



Policy Paper

Student Success and the Future of Quality Education

March 2011

Prepared by:

Meaghan Coker, Vice President University Affairs
University Students' Council, University of Western Ontario

Nick Soave, Vice President Education
Federation of Students, University of Waterloo

With files from:

Susannah Gouinlock, former Academic Affairs Commissioner
Alma Matter Society, Queen's University

Chris Martin, former Vice President Education
McMaster Students Union, McMaster University

Justin Neves and Huzaiifa Saeed
McMaster Students Union, McMaster University

Executive Summary

Discussing the quality of education at our post-secondary institutions has always been difficult. A high-quality education has traditionally meant different things to different stakeholders, institutions and governments. For this reason, OUSA is advocating a student-focused definition of educational quality. Rather than focusing on inputs to make a quality education, the conversation should be about what students need from their education to be successful. For a learning environment to be conducive to student success, OUSA has identified three specific areas that should be addressed: the in-class experience, the broader learning environment, and support services.

In-Class Learning

Unfortunately, the in-class experience of most Ontario students is defined by outdated learning methods and structures that reward faculty research over teaching. Furthermore, while primary and secondary teachers are required to undergo extensive training and professional development before entering the classroom, professors that teach lectures are not required to have any formal training in teaching or presentation skills.

To address this, OUSA recommends:

- Incentives and support to have all new instructors and TAs undergo formal training in teaching pedagogy
- Government-funded teaching chairs to drive cultural change around teaching and learning
- A provincial target for the number of courses that employ active learning
- Incentives to create more high-impact learning opportunities
- Valuing quality in the tenure and promotion process and improvements to student evaluations
- Raising the profile and importance of teaching and learning on university campuses

Broader Learning Environment

The standard university experience is not defined primarily by time spent in class. While the classroom is the one learning space where students are guaranteed to congregate, outside-the-classroom institutional conditions and experiential learning are as important if not more important to a student's university experience. Additionally, opportunities for extra-curricular growth, such as clubs, athletic programs, residences, study abroad opportunities, undergraduate research opportunities, and much more have been positively correlated with persistence and engagement.

To address this, OUSA recommends:

- More institutional resources to develop the broader learning environment
- Incentives to increase the availability of work-integrated learning and community-service learning
- Incentives to create Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programs and help students develop their ideas
- Expand study abroad opportunities and increase financial assistance for students studying abroad

Support Services

When students face difficulties with their classes, the difference between persistence and dropping out often comes down to the support networks available on-campus. The frontline efforts put forward by academic support centres, health and counselling centres, and a host of other vital services make an enormous difference in keeping at-risk students in the system and helping everyone to succeed. Unfortunately, due to financial pressures facing institutions, these services are often not able to grow to meet student demand. This is particularly concerning given the fact that underrepresented groups are projected to take on a greater share of enrolment in the coming years.

To address this, OUSA recommends:

- Incentives to create early-warning systems to proactively assist students in need
- A special purpose grant to fund vital student support services, including health services, academic support, transition in first and fourth year, and support for underrepresented groups

Introduction

In the context of post-secondary education (PSE), discussions of quality have traditionally been somewhat limited in scope. Somewhere between measuring student-faculty ratios and post-graduation employment rates, the question of what a successful post-secondary experience means has been drowned out. 'High quality' has become interchangeable with 'success', confusing the goal for students with the measurements of such. In recent years, however, a more comprehensive conversation of what quality means in the context of PSE has started to emerge among stakeholders and policy-makers. Since the creation of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) 'quality indicators' are being considered that span further across the continuum of the education experience.¹ As we examine this topic more closely, questions of what it takes to make students successful, and what exactly should be measured, have arisen. However, before this topic can be given the attention it deserves, it is time for the most substantial consumers of the post-secondary system – the students – to answer one overarching question: what does a successful education mean?

The value of this discussion is not limited to students in the system, though. In fact, pausing to consider the societal implications of successful students is necessary in order to appreciate the need to devote more attention to this subject. In the growing knowledge economy, more than 70 per cent of all new jobs require post-secondary education.² While this alone may support a collective investment in successful students, studies additionally demonstrate significant social benefits of such. Education attainment has been inversely related to crime, creating a safer and more positive community for all citizens. Moreover, education attainment is related to better health, longer life, improved communication skills, and greater self-confidence.³ The reduced dependence on the system and the ability to contribute positively to the community is a benefit that all members of society can share in. Furthermore, while Ontario has a relatively high post-secondary participation rate, other countries are catching up, and Ontario must have the best and brightest workforce, not simply hand out the most credentials. Student success, then, provides value beyond the post-secondary community, and is deserving of a comprehensive analysis.

