

policy paper

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ontario undergraduate student alliance

Teaching Quality: A Balance of Scholarly Priorities and the Need for Innovation

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INTRODUCTION

Quality teaching is an undeniable component of a good education. The process of gaining knowledge through interaction with experts are one of the key reasons students attend university. In Ontario, a recent survey asking the public their opinions on the most important area for allocating additional resources indicated that out of a list of seven indicators, Ontarian overwhelmingly feel that improvements in the quality of teaching should be the number one priority.¹ The report summarized that, “teaching is the key factor that resonates most strongly in the minds of Ontarians when thinking about quality and the university.”² These views are quite reflective of the sentiments felt by many stakeholders who experience first-hand the quality of teaching at universities.

In recent years there has been a greater emphasis put on teaching and the improvement of the learning experience for students, as well as the support mechanisms that are available to instructors who wish to improve their teaching skills. This emphasis comes at a time when the role of instructors seems to be in transitional state. Technology may have played a role in shifting the learning process into a more self-directed activity. As Nancy Van Note Chism argues, “[There is] an emerging shift in roles and responsibilities from the teacher as presenter of content to a facilitator of learning, where focus moves away from what the teacher does with the course content to what the learner needs and can do.”³ In the past, students were dependent on teachers to relay important information to students, however, we are seeing a shift occurring where less emphasis is being placed on the ‘teaching’ aspect of the classroom and the process of learning and discovery are becoming the important factors.

The role of the instructor has evolved from a teacher of information to that of a facilitator for creativity and discovery as students work toward innovative solutions for traditional problems. Many universities are implementing new and innovative techniques to inspire students and allow them to achieve success, however the development of these learning experiences often comes with a price as there is a great deal of research and development that must be completed to implement new classroom programs and to ensure their success.

There is currently some consensus among institutions that teaching and research should be of equal priority. There is a long-standing tradition at Canadian and American universities that professors should allocate 40 per cent of their time on research, 40 per cent on teaching and the last 20 per cent on administrative and service duties, including sitting on university committees, editing journals, and attending conferences, amongst other things. Although there has been an acknowledgement of the need for balance between teaching and research, many believe that there are inherent oversights that have not been addressed. There are different perspectives on the relationship between teaching and research. Some professors have noted that the imbalance begins with the training that is given to PhD students and new professors. Graduate students learn vast amounts of knowledge in their discipline, however, are often given little direction when it comes to teaching that topic.

OUSA recognizes that some of the ideas we have put forward below are not changes that should be implemented on the government level, as they deal with the individual programs that are governed by Ontario institutions themselves. Rather, because we have suggested that increased funding levels and rewards should be provided by the government for quality teaching, we have outlined these recommendations in order to ensure that the increased funding allocated to universities is actually helping to achieve better quality education. Students believe that numerous components are necessary for quality teaching, from the delivery of course material to the evaluation process, and must be taken into account when assessing the government funding allocated to a university.

¹ Ekos Research Associates for the Council of Ontario Universities, “Public Perceptions on Quality” (Toronto: COU, 2003), p39.

² Ibid., p.40.

³ Nancy Van Note Chism, Essays on Teaching Excellence, “Toward the best in the Academy,” Vol. 16, No.5, 2004-2005; accessed online at <http://www.cofc.edu/~cetl/Essays/DevelopingaPhilosophyofTeaching.html>.

PRINCIPLES

OUSA has examined the issue of teaching quality for students in Ontario and developed recommendations in accordance with the following principles:

Principle One: Ontario universities require stable and adequate public funding for quality teaching regardless of the current government

Recently there has been a great deal of discussion around the price tag associated with a post secondary education; however OUSA believes that a discussion on the quality of education must parallel any discussion on price. In the last decade, students have seen the price of an education increase while quality has stayed the same or decreased. The Boyer Commission, which examined the education of undergraduates in the United States, notes “tuition income for undergraduates is one of the major sources of university income, helping to support research programs and graduate education, but the students paying the tuition get, in all too many cases, less than their money’s worth”⁴ Although funding in Ontario has been increased through government programs like the Quality Improvement Fund, generally enrolment has also increased, the new money that has been allocated has not sufficiently addressed all of the issues that surround teaching quality.

OUSA believes that it is imperative that stable models of funding need to be established so that universities have the ability to predict the level of funding that will be available and plan ahead. The introduction of multi-year funding plans that require accountability from both government to provide the funding, and institutions to use the funding in a responsible manner, will help to create the highest quality learning experience for students. Only through stable funding will universities be able to plan for the future and be able to clearly outline plans for improvement for aspects of quality education such as teaching.

The government also has the responsibility to provide funding at an adequate level that allows institutions to be able to respond to the climate of the day as well as be able to plan for the future. The province of Ontario and other government jurisdictions have spoken about the necessity of higher education to allow our province and country to be able to compete on a global level, however the current funding levels in Ontario prevent our universities from introducing advancements in educational pedagogy that are being implemented in other jurisdictions. These disparities will be further discussed in the concerns.

Principle Two: Quality teaching is a fundamental requirement of the university system in Ontario.

