McMaster University

Inspiring Innovation and Discovery

McMaster University

Task Force on Teaching & Learning: Initial Observations and Recommendations

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Executive Summary

1

Executive Summary

In December 2007 the Provost established the Task Force on Teaching and Learning (TOTAL) to examine the effectiveness of teaching and learning practices at McMaster with the aim of identifying the ‘ideal’ teaching and learning environment for McMaster and recommending strategies and directions to help achieve that ideal. The fourteen-member task force comprises representatives from all Faculties on campus, Teaching Professors, teaching and learning partners (library, Centre for Leadership in Learning [CLL]/ Learning Technologies Resource Centre [LTRC], Centre for Student Development [CSD]), and graduate and undergraduate students.

TOTAL was charged by the Provost with four goals:

1) *Document the Current State: Where are we now?*
2) *Identify the Ideal Future State: Where should we be?*
3) *Design Strategies to achieve the ideal state*
4) *Implement, Evaluate and Disseminate*

The initial work of the TOTAL has focused on the first goal and the collection and analysis of qualitative data on teaching and learning practices and issues from a representative sample of faculty, staff, students and administrators on campus. In order to do this all members of the task force conducted Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) interviews with their respective Faculties or constituent groups. Over 550 individuals representing all faculties and teaching and learning partners on campus were interviewed or surveyed in this process including administrators, instructors*, staff and students. All aspects of the teaching and learning environment at McMaster were addressed in the SWOT analyses including those directly affecting students and instructors, support infrastructure and services, community interaction, and future directions and planning.

*Note: In this report the term ’instructor’ is used to refer to any individual involved in the design and delivery of instruction on campus and includes full-time faculty, Teaching Professors, sessional faculty, Contractually Limited Appointments, librarians, counsellors and staff.

A number of common topics and concepts emerged in the issues raised through the SWOT analyses. These 'emerging issues' identify a need for reinforcement of our commitment as a community to the pursuit of a shared purpose of excellence and innovation in teaching and learning. Four key recommendations on which to focus future work and exploration are proposed that will enable McMaster to undertake such a 'pedagogical renaissance.'

These four recommendations ***(The Four Rs*****),** that reflect the sentiments of the McMaster community, are:

1) Recognize and reward excellence in teaching and learning

2) Rejuvenate the infrastructure that supports teaching and learning

3) Re-engineer processes, programs, systems and support structures to enable success

4) Reiterate our commitment to scholarly teaching and learning

The next steps for the Task Force on Teaching and Learning will include: release of this report and solicitation of input from the university community, identification of issues requiring additional data gathering, analysis of quantitative data supplied by Planning and Analysis, and prioritization of the order in which to address issues. The campus community will be informed of the TOTAL activities and findings at all stages of the work.

Introduction

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Introduction

McMaster is uniquely positioned to provide strong leadership in the complex environment that is higher education in the 21st century. Our reputation for innovation and excellence in research, teaching and learning; the appointment of new academic directors; the creation of a 'Teaching Professoriate', and significant changes in the support structure for teaching and learning provide us with an excellent opportunity to lead once more in the international educational arena. McMaster is fully committed to the provision of an educational experience for all students across campus that will engage their own spirit of learning and discovery and help them develop their skills as life-long learners. This commitment is reflected in one of the three goals identified for McMaster University in Refining Directions:

> *"To provide an innovative and stimulating learning environment where students can prepare themselves to excel in life."*

Unfortunately, rising costs, expansion and growth, competition, decreased government support, increased calls for accountability, changing demographics, changing technologies, the information explosion, and increased student expectations are just a few of the external pressures that have challenged the academic community in recent years. McMaster is certainly not uniquely affected by these factors. In the initial data-gathering phase of the Task Force on Teaching and Learning (TOTAL) it became apparent that McMaster is struggling with many of the same issues faced by other institutions of higher education, issues that are making it increasingly difficult to provide the quality of education required for students to excel in their future lives.

The underlying message is a need for change in the way we organize, deliver, administer, support and reward teaching and learning at McMaster. However, before we move to implementing change we must first identify and understand how issues related to teaching and learning are currently being played out on our campus. We must also identify the characteristics of the 'ideal' teaching and learning environment for McMaster and establish strategies to achieve that 'ideal'.