In a society requiring greater attention to the post-secondary system, and with benefits of a successful education reaching across all communities, it is time to confront what student success means more holistically. The purpose of this policy, then, is simple in intent and complex in result: to provide a vision for a successful post-secondary experience.

Principles

Principle One: Student success is a continuum beginning well before students begin their post-secondary education, and continuing after they have graduated.

One narrow view of student success limits the topic to ensuring students persist to the end of their degree programs. However, it is students' view that it is really a much more multi-faceted concept. The key to a true knowledge economy is not simply a degree-holding population, but rather one leaving school with an appetite for growth, leadership and lifelong learning. These learning outcomes require all the inputs to education to be of high quality. This means that that education must not simply be engaging and of high quality, but accessible. It additionally requires an acknowledgement that barriers to education are often in place well before students start applying to college or university.

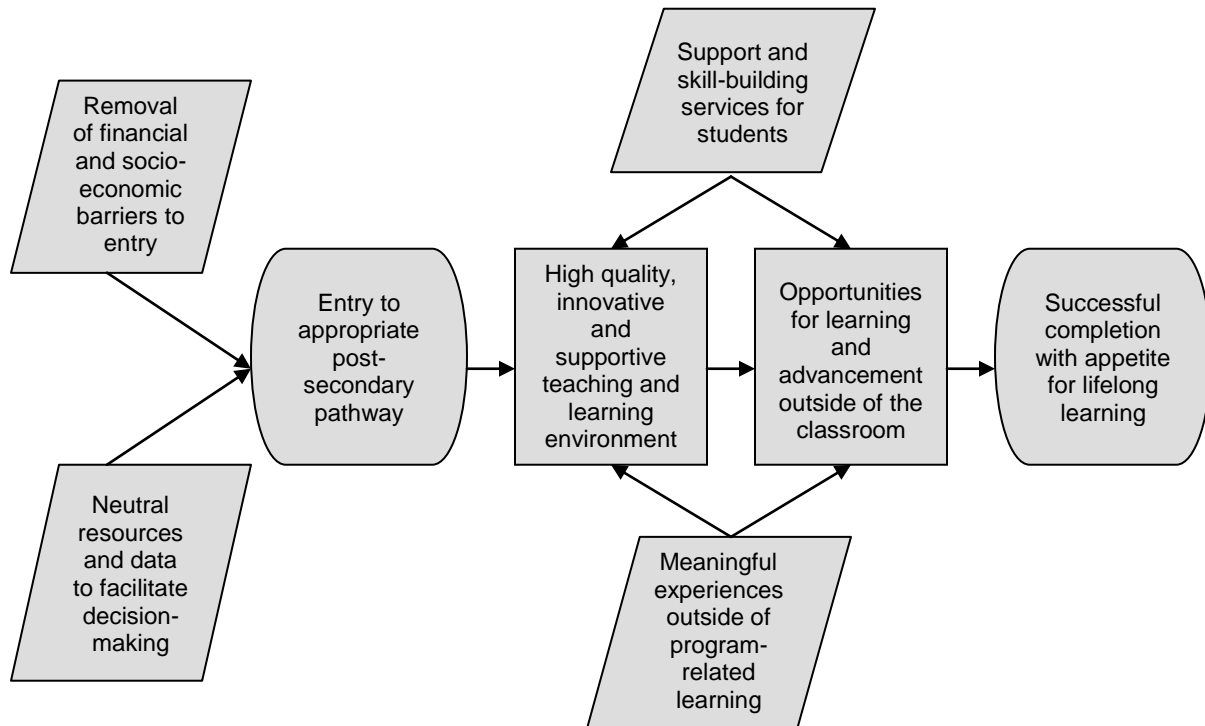
¹ Educational Policy Institute, *Producing Indicators of Institutional Quality in Ontario Universities and Colleges: Options for Producing, Managing and Displaying Comparative Data* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2008).

² TD Economics, *Investing in Higher Education Delivers a Stellar Rate of Return* (Toronto: TD Economics, 2004).

³ Ibid.