The primary function of universities is to educate its students, and consequently one of the central missions of Ontario universities is to provide quality teaching to all students in different programs. However, many students are currently getting the bare minimum when it comes to the quality of teaching at Ontario’s institutions of higher learning. Often, students sit in crowded lecture halls and listen to a professor with little to no engagement. There is great potential to inspire and engage students throughout their university careers, but in order to do so students must have access to learning environments that go beyond the traditional lecture experience. As Christopher Knapper, founding president of the Society of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and Queen’s University professor argues, “teachers do make a difference, especially through their role in motivating students, providing

⁴ The Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University, “Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America’s Research Universities”, p.5; accessed online at <http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf/>.

guidance on learning strategies, offering feedback on students' performance and generally services as validators of students' own learning efforts and accomplishments.”⁵

Although many governing bodies at universities in Ontario may feel that regulation of teaching quality standards may be an impediment to their institutional autonomy, OUSA believes that their autonomy is necessarily maintained through *what* is being taught. Expert professors must have control over their subject matter. *How* the material is taught is our concern. Because increased government funding is required to allow new teaching and classroom engagement techniques to be implemented, the provincial government, students, and the public must be enabled to ensure that the funds are successfully being directed to improve quality.

Principle Three: Teaching and research are two essential components of a higher education system.

OUSA believes that teaching and research are stronger when integrated. It would seem that the most constructive environment for both student and teacher alike would come from a forum that allows for both groups to learn from each other. Education policy researcher Jane Harrison sums up this process of mutual discovery saying, “The student learns within and is inspired by an environment of enquiry and creativity; while faculty are re-energized and revitalized by the act of teaching through which they gain new perspectives on old ideas.”⁶

The idea of new developments and innovation in teaching is becoming more commonly accepted. In the past, scholarship referred to research and exploration by a scholar looking further knowledge and information through discovery, however the process of discovery in itself is becoming a topic that is more prevalently researched, and OUSA commends these endeavours. The Boyer Commission briefly explores the potential opportunities at universities if research and discovery are integrated for the benefit of all parties, “scholar-teachers would treat the sites of their research as seminar rooms in which not only graduates but undergraduates observe and participate in the process of both discovery and communication of knowledge.”⁷ Ideas such as this need to be the goal for Ontario universities in order to be able to boast of offering the highest quality educational experience for its students.

Principle Four: Innovative ideas in both teaching and research should be recognized and encouraged through funding by the province.

The federal government has made academic research and innovation a major priority in Ontario and throughout Canada by establishing organizations such as the Canadian Foundation of Innovation (CFI) founded to fund research initiatives at colleges and universities in Canada.⁸ Furthermore, the provincial government has partnered with the federal government to provide funding dedicated to Canada Research Chair positions, further demonstrating their commitment to high quality academic research.

It is in the best interest of the province to begin to realize the potential that exists by providing similar funding opportunities for the development and implementation of innovative teaching and learning experiences at universities. As Jane Harrison argues, “the new economy places new expectations on its workers and requires of

⁵ Christopher Knapper, “Research on College Teaching and Learning: Applying What We Know, p.2.

⁶ Jane E. Harrison, “The Quality of University Teaching: Faculty Performance and Accountability. A Literature Review”, Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education Professional File, Spring 2002, p.4; accessed online at <http://robertwright.ca/Harrison.pdf>.

⁷ Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduate in the Research University, “Reinventing Undergraduate Education”, p.18; accessed online at <http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf/>.

⁸ Canadian Foundation for Innovation website; accessed online at <http://www.innovation.ca/index.cfm>.

them new skills and abilities. To ensure that students are better prepared for this environment, universities must change how they teach students and assess what they have learned.”⁹

OUSA believes that there is great potential in providing funding that allows innovative technology and research accomplishments to be married with the classroom. In many cases, the private sector is the primary beneficiary of many of the technological advancements that are discovered at institutions of higher learning. The Boyer Commission notes that “if faculty give appropriate attention to teaching innovations, universities can become the technological pacesetters in teaching that they have always been in research.”¹⁰ It should be cautioned however, that technology should never be a substitute for teaching but rather an enhancement to the interaction that exists between an instructor and her students.

Principle Five: Support programs for professors and instructors are a necessary component for teaching quality.

Just as students attend university to engage in a process of learning and discovery, this opportunity should also be afforded to the teaching staff. Learning to teach should never be a static process that only occurs at the beginning of one’s working career as a professor. Rather, it is important that support mechanisms are in place at every institution in Ontario that allows for professors to learn about new teaching techniques as well as gather feedback on their current teaching style.

As they have began to put emphasis on quality teaching, many institutions in Ontario have established centres or programs to support instructors in teaching. These centres often assist in the training and mentoring programs for new instructors or PhD students. However, the establishment and staffing of these centres has generally meant that money has been pulled from other areas. It is important that the province recognize the need for these centres in order to establish longstanding programs and plans for teaching quality.

There is currently no mandate from the province that university instructors must go through some form of teacher training. Some institutions have made it a requisite for new instructors; however OUSA believes that with the establishment of teaching centres at universities it is essential that any individual that will be contributing to teaching of undergraduate students should have the support and training from a teaching program or centre.

Principle Six: Teaching reviews and accountability for quality teaching for professors is essential at public institutions.

Teaching reviews generally occur in the early stages of a professors career path toward tenure, and then periodically afterward. However, in order for institutions to assess their teaching performance, and for a professor to gain feedback on ways to improve their techniques, it is important that these reviews happen on a regular basis, ideally on an annual basis. Arizona State University has mandated that annual reviews be conducted with all professors. Arizona State has taken this a step further and notes that any faculty member who consistently receives low teaching evaluations from students be fired, making quality teaching a requisite rather than an option.¹¹

It is important that the province must encourage the idea that accountability for quality teaching not be something that is dreaded by professors, but rather embraced as a mutual learning opportunity for both instructor and institution. Many institutions periodically offer brown-bag lunch programs on enhancing the learning experience for

⁹ Jane E. Harrison, “The Quality of University Teaching: Faculty Performance and Accountability. A Literature Review”, Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education Professional File, Spring 2002, p.5; accessed online at <http://robertwright.ca/Harrison.pdf>.