To that end, the TOTAL was established by the Provost with the mandate of identifying the current state of teaching and learning at McMaster, identifying the ideal future state, designing strategies to attain that future state, and to implement, evaluate and disseminate information gathered during the process (Section 9, Appendix 1: TOTAL Terms of Reference).

One of the first goals of TOTAL has been to identify the issues relating to the current state of teaching and learning across campus through a thorough analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) facing teaching and learning at McMaster (Section 3; all SWOT summaries are attached in Section 9, Appendix 3). Over 550 individuals were questioned, with representatives from all faculties and teaching and learning support units across campus. The results of this data gathering process are presented in this report (Sections 4, 5 and 6). During the SWOT analyses we focused on identifying issues that related to students, instructors*, support infrastructure and services, community relations and future directions (see Themes, Section 9, Appendix 1). A number of questions were also used to guide our analysis of the SWOT data including:

- Which of the issues raised are particularly problematic?
- How are different units/areas on campus addressing them?
- What can we learn from each other?
- Which solutions are working well? Which are not?
- Which issues are so large they need university-wide support and commitment to resolve?

It is clear that there are common topics and concepts emerging among the issues raised through the SWOT analyses that need to be resolved. We have grouped and presented these as ‘emerging issues’ in this initial report (Section 4). Fortunately, many of these issues are not unique to McMaster and there are many examples and solutions in place in other institutions from which we can learn. Analysis of the information gathered from the SWOT analyses allowed us to present recommendations for further exploration which are organized under 4 main headings (Section 7). These recommendations synthesize the views of the McMaster community as expressed through the SWOT process. Future tasks for TOTAL are identified in section 8.

*Note: In this report the term ’instructor’ is used to refer to any individual involved in the design and delivery of instruction on campus and includes full-time faculty, Teaching Professors, sessional faculty, Contractually Limited Appointments, librarians, counsellors and staff.

Process

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Process

The Task Force on Teaching and Learning met regularly (weekly or bi-weekly) from late January through March to discuss, establish and conduct procedures to collect, analyze and disseminate information regarding the 'Current State' of teaching and learning on campus. The process followed is summarized below:

- in February and March individual TOTAL members gave presentations introducing the mandate of the task force and data collection processes to selected groups across campus including Undergraduate Council, Senate, Faculty councils, Dean's councils, general Faculty meetings, and departmental/unit meetings;
- a wiki site (http://libwiki.mcmaster.ca/total/index.php/Main/HomePage) was established as a communication tool and repository of information for TOTAL members. Members of the university can communicate with TOTAL via total@mcmaster.ca;
- quantitative data related to teaching and learning issues such as faculty: student/instructor ratios, class sizes, enrolment trends, instructor teaching loads etc. were requested from Planning and Analysis. These data will be analyzed during the next phase of work for the task force (section 8);
- in order to collect qualitative data on teaching and learning practices and issues from a representative sample of faculty, staff, students and administrators on campus all members of the task force conducted SWOT interviews with their respective Faculties or constituent groups. This process was initiated by conducting a SWOT analysis with TOTAL members;
- the SWOT analyses were structured to obtain information relevant to each of the five thematic areas identified for TOTAL namely: The Student Focused Organization, The Effective Teaching Organization, The Supportive Organization, The Engaged Organization and the Future Focused Organization;
- SWOT interviews were conducted over a three month period (February through April 2008); a detailed listing of these interviews is included in Appendix 2. More than 550 people were interviewed from all Faculties and teaching and learning partner units (library, CLL [Centre for Leadership in Learning]/ LTRC [Learning Technologies Resource Centre], CSD [Centre for Student Development]) across campus. Task force members were responsible for summarizing and analyzing the SWOT data collected from their groups and individual SWOT Summary reports are included here as Appendix 3 (A through N);

- a full day retreat was held in May (followed by two subsequent meetings) to discuss and synthesize the SWOT summary data from all areas on campus and to begin to identify recommendations to be brought forward to the Provost by TOTAL;
- study visits to the University of Dayton and Wayne State University (Jeff Trzeciak, Carolyn Eyles & Sue Vajoczki) and Hong Kong University and the University of Shantou, China (Jeff Trzeciak and Carolyn Eyles) were also conducted to learn about effective teaching and learning practices at other institutions.
- A draft version of this report was submitted to the Provost and was circulated among members of the PVP, Faculty Deans and Senior Administrators in August. Comments received as feedback were taken into account during preparation of this version of the report.