For this reason, students view student success as a continuum that begins as students enter school. One widely accepted interpretation of the continuum model holds that a pre-college/university phase, a college/university experience phase, and a post-college/university phase must all be considered.⁴

Figure One: Continuum of Student Success



Student success starts with opportunity for all students, regardless of financial or socioeconomic standing, to attend the post-secondary institution most suited to their passions and skill-sets. This necessitates an affordable system including robust financial assistance, but also access to neutral and accurate data on their post-secondary options to facilitate proper decision-making. Upon entry to their chosen post-secondary pathway, the students’ educational experience both inside and outside the classroom must provide the opportunity both to master content and to develop the skills and personal growth that provide the foundation for future success. More specifically, the students’ needs must be supported through high quality student support programs, and teaching methods must be innovative, engaging and supportive to diverse learning styles. Students must also be encouraged to learn and advance their interests outside the traditional confines of the classroom.

All of these factors are inputs that, when combined, result in a successful student.

The student success continuum never truly ends, as successful students do not stop learning upon graduation but embraces life-long learning. Students should graduate from post-secondary institutions with proper levels of satisfaction, engagement, as well as strong skill-sets to ensure success in the burgeoning knowledge economy. Additionally, they should be aware of the opportunities their education has provided them.

⁴ Kuh, George D., Jillian Kinzie, Jennifer A. Buckley, Brian K. Bridges, and John C. Hayek. “Piecing Together the Student Success Puzzle: Research, Propositions and Recommendations.” *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 32.5 (2007). 11.

Principle Two: All academically qualified students should have the opportunity to advance through all levels of higher education.

It is vital for individual and societal advancement that students have the ability to move freely into any level of higher education that they are academically qualified to attend. This is particularly true when looking specifically at higher education beyond the Bachelor's degree.⁵ Graduate and professional studies amplify the economic and social effects of higher education. Graduate students "conduct cutting-edge research, replenish faculty ranks, address the human resource needs of both the private and public sectors, and translate innovation into commercial activity. They are integral to the transfer of knowledge from universities to many other sectors of society."⁶

Advancement beyond the Bachelor's degree has become a more important issue as labour market demands have increased. Concurrently, costs have skyrocketed for graduate and professional degrees. According to the Council of Ontario Universities, Ontario and Canada "do not produce sufficient graduate students to compete with other global competitors" and, for the foreseeable future, demand for graduate students will continue to grow faster than our ability to supply them.⁷

Traditionally underrepresented groups, such as Aboriginal students, first-generation students, rural and northern students, low-income students, students with a disability, and students with dependants, must all be supported and enjoy the opportunity for advancement past the undergraduate level.

Principle Three: Students in all levels of higher education should have access to meaningful opportunities to enrich their experience, develop new skills, and enhance their learning.

The philosopher of education, John Dewey, once said that for all forms of education, "everything depends on the quality of the experience which is had."⁸ Furthermore, he believed that the quality of the experience was dependent on its influence upon future experiences.⁹ From this premise, Dewey was able to criticize the foundations of so-called 'traditional education,' in favour of a more progressive form that was dependent upon both experience and formative education as opposed to the mere mastery or acquisition of content. This theory underpins the importance of experiences in higher education that contain opportunities for discovery and development.

Experiences driven by discovery will benefit the student and their environment for years to come. Conceptually, this becomes more important in a world where information and environments change on a daily basis. Those individuals with transferable skills who are able to learn, discover and analyze will be the leaders and innovators of the twenty-first century.

Universities must also present opportunities for moral and civic development that encourage students to think critically about the world, especially in the context of a province and a nation where youth are becoming less engaged in public life.

We cannot continue to operate a system of higher education whose main purpose is the transmission of content and the acquisition of certificates. This does not diminish the need for the mastery of content, but the process of discovery (including self-discovery) must be further emphasized.

Students must have the opportunity to journey beyond the lecture hall, beyond regurgitation and beyond the A, B,

⁵Author's Note: The issue of transferability between colleges and universities is also an important issue for college students and directly relates to the concept of advancement within higher education. However, as noted in the introduction, this paper will focus on issues facing undergraduates. Therefore, transferability will not be discussed in this paper.

⁶ Council of Ontario Universities, *Expanding Graduate Studies to Boost Our Human Capital Advantage* (Toronto: 2008).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Dewey, John. *Experience and Education* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1938).

