle: Students should have the opportunity to participate in research during their undergraduate education.

Principle: Undergraduate research opportunities provide students with skill development and career readiness.

Principle: Undergraduate research opportunities contribute to the mission of universities.

Concern: Undergraduate research opportunities are limited, especially in programs such as the arts, social sciences, and the humanities.

Concern: Undergraduate research opportunities are poorly advertised, decentralized, and inconsistent across degree programs.

Concern: Some students are not able to access undergraduate research opportunities because of financial limitations and barriers.

Recommendation: Provincial government should provide funding for undergraduate research opportunities for undergraduate students in non-STEM fields

Recommendation: The provincial government should create bursaries and grants to lessen the financial burden of students who choose to undertake undergraduate research

Recommendation: The Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities should adopt undergraduate student research opportunities as a metric used in Ontario's Strategic Mandate Agreements.

Research opportunities at the undergraduate level provide students with practical skills that can be applicable to further academia and future careers. Undergraduate research allows students to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to long-term projects that promotes knowledge transfer and adds to the breath of academic knowledge, all while receiving guidance and mentorship from university accredited professors. This further allows students the opportunity to make original contributions to their field.³⁰ These opportunities can take the form of theoretical and applied research in a variety of fields and through experiments and studies that highlight qualitative and quantitate research methods.

³⁰ John, Joanna and John Creighton. 2011. "Researcher Development: The Impact of Undergraduate Research Opportunity Programmes on Students in the UK." *Studies in Higher Education* 36 (7): 781

Undergraduate Research Opportunities (UROPs) facilitate discovery and skill development that can impact a student's quality of education, post-graduate choices, and broader community. Currently in Ontario, UROPs have been limited. Studies suggest UROPs make significant contributions to the research capabilities and confidence of participating students, leading them to form a deeper understanding of their area of research and the methods of scholarly work. UROPs also give students the possibility to develop other skills such as their writing, communication, analysis, and knowledge translation.³¹

One of the most important aspects of undergraduate research opportunities is that they give students an opportunity to contribute to the mission of universities. The functions of a university can be characterized as two different primaries: the university as a generator of knowledge and the university as a dispenser of knowledge. These goals can be achieved through activities such as research and publishing, as well as teaching and learning. Undergraduate research provides students with the capacity to contribute to both and bridge the gap between them.

UROPs are limited and are poorly advertised, decentralized, and inconsistent across degree programs. This is especially true in the humanities and social sciences as research in these fields are undervalued and not prioritized as learning opportunities for students.³² Popularizing and institutionalizing UROPs throughout Ontario requires consistent attention and resources from the province. Often, the development of UROP programs are dependent on the dedication of individual faculty members or departments. Additionally, limited funding for UROPs, especially in non-STEM programs, is a significant barrier that limits undergraduate students' ability to access research opportunities. Therefore, the provincial should allocate grants and bursaries for students who wish to pursue undergraduate research as part of, or outside of their degree program. This will help aid in removing financial barriers that limit access to these opportunities

The province could make a significant impact by allocating funding to support UROP opportunities and through the use of Strategic Mandate Agreement. Furthermore, the government should set metrics to include UROPs as opportunities for differentiation. While research is one area of focus within SMAs, UROPs should also be considered for their ability to provide undergraduates with meaningful research experience, an area that should not be limited solely to graduate students and faculty.

MANDATORY STUDENT PLACEMENTS

Principle: All students should be able to complete placements mandatory for their academic and professional success in a timely manner.

Principle: All placement opportunities should accommodate students with accommodation needs and disabilities.

Concern: Placement opportunities for professional students across all areas of study are increasingly competitive and limited.

Concern: Financial costs associated with relocation and transportation to placements within the province is a barrier to finding adequate placement opportunities.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide incentives to businesses, government organizations, non-profits, or other relevant parties to create more placement opportunities for students

Recommendation: The provincial government should offer financial assistance through grants or bursaries to reduce financial barriers associated with travel to mandatory student placements.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Wilson, Reed. "Researching "Undergraduate Research" in the Humanities." *Modern Language Studies* 33, no. 1/2 (2003): 75..