'Measures of Success'

During the early meetings of the task force in February a considerable amount of discussion focused on the issue of "How to measure success of the task force" (i.e., how could we measure if the task force had enhanced teaching and learning at McMaster?). This discussion allowed task force members to fully explore the mandate and anticipated outcomes of the task force and to suggest and develop appropriate assessment metrics and criteria. The following 'Measures of Success' were agreed upon by the TOTAL membership (*Note: The TOTAL recognize that this list of criteria and metrics is not exhaustive and others may be added as recommendations are implemented and evaluated):*

- increased external recognition (e.g., more teaching and learning awards such as OCUFA teaching awards, 3M teaching awards, more visits to campus from other institutions interested in teaching and learning occurs at McMaster and/or how McMaster managed to change teaching and learning, etc.);
- increased and enhanced involvement of McMaster instructors (i.e., sessional faculty, Contractually Limited Appointments (CLAs), and faculty) in professional development activities related to teaching and learning;
- increased and enhanced involvement of McMaster instructors in scholarly activities related to teaching and learning (e.g., presenting teaching and learning research/activities/experiences at conferences/workshops, published research in teaching and learning);
- enhanced logistic support for instructors;
- creation and sustainability of an effective (and widely used) mechanism for sharing information regarding teaching and learning at McMaster;
- development of the university's structures, as identified in this report, to minimize barriers and maximize opportunities for innovation and excellence in teaching and learning;

- enhanced NSSE scores (i.e., demonstrating increased levels of student engagement);
- improved scores on existing satisfaction surveys (e.g., LibQUAL);
- enhanced reputation/ability to attract high quality students;
- enhanced ability to improve student performance during their tenure at McMaster;
- enhanced quality of student experiences at McMaster – in and outside of the classroom;
- enhanced post-graduation success of students – time to job placement, career choices, professional school admission, self-reported job satisfaction;
- increased engagement of alumni – i.e., ‘bonding’ with McMaster, meaningful and lasting relationships (e.g., increased participation in events/activities, particularly those that involve students); and,
- increased numbers of alumni involved in Continuing Education activities at McMaster.

Initial Observations

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Initial Observations

The SWOT Summary compiled for the McMaster campus was used to identify the following: ‘Things we do well’, ‘Things we need to improve upon’, ‘Opportunities for enhancement’, and ‘Barriers to success.’ Issues that relate to all five of the thematic areas identified (The Student Focused Organization, The Effective Teaching Organization, The Supportive Organization, The Engaged Organization and the Future Focused Organization) are included in each of these categories.

While it is still early in our deliberations, it is also apparent that there are common topics and concepts emerging from the issues raised during the SWOT analyses. At this time we offer the following recommendations to address some of those emerging issues. The list is not intended to be complete. Rather, it is illustrative of the issues identified from the extensive SWOT exercises conducted over the past several months.

Among our observations, we identified a strong desire for McMaster to:

> ***Reinforce our commitment as a community to the pursuit of a shared purpose of excellence and innovation in teaching and learning***

In order to do this successfully, we need to:

1. Recognize and reward for excellence in teaching and learning

2. Rejuvenate the infrastructure that supports teaching and learning

3. Re-engineer processes, programs, systems and support structures to enable success

4. Reiterate our commitment to scholarly teaching and learning

What we do well

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What we do well

The following areas of strength were identified from the results of the SWOT analyses. These do not necessarily equate with ‘good practices’ but represent characteristics identified by the McMaster community that can be capitalized upon to enhance the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning at McMaster:

- **McMaster has a well deserved reputation for excellence in research and for ‘innovation and risk-taking’ in teaching and learning**, particularly in the areas of problem-based learning and inquiry learning. These methodologies/ philosophies were referred to as a ‘strength’ across the University campus.