⁹ Ibid.

and Cs of multiple-choice exams. They should have the freedom to explore their interests in new and engaging ways. Alfred North Whitehead wrote that, "...the purpose of a university is to join the old and the young in imaginative methods of learning." This concept of co-discovery and frontier exploration of ideas should drive the development of both students and institutions in Ontario. Institutions that pursue this principle will produce corollary benefits for society as a whole. Both the discoverers and discoveries are products of the system, and can be retained for the benefit of all.

In addition to discovery, there should be meaningful opportunities for students in all levels of higher education to develop skills and gain experiences to allow them to move on to higher levels of education or the workforce. One cannot ignore the practical function of higher education as a developer of skills and experiences for future jobs or further studies.

In 1998, The Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University outlined the development of an Academic Bill of Rights for universities. The core principle behind this document is the belief that when a student is accepted into a college or university, an unwritten contract is established. Just as students are bound by a code of conduct, institutions are bound by a duty "to provide maximal opportunities for intellectual and creative development."¹⁰ The Academic Bill of Rights includes eight commitments of the institution, four of which include the word "opportunity." These commitments include:

- Opportunities to learn through inquiry rather than simple transmission of knowledge
- Appreciation of arts, humanities, sciences, and social sciences, and the opportunity to experience them at any intensity and depth the student can accommodate
- Careful and comprehensive preparation for whatever may lie beyond graduation, whether it be graduate school, professional school or first professional position
- Expectation of and opportunity for work with talented senior researchers to help and guide the student's efforts.
- Opportunities to interact with people of backgrounds, cultures, and experiences different from the student's own and with pursuers of knowledge at every level of accomplishment, from freshmen students to senior research faculty.

If Ontario students are to truly succeed, each of these commitments must be fulfilled at every Ontario university. Students stand firmly behind the Boyer Commission's Academic Bill of Rights and its vision of producing the type of graduate who is "equipped with a spirit of inquiry and a zest for problem solving; one possessed of the skill in communication that is the hallmark of clear thinking as well as mastery of language; one informed by a rich and diverse experience. It is that kind of individual that will provide the scientific, technological, academic, political, and creative leadership for the next century."¹¹

It should be noted that the concept of opportunity is not driven by the need for skills related to employment. It is merely one among a host of outcomes that is sought in higher education. It should be further noted that these principles do not remove the need for faculty. In institutions where the opportunity to discover and develop are seen as paramount, faculty must play an even more important and engaged role. They must act to impart the needed foundation of knowledge, and also become co-discoverers and developers of skills for their students.

Concerns

Concern One: There is an insufficient focus and inadequate resources in Ontario universities for supporting student success.

¹⁰ Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Universities* (New York: Boyer Commission, 1998).

¹¹ Ibid.

In recent years, there has been a welcome shift by institutions and government alike toward assessing whether the students are receiving a 'quality' education. However, it is the opinion of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance that this shift has been too narrowly focused on improving retention rates and arbitrary input metrics, and not on a holistic student success vision that includes an emphasis on improving the experiences provided by the in-class experience, the broader learning environment and student support services.

Within the PSE sector there is not enough focus on the many areas that crucial to the development and success of students. For example, university administrators and faculty often stress the importance of student-to-faculty ratios without also thinking about the experience that occurs within the classroom, no matter how small or large the class size. There is also too often the assumption that the responsibility of the university ends at the classroom, ignoring the essential opportunities for students to learn and grow outside the classroom, through student support services, leadership development programs and research opportunities. These are just a few examples, but moving forward both universities and the government need to look at the experience that they are working together to provide and ensure that students graduate not just with a degree, but with the skills and experiences to ensure their success.

Recommendations

Recommendation One: Student success fostered in the classroom, in the broader learning environment and in support services throughout a student's education must be a fundamental priority for Ontario's provincial government and universities.

The provincial government through its Open Ontario Plan has set out an ambitious target of a 70% post-secondary attainment rate. To achieve this goal, both the government and universities will need to not only focus on building a more accessible and affordable system, but also on ensuring that students who attend are adequately supported through to completion. By focusing in the coming years on students' success, we will continue to create a strong post-secondary education system in Ontario that meets the demand for skilled labour and ensures a bright future for the province and its students. As a key component of this plan, a focus on student success must be front and centre.

For students to be successful there must be a multi-faceted approach to the experience that we provide to students. There cannot just be a focus on one area of a student's experience, but an improvement in all areas. OUSA has identified three areas that encompass the important aspects of a student's education.