Students should have the opportunity to complete placements necessary for their academic and professional success in a timely matter. Not only is it imperative to the quality of their education, but for many professional students, a requirement to graduate. Placements are vital to many programs such as nursing, engineering, teaching and education, pharmacy, social work, law, and medicine. Placements are often mandatory in these and other professional programs because it places students in a hands-on learning environment outside of the classroom, preparing students with real life experience necessary to practice both legally and ethically.

Unfortunately, in some fields, student placements are becoming increasingly limited because of increased student enrollment, workforce shortages, low to no funding, and lack of supervisors.³³ In one study, 58% of study respondents reported difficulty in finding a sufficient number of appropriate nursing placements.³⁴ This problem is echoed across many programs with mandatory placements. For instance, the number of medical students not able to secure adequate residency positions has increased and law students have also had difficulties securing articling positions. The lack of placements has adverse effects on Ontario's students as it also negatively affects the quality of education. The over enrollment problem in medical programs for instance has been an additional strain on institutions while creating uncertainty and stress for students waiting to pursue their careers. This has proven to be a challenge for educational institutions when the number of students requiring clinical placements is beyond what educators can place.³⁵

Traditionally, placements have been identified by course instructors and coordinators. Schools have primarily relied on historical use or decisions and relationships between the clinical manager and professor.³⁶ These methods have now been failing and the province must incentivize business, government organizations, non-profits and other relevant partners and parties with funding programs such as grants and bursaries. This provincial funding would help offset the costs of employers taking on the added burden of supervising, training and accommodating students on placement. By limiting the financial burden on relevant groups who could offer sufficient placements, employers will be more likely to take on more students seeking placement.

A student's ability to travel to a placement that requires a long commute time is another barrier to finding an appropriate placement. Travel expenses can negatively impact a student's success to securing and completing mandatory placements for their program. Some students may not be able to find adequate placement without needing to travel. Therefore, the provincial government should offer financial assistance through grants or bursaries to reduce financial barriers associated with travel to mandatory student placements.

INCLUSIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

STUDENT ASSESSMENTS

Principle: Differentiated evaluations and assessment styles allow for a more accurate demonstration of knowledge.

Principle: Universal design philosophies ensure accessibility is built into instructional standards and campus infrastructure outside of traditional spaces for students with disabilities

³³ Smith, Patricia M., Linda N. Corso, and Nancy Cobb. 2010. "The Perennial Struggle to Find Clinical Placement Opportunities: A Canadian National Survey." *Nurse Education Today* 30 (8): 798.

³⁴ Smith, Patricia M., Linda N. Corso, and Nancy Cobb. 2010. "The Perennial Struggle to Find Clinical Placement Opportunities: A Canadian National Survey." *Nurse Education Today* 30 (8): 798.

³⁵ Ibid, 799.

³⁶ Ibid.

Principle: Differentiated evaluations and assessment styles would be beneficial for all students and would better support students requiring accommodations.

Principle: Final examinations are an important component of assessing learning.

Principle: Summative evaluations should be designed to demonstrate competence and general knowledge.

Concern: There is a heavy reliance on a narrow group of assessment types that do not encourage deep learning.

Concern: Traditional assessment styles are less likely to give an encompassing demonstration of what a student has learned than differentiated evaluations.

Concern: There is a lack of variety in assessment opportunities for students in discipline-specific programs to develop generic and transferable skills in literacy and numeracy.

Concern: Final examinations can be a large cause of stress in students, which can cause students to underperform on final examinations when compared to their actual level of knowledge in a less stressful environment.

Recommendation: The provincial government should incentivize institutions to help faculty with the development and implementation of evidence-backed, differentiated evaluations through grant funding.

Recommendation: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should conduct research on the effectiveness and fairness of final examinations practices and establish a best practice framework for final examination pedagogy.