¹⁰ Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduate in the Research University, “Reinventing Undergraduate Education”, p.26; accessed online at <http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf/>.

¹¹ Mimi Wolverton, “Treading the Tenure-track Tightrope”, *Springer Science and Business Media BV*, 23(1), p.74.

students in the classroom. OUSA applauds the professors and institutions that have begun to recognize the need for ongoing professional development, however, it is necessary that evaluations be taken on whether or not new techniques are actually being applied and their usefulness to students in the classroom.

Student and the valuable information that can be provided through student evaluations of teaching are very important to the review process. Most institutions ask students to fill out an evaluation form. These evaluations have the potential to be a great tool for assessment and accountability for students and government alike.

Principle Seven: Quality teaching should be recognized and encouraged through teaching awards and other programs recognizing outstanding teaching.

Often, recognition does not need to happen through monetary rewards or bonuses. As it has been stated above, teaching excellence is very difficult to quantify, for that reason often an award recognizing the efforts and successes in the classroom by a professor is seen as a great honour. Many times these awards are given out by student organizations, faculty groups, or by other groups recognizing teaching excellences.

Almost all student organizations in Ontario have recognized the need to honour excellence in teaching, and have committed resources behind this initiative. Often teaching awards run by students are nominated by students, assessed by students and given out by students, and OUSA applauds these efforts. The criteria for these awards are often very fluid and can change from year to year. This is very important as it allows the awards given out to mirror the classroom requirements for success and the professors that are responding to those requirements. Many programs also offer recognition of professors who devote their career to good teaching through lifetime achievement awards, as well as instructors in the beginning parts of their tenure through merit awards.¹² If a student organization has the resources to do so, it is very important that non-monetary awards of recognition be granted, as students are the main beneficiaries of quality teaching, and this is just one way for students to take an active role in the process of improving teaching quality.

The Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Association also bestows awards every year on faculty members who exemplify outstanding teaching. The awards that OCUFA gives out are unique because they also recognize outstanding librarianship as well as teaching. The award criteria are established by the selection committee, and encompass many aspects that make up quality teaching, such as teaching in the classroom, consultation, and innovative teaching. This award differs from those nominated by students because it also recognizes the development aspect of quality teaching; generally students can only assess the 'finished product' of teaching in the classrooms. Roughly seven awards are presented each year to different faculty members.

The 3M award is currently the only pan-Canadian award recognizing outstanding teaching. The award is co-sponsored by the American company 3M and the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. The 3M award is given to individuals who excel in the teaching of their own courses and also demonstrates an exceptionally high degree of leadership and commitment to the improvement of university teaching across the country. The annual award was founded in 1986. Since that time, 150 educators from 36 universities have received this honour.

Teaching awards have been around for a number of decades. OUSA believes that stakeholder recognition and appreciation for quality teaching is an essential element for encouraging further developments in teaching and should continue. It would seem that the criteria for some awards are limited by criteria requiring instructors to be tenure, or tenure-track, however there are many great instructors at Ontario's institutions that do not meet this criteria.

¹² McMaster Students Union, Policies and Bylaw "Teaching Awards," August, 2002.

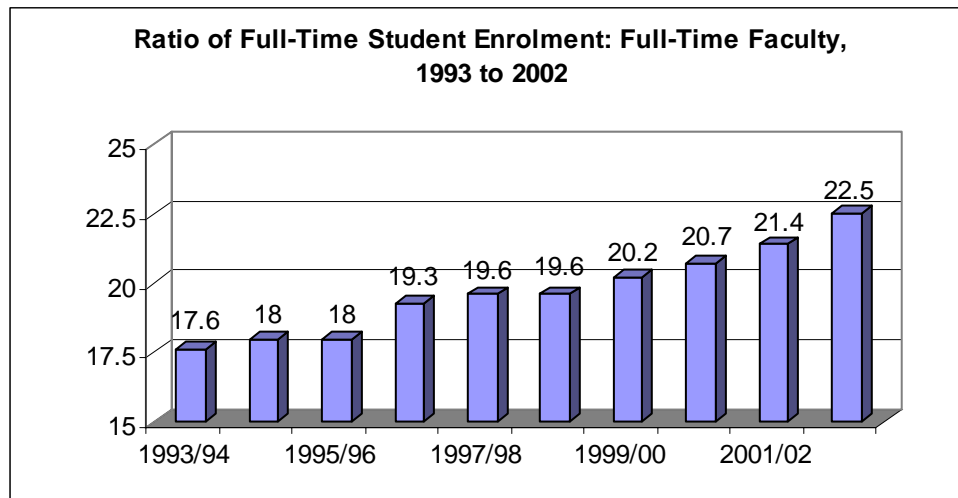
CONCERNS

Concern One: Ontario Universities are not receiving sufficient funding to maintain or improve teaching quality.

In the past decade the provincial government of Ontario has seriously under-invested in the university system. Ontario lags behind the OECD and the rest of Canada in terms of the proportion of public funding provided to universities and in terms of per-student funding provided to universities. Further, a 32 per cent enrolment increase in Ontario has been met with a 0.7 per cent decrease in real funding dollars.¹³ This pervasive under-funding of the university sector has seriously compromised the quality of university education in Ontario.

One effect of this funding shortfall is that faculty-student ratios are rising at Ontarian universities (see Figure One). Another consequence is that faculty hiring at Canadian universities is lagging far behind peer jurisdictions like the United States (see Figure Two). Professors are forced to take on heavier teaching loads and students are forced to take large classes to make up for institutions inability to hire extra instructors. This not only reduces the amount of time professors are available outside of class time to help their students, but it also limits students' ability to gain a quality education.