Principally, there needs to be a focus on the in-classroom experience, as students attend university first and foremost to engage in formal learning. There needs to be a renewed focus on several key components of the in-class experience, including the quality and type of instruction and the interaction between students and instructors.

Secondly, students not only need to learn within our classrooms, but also need to be offered and supported through broader learning and extra-curricular experiences that allow them to grow and develop. By providing a strong learning environment outside of the classroom that provides life experience and skills, we will graduate with holistic learners ready to contribute to building a stronger society.

Finally, government and institutions must work together to provide adequate and high-quality student support services, too often seen as an afterthought. These services are demonstrated to be crucial in ensuring students' academic and personal achievement and must be considered a key piece to helping students succeed throughout their education.

Student Success in the Classroom

Principles

Principle Four: The delivery of varied, innovative and engaging teaching methods is fundamental to creating a successful student.

The classroom is the one space in a university campus where students are guaranteed to congregate. Without an engaging, innovative and high-quality classroom experience, the university experience will never be conducive to student success.

Literature on teaching and learning emphasizes faculty-student contact (as a holistic concept rather than a ratio), opportunities for active and collaborative learning, high expectations, and respect for diverse ways of learning as principally important.¹² What is crucial to note about all of these teaching areas is that they do not only require a mass hiring of new teachers, but rather providing the teachers currently in the system with the resources they need to facilitate student engagement. In this context, resources can mean learning technologies, greater support for centres for teaching and learning, professional development opportunities for professors, improved classroom infrastructure, or support for new styles of pedagogy.

Support for centres on teaching and learning, professional development opportunities for professors, improved classroom infrastructure, and support for new styles of pedagogy are all important avenues to explore because they all help facilitate a move towards more engaging and educationally effective learning styles. One common theme that has arisen throughout much of the literature on teaching and learning is that passive lecture is contrary to almost every principle of an ideal learning environment.¹³ Traditional styles of pedagogy although useful to some students should be moved past in favour of more progressive and innovative styles. For students to be given the greatest chance at success, they require pedagogies that engage students with peers, involve them actively with their education, and apply subject matter in a variety of different settings.

Learning technologies are a particularly interesting avenue for discussion, as incoming generations of students will be more technologically literate than ever before. Some evidence has suggested that courses designed to infuse instructional technology and web-based learning have positively affected completion rates, and lowered drop/failure/withdrawal rates.¹⁴ Even more interesting is that it has been shown to have particular impact on low-income, first generation and adult learners.¹⁵

The federal government has made academic research and innovation a major priority by establishing organizations such as the Canadian Foundation of Innovation, founded to fund research initiatives at colleges and universities across Canada.¹⁶ In addition, 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 important for the Ontario government 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 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.”¹⁷ New innovations in teaching are more

¹² Kuh, et al., 2007, 43; Promoting Persistence, 23.

¹³ Kuh, et al., 2007, 94.

¹⁴ Ibid, 96.

¹⁵ Ibid, 97.

¹⁶ Canadian Foundation for Innovation, “Home Page” (2007); accessed online at <http://www.innovation.ca/index.cfm>.

¹⁷ 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*, 21 (2002): 5.

commonly accepted than ever before. In fact, the processes of learning and discovery are being more widely researched and experimented with. It is imperative that the Ontario government support this research and encourage the use of innovative teaching methods at all Ontario universities.

Principle Five: All university instructors must have the resources to develop their teaching skills to help students succeed.

Nothing impacts students' success in the classroom more than the skills of the instructor. Ontario public school teachers must acquire a degree in education before being allowed to teach. Students believe that any individual who will be teaching undergraduate students for any length of time should also be required to participate in some sort of formal training in teaching. It is unreasonable that an education degree is required when teaching a senior high school student, yet teaching a first-year university student does not require training of any kind. The Boyer Commission recognizes the lack of training that instructors receive and complains that "they are too often expected to know how to teach with little more than a few days or weeks of casual training and with little or no supervision throughout the year."¹⁸ With the establishment of instructional support programs at universities across Ontario, the infrastructure to handle such a process is now in place, and it is time for the provincial government to give serious consideration to this matter.

Principle Six: Student success is enhanced by the inclusion of research in the classroom.

A great deal of research has concluded that teaching and research are stronger when integrated. The most constructive environment for both students and teachers is a forum that allows both groups to learn from each other through a constructive dialogue and sharing of research results. 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."¹⁹ 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."²⁰ If Ontario is to offer a high quality educational experience, the prevailing university pedagogy must incorporate these new ideas.