Differentiated evaluations and assessment styles allow students to demonstrate their knowledge of course content in a way which best suits them. Different assessment types vary from traditional multiple choice and short answer questions to research projects and presentations, with each evaluation being preferred by different students with different strengths. Students' individual aptitudes are often disregarded with narrow assessment opportunities, and historically speaking, traditional assessment methods have been most commonly used. An over-reliance on traditional assessment types does not effectively prepare and measure the skills and knowledge students need to succeed after graduation.³⁷ Additionally, universal design philosophies work to eliminate educational barriers and reinforce inclusive, accessible teaching practices.³⁸ Universal design concepts should be used to help faculty develop and implement assessment styles that benefit all students.

In discipline-specific programs, there is often a focus on foundational knowledge which can limit students pursuing different avenues in their education. Students need more opportunities to bridge and develop discipline-specific skills, otherwise they may be limited in their higher comprehension of knowledge. To ensure that students build competencies in different areas, course instructors should aim to use several methods of evaluation and approaches to application of learned material in their courses. If structures are put in place that allow students to articulate their knowledge in ways that suit them, it creates a culture of knowledge being more valuable, and actual testing methods being less important. The provincial government should incentivize institutions to help faculty develop differentiated assessment styles through grant funding.

Furthermore, assessments should evaluate a student's knowledge in a fair and effective manner. Final examinations, in particular, can cause a lot of stress for students and students often underperform during these final examinations due to this stress. Alternative forms of assessments like a summative paper or a series of tests could provide a better opportunity for students to demonstrate what they have learned as

³⁷ Rousseau, Paulina. 2018. "Best Practices in Alternative Assessments", 3.

³⁸ Farran, Y. and Shamma, R. 2015. "The Faculty Accessibility Resource Guide". *McMaster Institute for Innovation and Excellence in Teaching and Learning*, 5.

opposed to one single high-stakes examination.³⁹ HEQCO should conduct more research on the effectiveness and fairness of final examinations practices and establish a best practice framework for final examination pedagogy.

FACULTY AND TRAINING

Principle: Students should be able to learn in inclusive and safe learning spaces.

Principle: Instructors should be equipped with the right tools and training to ensure inclusive and safe learning spaces.

Principle: Training frameworks should have clear learning outcomes.

Principle: Equity and Inclusion offices are a valuable resource for institutions to ensure their learning environments are inclusive and safe.

Concern: Learning is negatively impacted when students experience feelings of isolation and exclusion in the classroom.

Concern: Instructors in post-secondary education are not required to complete inclusivity trainings, such as gender sensitivity training, cultural sensitivity training, accessibility training, decolonial training, or sexual violence education and training.

Concern: Instructors may lack accurate information on how to effectively support marginalized students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should develop and commit to an inclusive education strategy at the post-secondary level, with adequate consultation from students, faculty, and institutions.

Recommendation: The provincial government should identify Equity and Inclusion offices as an essential service to be utilized as a resource for the creation of these trainings and invest in their creation and maintenance.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate universities establish a baseline, minimum standard level of training to provide faculty and student-facing staff with inclusive educational tools and sensitivity training and principles.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate universities include a mandatory renewal cycle, not greater than five (5) years, to ensure training remains appropriate and relevant.

For students to fully thrive in their learning environments, an inclusive learning space must be provided. Inclusive education can be defined as education based on principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students and is fostered in areas such as curriculum development, physical surroundings, and the broader learning environment.⁴⁰

Existing biases and barriers can limit a student's prospect for learning and post-graduate success.⁴¹ These barriers may relate to sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, race, ethnic origin, religion, socio-economic background, physical or mental ability, or other factors. Furthermore, several of these

³⁹ "Alternative to Traditional Testing," Berkeley Centre for Teaching & Learning, November 23, 2018, <https://teaching.berkeley.edu/resources/improve/alternatives-traditional-testing>

⁴⁰ "Quick Facts: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy." Ontario Ministry of Education, last modified 2016.