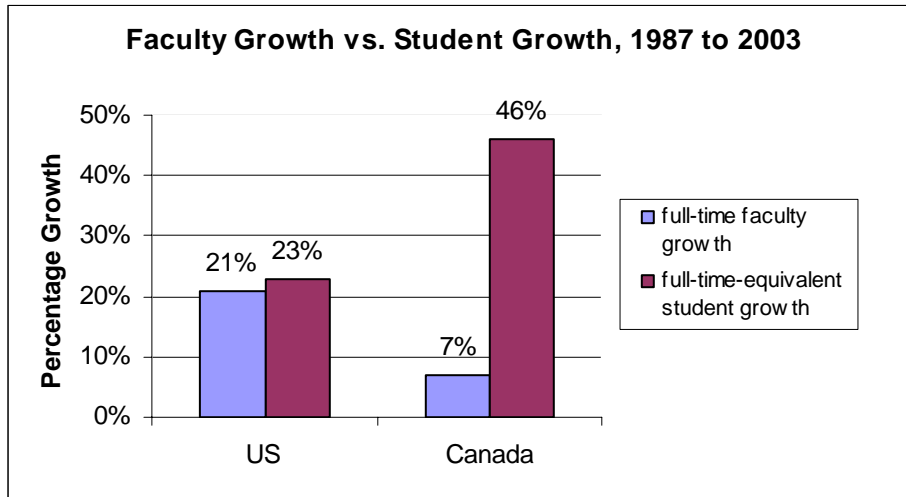
Figure One¹⁴



¹³ Graeme Stewart, "Funding, Tuition and Student Financial Assistance", in *Our Bright Future: A New Vision for Higher Education in Ontario* (Toronto: OUSA, 2004), p.25.

¹⁴ Council of Ontario Universities, *Facts & Figures 2005* (Toronto: COU, 2005), p.3-35.

Figure Two¹⁵



In order to provide a high quality educational experience, the government must ensure that institutions are financially stable by providing the appropriate level of funding. One way to do this is to set out provincial funding commitments on a multi-year basis.

Concern Two: There are a number of indications that teaching is less of a priority to academic research in Ontario universities.

Universities appear to prioritize high-quality academic research over teaching in the curriculum of graduate students (who are future faculty), as well as through the image they present to the public. Examining expectations for graduate students shows the primary imbalance when it comes to institutional priorities and the way in which they pertain to education quality. Preparations for teaching in higher education pales in comparison to the preparation graduate students receive to do research. Generally, graduates students are expected to learn teaching tools and pedagogy by trial and error, and also gain advice from colleagues who learned about teaching in the same way.¹⁶ Universities also widely publicize their feats in recruiting world-renowned researchers to their institutions, however the stories on classroom successes and the allocation of resources to recruit world-renowned instructors is rare at best.

It may not be that students are the only group that share these sentiments. Professors, especially those that often focus much of their efforts on teaching have publicly shared that they feel that an imbalance exists. Dr. Geri Van Gyn, a professor at the University of Victoria states, “the research record of the individual mitigates the impact of the teaching record on the final result. The stronger the research record, the less impact a weak teaching record will have on the outcome. In the case of a weak research record, it is unlikely that strong teaching will tip the balance toward a positive decision.”¹⁷

Concern Three: The programs and support that are available for instructors differ very much in their quality as there is currently no provincial money allocated for establishing these support mechanisms.

¹⁵ Ann Dowsett Johnston, “Waging a war for talent”, *Maclean’s Magazine*, November 14, 2005, p.22.

¹⁶ Dr. Geri Van Gyn, The University of Victoria, “Why teaching should really Count”, August 14, 2003

¹⁷ Ibid.

It is important that all universities have the opportunity to strengthen their teaching and offer professional development opportunities to staff in order to achieve the optimal teaching experience for students; however this is simply not happening. As Jane Harrison argues, universities are at different stages in the development and support that is offered to instructors. She notes that “[t]here are institutions at every stage of development on the trajectory from the very simplest first steps through to a comprehensive teaching improvement programme.”¹⁸

In their strategic plans, many universities have identified teaching quality as one element of the university experience that will be extensively developed in the coming years, however OUSA is concerned that limited resources will force universities to devote money allocated for hiring new faculty to be re-allocated to support other purposes. Moreover, teaching quality should be made a priority at a provincial level, as all students in Ontario should have the same access to innovative teaching techniques and the highest quality of instructors regardless of the institution that they attend. If universities are independently left to initiate programs for improving teaching quality, there is a concern that it simply will not be made a priority due to other pressing issues requiring funding.

Concern Four: Low funding levels are forcing drastic increases in class sizes and sparse variation in course material and delivery.

Because of low funding levels, universities for the most part have been unable to sustain low student-to-faculty ratios, well-maintained infrastructure, up-to-date and well equipped labs, full and comprehensive library acquisitions, sufficient and necessary student services and a well-developed broader learning experience, all of which are key components of a quality education. Further, the traditional methods of teaching used at virtually all universities in the country are quite dated, especially for institutions that boast of being societal leaders for innovation. This discrepancy has been highlighted by the Boyer Commission in the United States, which points out that:

“The traditional lecturing and note-taking, certified by periodic examinations, was created for a time when books were scarce and costly; lecturing to large audience of student was an efficient means of creating several compendia of learning where only one existed before.”¹⁹

It is important that student engagement be the number one focus; technology has many potential benefits to enhance the learning experience for students. Many studies have indicated that students learn best in environments that can be adapted to their learning style. It would seem that with all the technologies available, student experience in the classroom should allow for adaptability and a number of choices for engagement and program delivery to ensure that students are receiving an educational experience that is tailored to their success; however, this just is not the case. Many classes continue to be conducted in the format of professors lecturing to an audience of students.