Principle Seven: It must be ensured that students have high-impact experiences during the course of their degrees.

Examples of stimulating educational experiences include active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, and peer interactions, with research showing the potential of these practices to encourage students to dedicate more effort to their education, expand their learning support network, and improve their overall level of learning.

An additional model of a stimulating experience is the high-impact experience which is best understood as an opportunity for a student to participate in an intense learning session. These planned intentional activities, such as "learning communities, first-year seminars, service-learning, senior capstone, undergraduate research, internships, and study abroad" – better known as "high-impact experiences," provide substantial learning benefits to students.²¹

¹⁸ Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Universities* (New York: Boyer Commission, 1998).

¹⁹ 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 21* (2002): 4.

²⁰ Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduate in the Research University, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education* (New York: Boyer Commission, 1998): 18.

²¹ Association of American Colleges and Universities, *College Learning for the New Global Century* (Washington, DC: 2007).

High-impact experiences require students to dedicate intense time and effort to the task. Evidence shows that for institutions to engage fully in active learning practices, earning academic credit outside of the classroom should not be exception, but a widely embraced practice across universities. The strength of the benefits associated with high-impact practices suggests a prescription for institutions to ensure that all students experience multiple high-impact practices during their undergraduate education.²²

Concerns

Concern Two: Passive lecture-style pedagogy, still pervasive across Ontario, is not as conducive to student learning as other methods of teaching.

The method of instruction students across Ontario are most familiar with is the lecture. It is a common expectation of a university education that students will be taught primarily by a professor standing at the front of a classroom discussing course material, while students take notes. Ironically, “most of the scholarship on teaching and learning indicates that the passive lecture is contrary to almost every principle of an optimal learning environment” and highly counter-productive to creating educationally engaging classrooms.²³

When asked, faculty offer a realm of descriptions for the typical undergraduate student of present, asserting that “students are passive” and “want to sit back and have their education done unto them” hoping “the experience will be pleasant and painless.” Faculty observe that “students lack confidence as learners” in addition to lacking “the basic study skills necessary to succeed” and that many are solely “motivated by grades, points, and marks.”²⁴

Historically, this passive lecture style has been utilized for centuries in the art of teaching, which some explain as part of the problem since faculty are recreating their learning experiences and teaching in the only way they have experienced and they know how. Over time, there has been a paradigm shift in educational philosophy, taking the focal point from being on the teacher to emphasizing the student learning aspect.²⁵

Inherently there is a failure to fully understand the “symbiotic relationship between faculty practices and student behaviours” and the correlation between faculty members emphasizing certain educational practices and this willingness of students to respond and exchange in these activities. The straightforward lesson is “if faculty members value and systematically use effective educational practices, students will engage in them and benefit in desired ways.”²⁶

Opportunities such as learning communities, service learning, and active and collaborative learning are all recognized as being educationally effective, however over half of graduating seniors never participate in any community-based work as part of their regular coursework.²⁷ Often, opportunities to participate in non-traditional style classrooms are limited to a few sparse opportunities in first year, or in small exclusive programs. Even more troubling, first-generation and transfer students have been identified as significantly less likely to participate in educationally effective methods of learning although research indicates that they would benefit the most.²⁸

If maximizing student engagement is to be a priority in Ontario, innovation in pedagogy must be fostered.

²² Hughes, Julia Christensen and Joy Mighty (eds), *Taking Stock: Research on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010).

²³ Kuh, et al., 2007, 94

²⁴ Maryellen Weimer, *Taking Stock*, pg. 81.

²⁵ Kuh, et al, 2007, p.90.

²⁶ Jillian Kinzie, *Taking Stock*, pg. 149.

²⁷ National Survey of Student Engagement, 2007.

²⁸ Ibid.

Concern Three: University teaching space is too often incapable of supporting and fostering a collaborative and active learning environment.

Physical infrastructure inside and outside the classroom is often not designed to support active learning. It has been largely recognized that “Institutions could do a much better job of providing classrooms that are conducive to collaborative learning (e.g., with tables and chairs on castors), as well as space outside of class that promotes student interaction.”²⁹

The majority of classrooms on campuses still resemble the traditional lecture-style hall, with rows of desks and the focal point on the front of the room. Without modernizing the physical structure of our learning environment, it is difficult to expect the teaching and learning process to adapt from the traditional norm of passive lecturing to the progressive method of active learning.