⁴¹ Ontario Ministry of Education. *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation*. Toronto, Ontario: Ministry of Education, 2014, 6.

factors may intersect to create additional barriers for some students.⁴² In a UK-based study, researchers found that non-white students and students with higher levels of ‘adverse circumstances’ reported lower levels of belongingness – which largely corresponded to national evidence about student characteristics associated with lower rates of retention and attainment.⁴³

Furthermore, students are also concerned about unmet accommodations and inclusive learning for students with disabilities, including learning disabilities. OUSA’s Students with Disabilities Policy Paper outlines how the post-secondary sector needs to be adequately supplied with proper training measures for staff and faculty to be able to address the needs of all students within their classroom.⁴⁴ A clear training framework should be established to ensure teaching staff create classes with the Universal Design for Learning Pedagogy. Not all students with disabilities formally disclose their disability or need for accommodations. However, faculty members can employ many simple strategies to ensure a more accessible and more inclusive experience for students with disabilities, which can improve the classroom experience for many students, regardless of level of ability, which simultaneously makes teaching as a whole more effective.⁴⁵ Some strategies and examples include implementing more visual aids in lectures, for example.⁴⁶

As such, it is important to address barriers related to inclusive learning environments to support all students in Ontario’s post-secondary system and ensure that student learning and the quality of a program is not hindered by such issues. Currently, members of faculty and administration at post-secondary institutions are not required to complete sensitivity or equity training, which would provide them with greater awareness, knowledge, as well as teaching tools and techniques, to support and foster inclusive education.

In 2009, Ontario launched the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy at the K-12 level to help educators and those within the education sector work together to address challenges and systemic barriers through policy and practice. The strategy outlines ongoing work that must be done in order to ensure that schools continue to provide caring, inclusive, safe, and accepting environments that support the achievement and well-being of every student.⁴⁷ The strategy outlines that school boards are expected to provide sensitivity training and professional learning in the areas of gender and sexual orientation, antiracism, antidiscrimination, and gender-based violence to increase their knowledge and understanding of equity and inclusive education.⁴⁸ They are also expected to provide professional learning in effective early intervention and prevention strategies and practices to deal with incidents related to racism, gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment, and inappropriate sexual behaviour.⁴⁹

While the nature and structure of a primary or secondary institution varies from post-secondary, OUSA believes that the principles and actions taken in this strategy can work as a good framework or guide to develop a strategy at the post-secondary level. Instructors at the post-secondary level are not to be tasked with taking on the role of conflict resolution or primary support but provide an inclusive learning environment to students as well as the tools and information for them to seek further support.

OUSA recommends that the provincial government develop a framework, with the aid of students, faculty, and institutions, and commit to mediating barriers and challenges to inclusive learning experiences. In doing so, the provincial government can not only better support the diverse range of students attending post-secondary institutions in Ontario today, but also to improve the quality of learning and teaching in

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Thomas, Liz et. al. *Supporting Student Success: Strategies for Institutional Change*. What Works? Student Retention & Success Programme, April 2017, 10.

⁴⁴ Bassett, Laura, Sarah Letersky, Raelle Ricci, and Danielle Pierre. “Policy Paper: Students with Disabilities.” Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, Toronto ON, 2016, 24.

⁴⁵ Schley, Sarah. “How to create an inclusive classroom for students with disabilities.” Inside Higher Ed, February 27, 2018. <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2018/02/27/how-create-inclusive-classroom-students-disabilities-opinion?height=500&iframe=true&width=775>

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ontario Ministry of Education. *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation*. Toronto, Ontario: Ministry of Education, 2014, 5.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 31.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Ontario universities and encourage the tools faculty and institutions can use to achieve this. Equity and Inclusion offices should be defined as an essential service by the provincial government, and due to the support, these offices provide, the provincial government should invest in them appropriately. The provincial government should mandate that universities establish a baseline of training that student-facing staff must complete, while also allowing for institutions to implement optional supplementary training. These trainings should be implemented with a renewal cycle that is no longer than five years, to ensure the training remains relevant, and that appropriate best practices can be included as they are developed.