- **McMaster has leaders committed to enhancement of teaching and learning** and applies evidence-based decision-making processes to direct initiatives in teaching and learning.

- **In general, McMaster has extremely high quality faculty, staff and students**. Instructors are recognized to be generally knowledgeable and accessible to students and Teaching Professors are viewed as a significant strength and growth opportunity for teaching and learning at McMaster.

- **A wide variety of learning opportunities are provided on campus**, including both academic (experiential, international, undergraduate research, seminars and events) and non-academic (internships, volunteer, summer placements, clubs and societies, MacStAR).

- **Learning opportunities take place in a range of environments** including traditional lectures, labs, and tutorials, field settings, simulation and clinical learning centres, industry and community settings.

- **A variety of teaching methods and approaches are used** on campus including PBL (problem based learning), inquiry, experiential, distance and collaborative learning.

- **McMaster offers a large variety of high quality educational programs.** Some of these programs are highly acclaimed (e.g., limited enrolment programs – Arts& Science, BHSc), some allow high faculty to student ratios and small class sizes, some have desirable program components (e.g., undergraduate thesis requirement) and flexibility in course offerings/requirements, some have supplementary admissions processes (e.g., BHSc, Arts & Science).

- **Common Level I programs are viewed as a recruiting and student-focused strength**.

- **Professional development opportunities for faculty and teaching assistants** through workshops, orientation programs, TA day, and other services provided by CLL and faculty-specific units (e.g., Health Sciences).

- **Professional education opportunities** for community members and industry through the Centre for Continuing Education.

- **Mentorship activities** including faculty-faculty, student-faculty and student-student.

- **Provision of resources and services to support teaching and learning** through units such as the libraries, CLL, CSD, on-line Learning Management Systems, advising and counselling services. Alumni are also viewed as a significant resource.

- In some areas **outreach activities**, including events and competitions foster increased student engagement and stronger ties with the community.

- McMaster is viewed by students, particularly those currently enrolled in Professional Schools, as **‘good value for money.’**

Where we can improve

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Where we can improve

The following areas of improvement were identified from the results of the SWOT analyses. The responses indicated that the quality and effectiveness of teaching at learning at McMaster could be enhanced by:

- **Increasing recognition, encouragement and support for instructors to develop excellence in teaching and learning and become innovators and risk-takers in their teaching and learning practices**. Striving for excellence in instructional practices should be appropriately recognized through tenure and Career/Progress/Merit schemes.

- **Re-designing the course evaluation system** as the current system is not evidence-based, provides little feedback to instructors, and is largely viewed as a worthless process by students. Instructors should be held accountable for the quality of the learning experience they provide for their students. Course and instructor evaluations should be made public and easily available to university stakeholders including students.

- **Enhancing professional development programs in the area of teaching and learning for all instructors** including faculty, teaching assistants (graduate and undergraduate), sessional faculty, CLAs and appropriate staff. Instructors need to be aware of scholarly research and approaches to different types of learning (e.g., large classes, experiential, inquiry) and well trained in the use of classroom and communication technology. Enhanced training and professional development of graduate students as instructors and teaching assistants, as well as in non-academic aspects of professional behavior, is viewed as being particularly beneficial to the university.

- **Addressing the issue of relatively low numbers of permanent instructors** (particularly tenured, tenure-track, and teaching track instructors and librarians) involved in undergraduate teaching and learning. In some Faculties, the perception is that majority of students are taught by non-permanent sessional faculty, CLAs and Teaching Assistants. The over-reliance on non-permanent instructors does not encourage strong, long-lasting connections to be made between students and instructors. Instructors also need to have sufficient support staff to enable them to work effectively and enable them to provide a stimulating teaching and learning environment for students.

- **Directing resources to support new initiatives, innovations and risk-taking in teaching and learning, and exploring ways to sustain such funding.**

- **Examining ways to encourage and provide opportunities for full-time faculty and staff to be more effectively involved in the delivery of instruction**. Full time instructors need to have sufficient support staff to enable them to work effectively and enable them to provide a stimulating teaching and learning environment for students. Over-commitment of instructors leaves little time for student-instructor interactions. Unequal teaching loads need to be recognized and appropriately rewarded. Support systems need to be improved to reduce inefficient course management processes (e.g., grade reporting, room bookings, scheduling) that reduce the time an instructor has for 'instruction'.