Students rely on campus infrastructure to support their education. While academic buildings and classrooms come to mind first, universities also have a wide array of complex facilities that support learning outside the classroom, including laboratories, hospitals, academic and administrative offices, libraries, residences, cafeterias, book stores, parking lots, and space for student support services.

In addition, the student experience is heavily dependent on student centres and athletic facilities, which currently are not eligible for funding from the government. Student centres provide space for students to meet, work, study, and relax, while fostering a sense of community on campus. Athletic facilities are critical both for varsity athletic programs and day-to-day recreational needs and are essential in ensuring the health of our students.

Concern Four: Teaching ability is regarded as less important than research performance when awarding tenure and hiring instructors.

It is not only student groups who are concerned with the inequity of teaching and research. 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 that “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.”³⁰

In the graduate studies curriculum of most Ontario universities, priority is given to high quality academic research over teaching. “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.”³¹ This is an important concern because these are the students who will someday make up a large portion of Ontario’s university faculty. According to the National Research Council’s Survey of Earned Doctorates, 54 per cent of all doctoral students will seek employment in colleges and universities.³² Of this high percentage of students, few will have received the training they need to excel.

There is a number of common barriers professors face in improving their teaching techniques. These include an overemphasis on research funding, a lack of incentives for the scholarship of teaching and learning, a flawed

²⁹ Hughes, Julia Christensen and Joy Mighty (eds), *Taking Stock: Research on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Dr. Geri Van Gyn, “Why teaching should really count,” (BC: The University of Victoria, 2003).

³² Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America’s Universities* (New York: Boyer Commission, 1998).

expectation of how professors divide their time between research and teaching, an abrupt transition from graduate student to faculty positions with little or no support for learning how to teach, and a tendency to forget about the needs of sessional and contract lecturers.

This favouritism toward research is constantly affecting the outcome of hiring and tenure decisions at Ontario's universities. Not only have professors and administrators noted this inconsistency, but direct evidence is displayed daily in the way our universities scramble to be considered "research intensive." In general, stories of success inside the classroom are seldom given the same credit awarded for advancements in research.

Concern Five: Students' evaluations of instructors are not effective enough to truly measure teaching quality and are often not made available to students.

Student evaluations of their instructors are an important part of quantifying professors' teaching ability and often play a key role in the tenure and performance reviews of faculty members. In order to hold their professors and institutions accountable for a high-quality education, students must have the ability to view the data collected from these evaluations. At present, the availability of faculty evaluations is poor or non-existent at many institutions and is inconsistent across the province. Additionally, these evaluations are too often focused on students' satisfaction with various aspects of the course, rather than on teaching ability and learning outcomes of students. The questions must be improved such that students are urged to evaluate the full spectrum of teaching quality, and universities must strive to use this information not just to evaluate a professors' salary increase but actually improve the teaching quality on campus.

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 ten-year existence, the website has received over 8 million ratings of over one million professors. However, there are numerous concerns about these websites, as there is no guarantee the contributors are students that have taken the class, and the comments often have little to do with teaching effectiveness. The sample sizes are also flawed so that students could be making course choices based on one or two students' reviews.

The main impediment to the public availability of teaching evaluations is that they are often treated as the private property of the professor under faculty collective agreements, and so the professor's permission is required in order to make the information public.³³ Rather than automatically making them public, many universities require professors to opt-in to a program that publishes the results of student evaluations. These types of contracts and agreements demonstrate the resistance at many institutions to open and public teaching evaluations.

Concern Six: University instructors do not receive regular formal training in teaching.

University professors are expected to conduct research and to publish their findings. To accomplish this they use their research skills, gleaned while completing many years of graduate work. Along the way they are faced with many tests, to ensure that their research is of the highest calibre. Yet these same professors are asked to devote an equal amount of time to teaching as they do to research, after receiving absolutely no formal training in education. They are told that teaching and research must be balanced equally, yet are often given no formal instruction on how to teach. They may receive teaching tips from their peers, or they may attempt to emulate a worthy professor from their past, but the majority do not have the basic instruction in teaching that will allow them to excel.

Professors and teaching assistants are given the tremendous responsibility of encouraging the development of knowledge in others, without any training on how this should be done. We cannot expect quality teaching from these

³³ Ann Dowsett Johnston, "Grading the Graders", *Maclean's*, 14 November 2005, 26.

individuals without first teaching them how to instruct others. While some instructors do improve quickly, gaining confidence and experience as they go, others are soured by initial failure and never push themselves to improve.