POLICY STATEMENT

TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

Whereas: All faculty and graduate teaching assistants should be encouraged and have the opportunity to be engaged in ongoing professional development related to teaching.

Whereas: Teaching excellence should be evaluated, framed, and recognized in a similar style to research excellence in post-secondary environments.

Whereas: A variety of deep learning opportunities including engagement within the academic community better prepares students for post-graduate experiences.

Whereas: Institutions should have structures in place to support undergraduate teaching assistants and provide these learning opportunities for the development of upper year students' knowledge in their field.

Whereas: Undergraduate teaching assistant opportunities are positive experiential learning opportunities.

Whereas: Undergraduate teaching assistants should be afforded the same training as graduate teaching assistants

Whereas: Student evaluations of teaching provide important feedback for faculty and universities on learning experiences and teaching quality.

Whereas: Student evaluations of teaching should be balanced with peer review-based assessments of teaching throughout a course.

Whereas: Evaluations of teaching should be implemented throughout the duration of a course, and not just at completion.

Whereas: Institutions need diverse perspectives, which can be achieved by hiring new faculty.

Whereas: Students benefit from diverse teaching styles and perspectives, improving their quality of post-secondary education.

Whereas: All students should have opportunities to participate in experiential learning as part of their undergraduate degree.

Whereas: Experiential learning opportunities go beyond traditional forms of work-integrated learning and placements.

Whereas: Accredited experiential learning opportunities should include activities such as volunteering, industry-recognized projects, mentorship, and leadership opportunities.

Whereas: Experiential learning provides valuable skills development, career readiness, and career opportunities for students after they graduate.

Whereas: Experiential learning opportunities should provide accommodations for students with disabilities and marginalized students to ensure all students are able to access these same opportunities.

Whereas: There is value in including experiential learning opportunities as a supplementary part of course learning

Whereas: Students should be able to easily understand, articulate, and display the skills they acquired, as well as the learning outcomes they achieved, through their experiential learning and co-op opportunities.

Whereas: Students should receive institutional accreditation for their experiential learning and co-op opportunities.

Whereas: Students should have the opportunity to participate in research during their undergraduate education.

Whereas: Undergraduate research opportunities provide students with skill development and career readiness.

Whereas: Undergraduate research opportunities contribute to the mission of universities.

Whereas: All students should be able to complete placements mandatory for their academic and professional success in a timely manner.

Whereas: All placement opportunities should accommodate the needs of students with accommodation needs and disabilities.

Whereas: Differentiated evaluations and assessment styles allow for a more accurate demonstration of knowledge.

Whereas: Universal design philosophies ensure accessibility is built into instructional standards and campus infrastructure outside of traditional spaces for students with disabilities

Whereas: Differentiated evaluations and assessment styles would be beneficial for all students and would better support students requiring accommodations.

Whereas: Final examinations are an important component of assessing learning.

Whereas: Summative evaluations should be designed to demonstrate competence and general knowledge.

Whereas: Students should be able to learn in inclusive and safe learning spaces.

Whereas: Instructors should be equipped with the right tools and training to ensure inclusive and safe learning spaces.

Whereas: Training frameworks should have clear learning outcomes.

Whereas: Equity and Inclusion offices are a valuable resource for institutions to ensure their learning environments are inclusive and safe.

Be it resolved that: The provincial government should support ongoing learning opportunities for faculty through envelope funding for university Teaching Centres with an emphasis on innovation in pedagogy.

Be it further resolved that (BIFRT): The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should establish metrics for quantifying varied learning experiences and engagement levels to assess teaching excellence.

BIFRT: Strategic Mandate Agreements should be adapted to reward increased engagement through deep learning and experiential learning.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to provide undergraduate teaching assistant opportunities.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to provide training and protections for undergraduate teaching assistants.