- **Recognizing the value of engaging emeriti faculty and staff** in teaching and learning activities. Emeritus faculty and staff could alleviate many of the pressures placed on full time instructors, but there are few rewards, or even opportunities for recognition of the contributions made by this group of individuals. Relatively modest incentive systems could be designed to more effectively engage our emeriti.

- **Thoroughly reviewing the institutional and resource support for teaching and learning support units (that is, CLL/LTRC and CSD).** For example, there has been considerable strain on instructional and academic skills counselling services offered by CSD due to resource allocation.

- **Thoroughly reviewing the organization of and service provision by teaching and learning support units (that is, CLL, LRTC and CSD).** For example, there is considerable debate across campus stemming from faculty, students and administrators who have had divergent experiences with CLL/LTRC and this has led to different characterizations of their efficacy and usefulness as they are currently organized. As well, this spectrum of experiences has led different SWOT interviewees to make varied suggestions and hold diverse opinions about any future reconfiguration of the organization/service provision of CLL/LTRC.

- **Enhancing student support services and directing them towards a model of skill development** (writing skills, academic skills, numeracy skills, career development, etc.).

- **Enhancing student support services for international students and students with disabilities.** Current levels of service are inadequate given recent growth in the size of this student population.

- **Examining the quality, management and scheduling of learning spaces (including technology) across campus.** All learning spaces should have appropriate infrastructure and technology and should be managed in a way that allows for flexibility and greatest efficiency in the use of the space.

- **Developing a system that will encourage communication of information** regarding issues such as curriculum development and design, instructional styles and processes, evaluation tools and perceived ‘best practices’ in teaching and learning. We need to develop more effective tools and opportunities to share, exchange and communicate information regarding teaching and learning practices between members or units of the McMaster campus and with the external community.

- **Improving the consistency of the quality of education provided to students across campus,** particularly in the content of programs and courses. Enhanced linkages and communication strategies between Faculties and Programs regarding program development, design, and delivery would be beneficial. Students are concerned about outdated curricula, course availability, overconcentration on discipline ‘specialist’ fields, and the lack of opportunity to explore complementary and interdisciplinary fields.

- **More strongly encouraging and developing alumni and external partnerships.** Alumni are an extremely valuable resource for the university and should be encouraged to be involved in the teaching and learning environment – as advisors, mentors, career guides. Faculty should also be encouraged to serve (and media-trained appropriately) as ‘experts’ for interactions with the media. Elementary and high school outreach programs are limited and should be expanded.

Recommendations

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Recommendations for further exploration

The extensive SWOT analyses conducted as part of the initial work of the task force identified that our success as an institution lies not in the strengths of individual members and units, but in our collective ability to work together. The university must therefore nurture and support an atmosphere whereby faculty, administrators, staff, alumni and students come together in pursuit of a shared purpose of achieving excellence in teaching and learning. As an institution we need to ***reinforce our commitment as a community to the pursuit of a shared purpose of excellence and innovation in teaching and learning***.

In order to do this, four key recommendations (**the Four Rs**) are presented here for further exploration. These four recommendations synthesize the sentiments of the whole McMaster community (specific recommendations relating to the Faculties of Social Sciences and Humanities can be found in Appendices 3F and 3H respectively). The SWOT analyses identified that in order to reinforce our commitment as a community to the pursuit of a shared purpose of excellence and innovation in teaching and learning there is a need to:

1. **Recognize and reward excellence in teaching and learning**
2. **Rejuvenate the infrastructure that supports teaching and learning**
3. **Re-engineer processes, programs, systems and support structures to enable success**
4. **Reiterate our commitment to scholarly teaching and learning**

1. Recognize and reward excellence in teaching and learning

a) Establish a culture that values and rewards teaching and learning excellence on par with research. For example:

- Give prominence to teaching and learning in the organization (e.g., Teaching Sabbaticals, University Teaching Professors);
- Retool Career/Progress/Merit and Tenure & Promotion process to more appropriately recognize contributions to teaching and learning;
- Design an ‘evidence-based’ course evaluation system that allows clear identification of teaching excellence and provides valuable feedback to instructors;
- Establish a program of rewards and recognition for teaching and learning (words, behavior, attitude), particularly at the Faculty level;
- Establish and endorse a program of “teaching champions”, to serve as mentors and encourage the ongoing development of instructors across campus;
- Recognize innovation in teaching/learning as well as research and provide ongoing funding of effective teaching/learning practices;
- Recognize and reward programs and individuals who emphasize the student experience, particularly the first year experience;
- Encourage and provide opportunities to enhance scholarship in teaching and learning;
- Provide appropriate staffing levels for those supporting teaching/learning;
- Support instructors in ways they want to be supported (teaching release, administrative assistance, etc.);
- Identify, encourage and support candidates in their application for external teaching awards (e.g., 3M, OCUFA, LIFT);
- Publicize/communicate success in the areas of teaching and learning to the university community and outside world.

b) Provide an enhanced professional development program for ALL instructional staff (faculty, sessional faculty, TAs, librarians, CLL/LTRC staff, CSD). For example:

- Enhance and expand opportunities for developing instructional skills, curriculum design skills, course management skills, technological skills, scholarship in teaching and learning - for all instructors (in order to build our future academy). Ensure that appropriate and relevant; workshops/developmental activities are available at departmental/faculty levels and are offered at times convenient for instructors (e.g., faculty meeting times). Emphasize ‘go to the instructors’ approach with help/support/training/development activities;
- Provide incentives for instructional staff to be involved in professional development activities – e.g., Summer Institutes, Teaching Fellows Program;
- Recognize and reward completion of formal orientation programs including teaching effectiveness workshops. Rewards may be in the form of ‘bonus’

funds paid into research or teaching accounts. (Money put into departmental budget based on who /how many faculty are engaged in teaching/learning activities - University of Sydney model http://www.usyd.edu.au/learning/quality/funding.shtml);

- Focus in particular on the training and development of instructional skills in TA's - these are the future of the academy and should be properly prepared and supported;
- Formalize a student-to-student mentorship program (e.g., graduate students mentoring 4th year U/G students);
- Training and development should include leadership development and mentoring (future chairs, deans, etc);
- Provide support and incentives for individual faculty to be involved in media, community, recruitment (with a focus on areas beyond the local catchment), advancement, alumni relations and communities of practice. Examples of support might be to provide appropriate media training (public relations), interpersonal communication skill training, market research training.

c) Align budget with strengths and priorities:

- Fund our strengths based on clearly identified institutional priorities;
- Support new initiatives in teaching and learning that are innovative and have the potential to enhance the experience of both students and instructors;
- Support enterprising behavior such as innovation and risk taking by providing opportunities for instructors and staff to explore and experiment with new methods of instructional delivery and assessment without penalty if not immediately successful (e.g., at the instructor's discretion course evaluations for 'experimental' courses may, or may not, be included in CP/M evaluations).

2. Rejuvenate the infrastructure that supports teaching and learning

The effectiveness of the partners for teaching and learning at McMaster (CSD academic skills and disability services, CLL/LTRC, and the libraries) should be enhanced through strengthened support for collaboration, interaction and communication between these units and faculty. These units should be housed in highly visible spaces that encourage user-centered ('go to' not 'come to') approaches and have appropriate staffing in alignment with the educational priorities of the university and faculties. In order to do this:

a) A thorough review of units supporting teaching and learning on campus should be conducted that examines structure and function to ensure that effective collaboration and communication between these units results in enhanced service provision.

  - Examine ways of strengthening central service units (e.g., CLL/LTRC), but at the same time allow for customizing to the individual Faculties' unique circumstances. The model proposed should not eliminate central organization, planning and reporting and the integrative function of existing university-wide offices. Officers should be involved in the daily life of their assigned Faculty, but also speak to one another in a central office.