Students in Ontario should have the opportunity to study subject matter that is relevant, applicable and diverse. The subject matter must also be widely available and accessible to all students, and taught effectively by faculty. Moreover, knowledge of subject matter should be assessed through meaningful testing and creative methods of learning through the implementation of diverse pedagogies. Particular attention should be paid to explore the potential benefits of using of new and emerging technologies for lecture delivery and classroom interaction such as clickers, podcasts and online forums.

¹⁸ Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduate in the Research University, “Reinventing Undergraduate Education”, p.5; accessed online at <http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf/>.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.16.

Concern Five: Teaching quality is currently not a mandated component for evaluating a professor's promotion or tenure.

At many post-secondary institutions in Ontario the faculty promotions process does not consider teaching as important as it should be. Teaching ability is often overlooked when research records are strong. Thus, professors wanting to advance their career and gain tenure at Ontario universities often spend more of their time and efforts on developing research and publishing books or articles, and much less time developing their ability to teach.

Ontario institutions must begin to consider teaching ability as equally, if not more, important than research records when awarding tenure if students are to attain a high quality education that is centred on learning.

Concern Six: At many institutions, teaching evaluations do not ask questions that adequately address the learning experience of a student

At many post-secondary institutions in Ontario, student evaluations of teaching are not given the consideration and weighted with the importance they deserve. What students have been able to take away from the courses in which they are registered is arguably the best indication of an instructor's teaching ability. There is currently no consistency with the evaluation process students engage in when it comes to the learning experience at Ontario's universities. Some institutions, such as the University of Western Ontario have very in-depth teaching evaluations that examine all aspects of the teaching and learning experience students receive in the classroom, while other universities just require students to answer one question such as "how good was your professor?" An example of this problem can be found with the student evaluations that are used by many of the departments at McMaster University. The questionnaire deals more with the affordability of the required text and the comfort of the classroom seating than it does with the quality of the learning experience.

Ontario institutions must begin to mandate the proper distribution and collection of student evaluation of teaching surveys that ask appropriate questions to properly gauge the learning experience that each student has had in any particular course. This should include questions on the professor's lecturing ability, communication skills, course content, and the quality of feedback provided to students. Further, they must begin to use the results from these surveys as part of the consideration process for promotions and tenure.

Concern Seven: Teaching evaluations are often not made public.

Another concern about teaching evaluations is their level of availability to students. In order to obtain a high-quality education, students must have the ability to view student evaluations of instructors in order to select future courses. However, at present the availability of faculty evaluations is poor at many institutions and inconsistent across the province. The popularity of websites such as RateMyProfessor.ca that allow students to post and read reviews of instructors at their universities demonstrates the demand for information about a professor's teaching abilities. In its four-year existence, the website has received over 5 million ratings of over 700,000 professors on Canadian campuses.²⁰ However, there are also numerous concerns about these websites, as there is no guarantee the contributors are students that have taken the class, and often have little to do with real teaching effectiveness. There are also no editors to provide a review or overview of a professors' ratings, so students could be making course choices based on one or two students' reviews.

One of the main impediments to the public availability of teaching evaluations is that they are treated as the private property of the professor under faculty collective agreements, and so the professor's permission is required in order

²⁰ As of March 2006; from RateMyProfessors website, accessed online at <http://ratemyprofessors.ca/index.jsp>.

to make the information public.²¹ So rather than automatically making them public, many universities require professors to opt-in to a program that publishes the results of student evaluations. Some agreements also exist between CUPE (the union for many instructors and teaching assistants) and institutions covering part-time instructors view student evaluations as personal information about the instructor and will not allow any evaluations to be made public. These types of contracts and agreements demonstrate the resistance at many institutions to open and public teaching evaluations.

Concern Eight: English as a Second Language (ESL) resources are exhausted at many institutions.

There has been a great increase in the number of international students attending Ontario universities. Many of these international students are finding employment as teaching assistants in virtually all institutions. There has not been an increase in the amount of support that is provided to ESL programs that reflects the increase in students. In some cases, ESL classes are reaching their capacity early each term leaving many students on a long waiting list with no support.

OUSA is concerned that the lack of resources for ESL classes is having a negative affect on the quality of teaching, as teaching assistants, may not be able to access support to improve their English, and thereby there teaching. Investments in ESL classes will not only have a positive impact for individual students, but also the greater learning experience at Ontario's universities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation One: The provincial government must increase funding to Ontario universities at a sustainable and predictable level to allow universities to improve teaching quality.

Before many of the issues surrounding quality can be addressed, it is imperative that funds be allocated to address some of the fundamental problems that have evolved in recent years due to drastic under-funding of post-secondary education. Class size has a great impact on the quality of the learning experience that can be offered to students. The conflicting demands of scholarship do not allow professors to be able to provide individual attention for a class with a population of upward of 400 students. Furthermore, classes in senior levels of some programs are seeing this problem magnified, as classes that are supposed to be in-depth seminars with high levels of engagement between students and their professor are becoming reading courses where students depend on class readings rather than classroom engagement for their information. Upper-year classes in many disciplines simply cannot function with class sizes upwards of 200 students.