BIFRT: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should continue to develop standards for assessing the quality of evaluations of teaching.

BIFRT: The provincial government should work with institutions to develop framework that combines peer review and student evaluation of teaching as a uniform way of quantifying teaching quality.

BIFRT: The provincial government should establish best practices and set metrics for the evaluation of teaching to be negotiated into future Strategic Mandate Agreements.

BIFRT: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should investigate and promote best practices in the design and implementation of evaluation tools for faculty to receive ongoing feedback.

BIFRT: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should develop metrics to account for biases and prejudices against instructors in evaluations.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that student and peer evaluations of teaching are taken into consideration in the assessment and renewal of instructors after the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario has developed metrics to account for biases and prejudices against instructors in evaluations.

BIFRT: The provincial government should work with institutions to create a sector-wide strategy on faculty hiring and renewal.

BIFRT: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should conduct research on contract academic staff in comparison to general faculty trends in Ontario to examine impacts of current trends on students, instructors, and universities.

BIFRT: The government should create a Select Committee to establish best practices for faculty protections that prevent labour disputes and the adverse effects they present to students.

BIFRT: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should expand its definition of experiential learning, while ensuring opportunities are associated with clear learning outcomes, and provide institutions with a framework to assess and credit experiential opportunities as they evolve.

BIFRT: The Council of Ontario Universities should set best practices for universities and faculty to effectively develop, implement, and promote experiential learning experiences to students.

BIFRT: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should work to develop a toolkit that provides faculty with greater resources and information on how to incorporate experiential learning opportunities into their courses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should work with community-based partners to incentivize experiential learning opportunities that can benefit students as well as the broader community.

BIFRT: The provincial government should uphold the commitments outlined in the Highly Skilled Workforce strategy to ensure every student has at least one experiential learning opportunity by the time they graduate from post-secondary education.

BIFRT: The provincial government should implement a needs-based bursary to allow students with financial accessibility concerns to have access to experiential learning opportunities.

BIFRT: The provincial government should recognize and commit to investing in a diverse range of high-quality experiential learning opportunities through envelope funding across all areas of study to address equalizing opportunities across different fields of study.

BIFRT: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should conduct more research on how institutions can set and incorporate learning outcome frameworks and standards for experiential learning opportunities and co-ops.

BIFRT: The provincial government should continue to support efforts of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario to develop a system-wide learning outcomes framework for Ontario institutions.

BIFRT: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should develop a co-curricular recognition framework that institutions can utilize when implementing a form of recognition on their campuses.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities should provide envelope funding for the development and implementation of co-curricular recognition systems.

BIFRT: Provincial government should provide funding for undergraduate research opportunities for undergraduate students in non-STEM fields.

BIFRT: The provincial government should create bursaries and grants to lessen the financial burden of students who choose to undertake undergraduate research.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities should adopt undergraduate student research opportunities as a metric used in Ontario's Strategic Mandate Agreements

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide incentives to businesses, government organizations, non-profits, or other relevant parties to create more placement opportunities for students

BIFRT: The provincial government should offer financial assistance through grants or bursaries to reduce financial barriers associated with travel to mandatory student placements.

BIFRT: The provincial government should incentivize institutions to help faculty with the development and implementation of evidence-backed, differentiated evaluations through grant funding

BIFRT: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should conduct research on the effectiveness and fairness of final examinations practices and establish a best practice framework for final examination pedagogy

BIFRT: The provincial government should develop and commit to an inclusive education strategy at the post-secondary level, with adequate consultation from students, faculty, and institutions.

BIFRT: The provincial government should identify Equity and Inclusion offices as an essential service to be utilized as a resource for the creation of these trainings and invest in their creation and maintenance.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate universities establish a baseline, minimum standard level of training to provide faculty and student-facing staff with inclusive educational tools and sensitivity training and principles.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate universities include a mandatory renewal cycle, not greater than five (5) years, to ensure training remains appropriate and relevant.