  - Explore the effectiveness of a model observed at other institutions involving secondment of instructors from Faculties to centralized units such as CLL/LTRC (as prestigious 'Teaching Fellows') for periods of six months to a year. This could provide additional staffing to the central unit, foster development of interfaculty dialogue between instructors and would help enhance opportunities for the development of distributed 'Faculty-specific' teaching and learning strategies.

b) Explore the potential for developing 'Centres for Teaching, Learning, Communications and Advancement'. These 'Centres' could serve as Innovative Program Incubators for temporary and flexible interdisciplinary programs integrating research and teaching (e.g., Adaptive Technology Resource Centre, Cognitive Science & the Arts Centre, Global Media Study Centre, Communication Skills Centre).

c) Expand CSD academic skills services with the primary role of supporting and facilitating learning skill development. The educational impact of CSD could be enhanced by:

  - Advocacy of its purpose by faculty/TAs/sessional faculty;
  - Change in advertising/promotion by instructors;
  - Advertising/promoting skill development functions through contact with first year classes;
  - Expansion of ESL (English as a Second Language) opportunities;
  - Creating a writing centre on campus - the current writing clinic should be expanded and opportunities for discipline-based writing skill development should be enhanced (at both undergraduate and graduate levels).

  This expanded CSD academic skills services unit could provide support for students, faculty and staff in the areas of writing skills, presentation skills and 21st century fluencies (including numeracy, media and communication fluencies, and technological/information fluency).

d) Continue with the enhancement and improvement of both physical and virtual learning spaces across campus. Build upon our successes (e.g., Hamilton Hall – Math Café). Explore mechanisms to introduce sustainable programs for inclusion

e) Enhance technology, facilities and opportunities for distance learning.

f) Create budget allocations for support units that reflect actual support needs.

3. Re-engineer processes, programs, systems and support structures to enable success

A universal sentiment, manifest across all SWOT analyses, identified that instructors were being held back or constrained from achieving their teaching and learning goals by ineffective institutional processes, programs and systems. Institutional processes, programs, systems and support are a means, not an end. They should be optimized in order to remove barriers and allow both instructors and students to excel. There is therefore an urgent need to overhaul the McMaster academic and administrative IT infrastructure. Processes that need to be re-designed to achieve more effective support for the teaching and learning environment include:

- Room scheduling;
- Learning Management System;
- Grade reporting;
- Registration;
- Career/Progress/Merit (CP/M) and Tenure & Promotion.

4. Reiterate our commitment to scholarly teaching and learning by:

a) Establishing a curriculum review and development process in every unit (faculty and support) that:

- Ensures every unit participates in development of a curriculum plan that identifies skills, knowledge and learning outcomes for both courses and programs. The review/update of program/course structure and content on a regular basis in order to ensure consistency in learning opportunities and effective communication (e.g., template for course design, standardized presentation of course descriptions);
- Recognizes and is responsive to change in students, expectations, technologies, etc.;
- Builds on strengths but focuses on the future;

  - Creates linkages between planning and budget, assessment (accountability), advancement;
  - Plans for legislative changes/other required changes – and is proactive, not responsive;
  - Engages support units in the planning processes for new programs to identify implications for support. Ensures informed decisions are made that match appropriate instructors with courses (which are in the best interests of the program and of the students).

b) Creating a university-wide body (Program Development Committee) that reviews program/course design and provides meaningful avenues to engage the campus community in planning teaching and learning opportunities for a shared future, including inter-faculty opportunities for collaboration. This body must include student representation.

c) Building upon existing strengths and the wide variety of learning opportunities available to students – both academic and non-academic – including:

  - Enhancing experiential, international, inquiry, research, internship, and volunteer opportunities, and making these available to all students on campus;
  - Exploring partnerships with external agencies (e.g., industry, government) that may help in the creation of learning opportunities for students;
  - Ensuring that every student graduates with skills in the areas of written, oral and visual communication, 21st century fluencies (creation of a compulsory first/second year course?);
  - Appropriately encouraging and recognizing non-academic learning such as participation in clubs and societies, athletic and sports teams, and volunteering.

d) Integrating a variety of meaningful experiences in every student’s curriculum (e.g., volunteerism, coop/internships, internationalization, research-oriented learning opportunities on campus, experiential education, year abroad). This process of integration needs to go hand in hand with university support for student initiated clubs/projects, etc. and support for an inclusive community on campus.