OUSA believes that institutions require adequate funding with a level of predictability that allows governing bodies to plan for the future. Multi-year funding agreements between the government and individual institutions would allow universities to develop and implement strategic plans based on the stable knowledge of levels of funding. It would be easier for institutions to develop plans and programs that focus on improving the quality of teaching if they know how much funding they will receive over a pre-determined number of years. For example, in order to hire faculty for longer than a single-year contract, universities need to know their budget allocations on a multi-year basis. Conversely, the provincial government would be able to measure the level of success and develop realistic accountability frameworks with institutions if funding levels are stable.

²¹ Ann Dowsett Johnston, "Grading the Graders", *Maclean's*, November 14, 2005, p.26.

Recommendation Two: Funding must be designated by the government of Ontario to provide ongoing professional development for Ontario's post-secondary educators.

Neither teaching nor learning are static processes, and so, should not be treated as such. The provincial government must recognize that Ontarians believe that improvements in teaching quality are one of the fundamental areas of investment for the government. (CITATION) Individual institutions have made commendable efforts to improve the support offered to instructors; however the province must make a significant investment in the improvement of teaching quality to all institutions in Ontario.

Although there have been many concerns brought up about the difficulty to quantifiably measure the quality of teaching, there are a number of programs that have been identified as ways in which it improve teaching quality. Centres that focus on “course development programmes; support for individual faculty with course design and specific teaching issues such as the effective evaluation of student learning, individual teaching consultations, classroom observations, and videotaping of classroom performance” are just examples of programs that the government could look toward funding at institutions.²² OUSA recognizes the need for accountability for the allocation of public funds and suggests the idea of accountability plans and student evaluations as ways in which the government could monitor the effectiveness of funding programs focused on the improvement of teaching quality. Although quality programs and centres are outlined as areas requiring funding, some commentators have proposed the idea of internal departmental infrastructure that would assist with increases in quality teaching.

Additional investments must also be made to improve the English as a Second Language courses at Ontario's Universities. Ontario universities have benefited greatly from international students. It is imperative that proper support be afforded to these students to allow them to improve their language skills. One of the fundamental components of quality education is communication. No educator wishing to improve their language skills should be turned away due to ESL classes that have reached capacity.

Recommendation Three: Universities must submit accountability support plans for quality teaching to the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

Ontario's institutions must be held responsible and accountable for the quality of teaching that is provided to students. An institutional strategic plan for teaching and learning must be provided by each institution to the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. There are many tangible objectives of achievement that could be put in place to ensure that universities are focusing allocated resources to ensure the improvement of the learning and teaching experience. The Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education outlines some key objects that OUSA recommends the provincial government should consider as submissions that universities could make to the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario:

- A statement of teaching philosophy for the institution as a whole; identification of areas of pedagogical focus/differentiation (e.g., learner-centeredness, service learning, problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning, co-op education, first-year seminars, writing across the curriculum);
- Key measures with identified areas in need of improvement (e.g. retention, employability, courses with high failure rates, student learning behaviours, student course ratings, faculty perceptions of extend to which teaching is valued and supported);

²² Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduate in the Research University, “Reinventing Undergraduate Education”, p.5; accessed online at <http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf/>.

- University-wide learning outcomes and a plan for assessing such outcomes;
- A plan for providing learning supports for students as well as a plan and policy pertaining to the effective assessment of student learning;
- Plans and policies pertaining to the effective assessment of teaching for hiring, promotion and tenure decisions;
- A plan for celebrating and rewarding teaching excellence;
- The designation of a senior administrative position with the responsibility for providing the leadership for the development and monitoring of a strategic plan for teaching and learning.²³

Universities who have set strategic direction that include extensive plans to increase the quality of the teaching experience should be rewarded with the funds necessary to ensure their plans can be achieved. Queen's University's Centre for Teaching and Learning has an extensive plan with areas of focus to improve quality as well as benchmarks of achievement for success.²⁴ However, it is absolutely imperative that the provincial government take an active role through the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario to ensure that these goals are indeed being transformed into a better learning experience across the province.

Recommendation Four: Quality teaching and students' learning experiences must be fundamental criteria for the evaluation and promotion process of instructors and professors at universities.

In the hiring and promotions process, more emphasis must be placed on an individual's ability to teach. Currently, processes of review for scholarly research are completed and peer reviews of professor's research and reports are taken into consideration when the question of promotion arises. If teaching is going to carry the same weight in the evaluation, it is only fair that teaching be reviewed by a member's peers under the same critical lens. As Jane Harrison argues, "many commentators argue that faculty teaching must similarly be laid open to the scrutiny of the teacher's peers for it to gain the same respect accorded faculty research efforts."²⁵

Further, OUSA would argue that students need to be on the promotion and review boards for professor evaluations. Many institutions have students that sit on these boards. This is important in order to adequately reflect the student experience. Student teaching evaluations can do an acceptable job of quantitatively reflecting the experience, however, student involvement on promotional boards would allow for students to further elaborate and reflect on the quality of the learning experience.

Furthermore, there must be a high degree of interaction between teacher and learner which would allow students to develop their critical thinking skills and comprehensive understanding of course material. Faculty must also be readily accessible to students through various means.

Recommendation Five: Course and instructor evaluations must be made public and easily accessible to all university stakeholders including students.

²³ Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (fix reference)

²⁴ Queen's University Centre for Teaching and Learning website; accessed online at <http://www.queensu.ca/ctl/about/strategic.html>.

²⁵Jane E. Harrison, "The Quality of University Teaching: Faculty Performance and Accountability. A Literature Review", Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education Professional File, Spring 2002, p.7; accessed online at <http://robertwright.ca/Harrison.pdf>.