e) Developing a ‘Community of Practice’ to research, share and communicate ‘best practices’ regarding teaching and learning across the University and beyond:

  - Create opportunities for collaboration and inter/multi/transdisciplinarity at all levels (undergraduate/graduate/research);
  - Include input from external ‘experts in the field’;

  - Recognize individual/team contributions to the ‘Community of Practice’ through the CP/M process.

f) Organizing a series of ‘days of dialogue’ where members from different units engage in discussions around teaching and learning. This will foster greater understanding of the diversity of subject areas represented across the campus. It will also demystify new disciplinary and thematic areas, such as cognitive science and cultural studies, which do not fit neatly into traditional disciplinary definitions.

g) Encouraging and supporting instructors to develop expertise in the ‘scholarship of teaching and learning’ and to more widely disseminate the results of their research in pedagogy and curriculum development.

h) Engaging our alumni, and the broader community, through enhanced communication processes, and invitations to become involved in curriculum design and planning, program evaluation, and career advice/development processes. Reward programs that form linkages with the external university community.

i) Establishing evidence-based processes for evaluating and assessing success:

  - Apply processes and tools that allow evaluation of ‘Measures of Success’ identified in Section 3 above including NSSE, external teaching awards and instructor involvement in professional development activities etc.

Next Steps

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The next steps for the Task Force on Teaching and Learning will include:

- Release of this report on the initial observations and recommendations to the university community;

- Solicitation of comments/input from the university community on the content of this initial report;

- Identification of the issues requiring further data gathering and analysis;

- Identification of issues that require analysis of quantitative data related to teaching and learning such as faculty: student ratios, permanent: non-permanent instructor ratios, class sizes, and enrolment trends. These data will be requested from the Office of Planning and Analysis and will be used to help quantify success of the implemented changes;

- Identification and prioritization of the order in which to address issues;

- Continuation of the search for, and documentation of, examples of 'good practices' in teaching and learning, and posting/publishing these for the community to access;

- 'Learning from elsewhere' and adaptation/adoption of effective strategies/process for improvement;

- Meeting with representatives from other task forces (evaluation, budget, etc.) to determine areas of overlap;

- Establishing baseline measures to determine success;

- Establishing a timeline for the implementation of the recommendations and identification of responsible parties;

- Co-ordinate the implementation of recommendations brought forward in this report with the work of the Refining Directions Implementation Committee;

- Ongoing communication to keep the campus community informed of our progress.

Appendices

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Appendices are available online at: http://libwiki.mcmaster.ca/total/

1. **Task Force on Teaching and Learning: Terms of Reference**

2. **Chronological Summary of SWOT Analyses**

3. **SWOT Analysis Reports**
    - **A:** University Administrators; Facilitated by Carolyn Eyles and Jeff Trzeciak
    - **B:** McMaster Student Union, Facilitated by Arati Sharma
    - **C:** Faculty of Engineering; Facilitated by Yaser Haddara
    - **D:** DeGroote School of Business; Facilitated by Milena Head
    - **E:** Center for Leadership in Learning (CLL) and Learning and Technologies Resource Center (LTRC); Facilitated by Erika Kustra
    - **F:** Faculty of Social Science: Students, Staff, Faculty, Teaching Professors and Dr. Dick Day; Facilitated by Sue Vajoczki
    - **G:** Faculty of Science, Arts and Science Program; Facilitated by Carolyn Eyles and Miroslav Lovric
    - **H:** Faculty of Humanities (Faculty, Staff and Students); Facilitated by Alex Sevigny
    - **I:** Library and Classroom Audio Visual Services Staff; Facilitated by Karen Nicholson
    - **J:** Faculty of Health Science; Facilitated by Carolyn Eyles, Jeff Trzeciak, Sue Vajoczki and Ilana Bayer
    - **K:** Graduate Students; Facilitated by Ryan Kealey
    - **L:** Undergraduate Students from various faculties; Facilitated by Carolyn Eyles and Kinsie Clark
    - **M:** Center for Student Development; Facilitated by Peter Walsh and Sue Vajoczki
    - **N:** Task Force on Teaching and Learning (TOTAL) SWOT