The quality of an instructor or a course has the most direct impact upon students in that classroom or lecture hall, and students contribute their tuition fees to the university in exchange for a quality education. Consequently, it is absolutely necessary that students have all the information that is available in order to ensure they are making educated decisions when it comes to their course and program choices.

Teaching evaluation survey results must be made public in order to provide instructor and institutional accountability. Because some collective agreements between universities and faculty associations prevent the open access to professor evaluations, this may require that future collective agreements with faculty include this requirement. OUSA recommends that universities work hard to ensure these course evaluations are available in order to improve students' access to high-quality teaching at their institutions.

Teaching evaluation survey results must be carried out by the institution or student union in a systematic way, and made public in order to provide instructor and institutional accountability. There is great variance in the material collected from teaching surveys. It is recommended that the government look to universities to develop this method of evaluation to greater reflect on the experience and opportunities for learning and discovery in the classroom. The public distribution of these results will ensure that teaching quality is given more weight in the instructor evaluation process. It will further entice instructors to pay more attention to their teaching scores and enhance their abilities in order to improve.

Recommendation Six: Teaching seminars and/or courses must be mandated for any PhD candidate or teaching assistant who will be teaching or leading students for any length of time.

In order to teach in elementary or secondary school in Ontario, teachers must have received extensive education and training. Prospective instructors must have attended a teachers' colleges, which have some of the most competitive entrance requirements in Ontario. Governments in the past have gone so far as to mandate that teachers must be tested on an ongoing basis to ensure that they still meet certain standards and requirements. However, at the institutions where students pay tuition fees in order to receive an education, there are virtually no mandated requirements to become a teacher other than obtaining a PhD. As noted earlier, the lack of emphasis that is placed on training for teaching can possibly be attributed to the greater priority placed on research over teaching at many universities. For that reason it is imperative that all PhD students be required to take a class that focuses on practical aspects of teaching in universities. Many universities already have programs in place that are thriving, setting students up for success in their careers as teachers.

The University of Ottawa is a fine example of the courses that should be offered to graduate students. The Centre for Teaching and Learning Support at the University of Ottawa offers on-going support for professors and instructors, but also offers a course to graduate students entitled "Theory and Practice of Undergraduate Teaching." This class touches on some of the key theoretical and practical aspects of teaching, and requires students to develop a course outline, as well as challenges them through videotaped teaching exercises where the professor offers feedback tailored to the graduate students' ability and work.²⁶ The program also offers a practicum option for graduate students who wish to further develop their skills as academic teachers. Students can work with a professor, attend his or her class and examine the processes and programs to challenge and motivate students in the classroom. There is no doubt that graduate students who decide to invest this time in teaching will be more knowledgeable when they are set to be instructors, however, the class is not mandated and is completely voluntary, conditional upon approval of the instructor of the graduate class. This skills and lessons learned in these classes would be

²⁶ Centre for University Teaching, University of Ottawa website; accessed online at http://www.uottawa.ca/services/tlss/cut/teaching_assistants/assist_prog5.htm.

invaluable to any PhD student, as it is more than likely at some point in their professional career they will be required to teach. For that reason, OUSA recommends that graduate classes similar to the models established at the University of Ottawa be implemented at all universities offering graduate level education, and students be required to take these classes.

Teaching assistants (TAs) also play a fundamental role in the learning process for many students, and should be given consideration when it comes to professional development and support in the classroom. Training for TAs before classes begin is essential in order to give TAs the tools they need to provide a quality learning environment for their students. In many occasions, TAs are usually graduate students or even undergraduate students who are taking a leadership role in the education process for the first time. It is important that resources are available to develop programs to ensure TA success in generating quality, engaging learning experiences.

It is recommended that funding for these programs come from the Quality Assurance Fund as this fund speaks directly to accountability for funding. With the amounts of resources that will have to be invested in order to make these programs a success, it is necessary that these programs be reflected in the accountability plans that were recommended earlier. It is not adequate to just have the program available. Programs that teach our future educators must be fluid and responsive to new research and methods of engagement to increase the quality of learning for students at Ontario's institutions.

Recommendation Seven: Innovation in teaching and innovation in research must be given equal consideration.

In order for quality teaching to be afforded the respect that it deserves, the province must first make the necessary changes within its jurisdiction. The Boyer Commission sums up this perspective, saying "faculty members, graduate students, baccalaureate students all bring their particular combinations of energy, imagination, experiences, and accumulated knowledge to bear. The divisions that have been created between them are artificial and counter-productive and must be bridged for effective collaborations to occur."²⁷ There are a number of changes that need to happen both on the provincial level, as well as on an institutional level.

Universities must offer support to instructors wishing to improve their classroom experience. Currently, at McMaster, instructors that can prove they are doing significant work to develop or improve classroom programs or courses are provided relief from their teaching duties. However, although this is a commendable effort, it would seem that a policy such as the one at McMaster could be adding to the increase in class sizes, as there is one more professor on payroll that is not able to teach. OUSA recommends that if a professor is working on the development of classroom activities, this work be defined as scholarly research and should be taken into account on the amount of research required from the professor, rather than a decrease in the number of teaching hours. This only seems logical as a professor looking to study innovation in the classroom would need to stay connected with their subject matter.

McMaster has also had great success in the development of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in the faculty of health science. This innovative method exemplifies the prospects available through funding of innovative teaching. The program has been given national awards as it challenges students to identify and solve problems, to think critically, to work in groups and to communicate more effectively. One student recalls the impact the program has had on his learning experience. As he describes, "by the end of the year, I had a better understanding and I knew that I had grown in so many ways... from where I sit now, I can see that I am a much more mature learner than many students I know from other faculties."²⁸

²⁷ Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduate in the Research University, "Reinventing Undergraduate Education", p.33; accessed online at <http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf/>.

²⁸ Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, "Skill Development with Students and Explicit Integration Across the Curriculum", Fall 2005, p.7.

In order for teaching to be considered with the same high esteem as research, the province must provide the same opportunities for advancement and recognition. Currently, Canada Research Chair positions are highly respected positions appointed at universities, and funded jointly by the provincial and federal government. OUSA recommends that the provincial government begin to establish an equivalent position dedicated to the advancement of teaching. This idea was first proposed by the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in their submission to the Rae Review and is supported by OUSA. As noted earlier, advancements in research innovation have impacts both socially and economically for the province and institutions; innovations in teaching would have a similar effect. The use of technology, and the opportunities to advance as institutions of higher learning around the world become more learner focused could put Canada at the top of the scholarly list with regard to teaching practices. Students in Ontario are paying some of the highest fees in the country for their education; the highest quality of teaching must be a small benefit for these great costs.

CONCLUSION

Universities will always have a large number of conflicting priorities requiring funding which always seems to be not enough. The quality of the teaching and learning experience should never be one of the issues that goes unrecognized. The province of Ontario and the federal government have made significant steps to recognizing the role that innovation plays in society. The same priority must be afforded to teaching in Ontario. As Jane Harrison argues, “the new economy places new expectation on its workers, and requires that students are better prepared for this environment... this will require substantial innovation from teaching faculty, something they feel is unlikely to occur unless the current system is changed.”²⁹

Although we have dealt specifically with teaching in the classroom or lecture hall at Ontario’s universities, it must also be noted that teaching and learning happens in many other facilities at universities and at the hands of many of the support staff that work at our institutions. Library staff, for example, have tremendous potential to inspire students and guide them through aspects of learning and discovery. Going forward, a close examination of non-instructor staff and the support they are given within our institutions may be helpful to fully understand the scope of teaching quality at Ontario’s universities.

Although this policy has taken a focus on improvement of the teaching and learning experience by improving the support and resources that are provided to instructors, it should be noted that the onus cannot be put strictly on teachers to improve the quality of learning, students must take an active role in utilizing all the avenues for improvement that are presented at their respected institutions. Teaching evaluations and opportunities for student feedback must be taken seriously, and students should be giving thoughtful responses and reflections on their experience. What’s more, students must make effort to engage their professors and be the chief steward for their education and the experience.

It should be reiterated once again that OUSA recognizes that many of the ideas and suggestions put forward in this policy paper do not simply apply to the provincial government, but several cross the boundary into the responsibilities of Ontario universities. However, universities may be asked to make small sacrifices in their autonomy in exchange for greater investment and funding. It has been noted that quality of the teaching experience at universities is a public priority for Ontarians, and requires a public investment. It is important that any public

²⁹ Jane E. Harrison, “The Quality of University Teaching: Faculty Performance and Accountability. A Literature Review”, Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education Professional File, Spring 2002, p.3; accessed online at <http://robertwright.ca/Harrison.pdf>.

investment comes with channels of accountability. The provincial government has made necessary measures moving forward through the establishment of both the Quality Improvement Fund and the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. Both the funding and accountability mechanisms are in place. Now teaching quality in Ontario must become a national benchmark for quality experiences for learning and discovery.

teaching quality policy statement

WHEREAS Ontario universities require stable and adequate public funding for quality teaching regardless of the government of the day;

WHEREAS Quality teaching is a fundamental requirement of the university system in Ontario;

WHEREAS Teaching and research are two essential components of a higher education system;

WHEREAS Innovative ideas in both teaching and research should be recognized and encouraged through funding by the province;

WHEREAS Support programs for professors and instructors are a necessary component for teaching quality;

WHEREAS Teaching reviews and accountability for quality teaching for professors is essential at public institutions;

WHEREAS Quality teaching should be recognized and encouraged through teaching awards and other programs recognizing outstanding teaching;

WHEREAS Ontario universities are not receiving sufficient funding to maintain or improve teaching quality;

WHEREAS There are a number of indications that teaching is second priority to academic research in Ontario universities;

WHEREAS The programs and support that are available for instructors differ very much in their quality as there is currently no provincial money allocated for establishing these support mechanisms;

WHEREAS Low funding levels are forcing drastic increases in class sizes, and sparse variation in course material or delivery;

WHEREAS Teaching quality is currently not a mandated component for evaluating a professor's promotion or tenure;

WHEREAS Student teaching evaluations are often not reflective of the student learning experience;

WHEREAS Teaching evaluations are often not made public and carry little weight in the instructor evaluation process;

WHEREAS English as a Second Language (ESL) resources are exhausted at many institutions.

BIRT The provincial government must increase funding to Ontario universities at a sustainable and predictable level to allow universities to improve teaching quality;

BIFRT Funding must be designated by the government of Ontario to provide ongoing professional development for Ontario's professors;

BIFRT Universities must submit accountability support plans for quality teaching to the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario;

BIFRT Quality teaching and students' learning experiences must be fundamental criteria for the evaluation and promotion process of instructors and professors at universities;

BIFRT Course and instructor evaluations must be made public to all university stakeholders;

BIFRT Teaching seminars and/or courses must be mandated for any PhD Candidate or Teaching Assistant who will be teaching or leading students for any length of time;

BIFRT Innovation in teaching must be supported at or above the same level as innovation in research.