The landmark Browne Report in the UK, which evaluated the country's university system, set the precedent that "students will expect that those teaching them will have a minimum level of skill in teaching" having developed a professional standards framework which accredits individual institutions' own teaching development activity, so as to meet the nationally recognized minimum standard. Moreover, they are requiring all institutions to mandate all new academics with teaching responsibilities to undertake a teaching training qualification accreditation.³⁴

Ontario universities claim to value teaching and research equally, but do not push new instructors to meet criteria concerning teaching ability. While instructional development programs are available at many institutions, they are optional and many instructors choose not to partake. It is up to the provincial government to insist that instructors at our publicly-subsidized institutions are capable of quality teaching, before they are thrust in front of a class. The quality of undergraduate teaching cannot truly advance until formal training in teaching is implemented.

Concern Seven: The culture of Ontario universities is not focused enough on teaching and learning as research is perceived as receiving more investment and support from Ontario institutions.

In recent years, increased emphasis on research from both federal and provincial governments has driven institutions to become "research intensive" in order to secure additional public funds. This has had an effect not only on the balance sheets of our universities, but also on institutional culture. Efforts to promote research have eclipsed the equally important mission of teaching even at the level of the individual professor. Faculty are discouraged by a system that is driven by research dollars and institutional prestige rather than learning outcomes for students. The remedy is not value teaching at the expense of research, but rather to rebalance expectations for both for both.

While "enhancing student engagement remains challenging, particularly at research-intensive institutions, most can do far more than they are currently doing to rebalance teaching and research".³⁵ When comparing the investment and resources that university administration dedicate to research over teaching, one can point to each institution's vice-president dedicated to research, with an entire office and staff in charge of overseeing the university's research activities. Whereas, many of the teaching and learning centres on campus struggle from year to year with devastating budget and staff cuts.

Further studies support this unfortunate imbalance. A recent survey found that 95 per cent of professors at six Ontario universities indicate that teaching is important or very important to their professional practice, while only 61 per cent believe that teaching is important or very important to their institution.³⁶

Concern Eight: High-impact experiences are not traditionally recognized as important components in a student's educational experience.

There are limited options for students to participate in high-impact experiences, as it is often dependent upon the will of the specific department or faculty to offer academic credit for programs including capstone projects, study abroad exchanges, or internships. Within a single institution, there are departments and faculties which offer several kinds of these opportunities, coupled with other departments and faculties that offer none.

³⁴ Browne Report, *Independent Review of Higher Education Funding & Student Finance*, 2010, pg. 48.

³⁵ Jillian Kinzie, *Taking Stock*, p. 151.

³⁶ Britnell, J., Brockerhoff-Macdonald, B., Carter, L., Dawson, D., Doucet, L., Evers, F., Hall, S., Kerr, D., Liboiron-Grenier, L., McIntyre, G., Mighty, J. Siddall, G., and Wilson, J., *University Faculty Engagement in Teaching Development Activities Phase II* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2010).

Moreover, programs offered by the ancillary units of the institution, including international volunteer programs or service learning opportunities, usually do not grant academic credit for the student's participation. By restricting the options of participation in such experiences beyond their academic career, there is a significant learning potential and demonstrated value that is lost for these students. It is becoming more widely recognized that the "importance faculty members place on high-impact undergraduate experiences influences the proportion of students that participate in those activities. For example on campus where the average faculty member believes participating in study abroad is somewhat important, only about four percent of students report this experience, whereas when faculty agree that study abroad is very important, nearly 50% of students participated in this activity."³⁷ Essentially, the more faculty members at a given institution value an activity, the more likely it is that students will participate. By failing to recognize and act on the academic value and learning experience that high-impact experiences can have, our universities are promoting the continued dominance of traditional teaching and learning philosophy.

Ultimately, high-impact experiences are not traditionally recognized as an important part of an undergraduate education. There is a lack of a coherent message and leadership being shown by university administrations, inherently making the development and availability of these opportunities more difficult. Increasing the number of opportunities is extremely important, but it is crucial that there is greater recognition of the vital part that these experiences should play in the Ontario undergraduate experience.

Recommendations

Recommendation Two: The provincial government must work with and support institutions to develop collaborative and active learning opportunities across disciplines.

One unfortunate reality of traditional teaching models is that student learning is very much an independent, isolated experience. Within traditional lecture-style classes there are few formal opportunities for consistent student participation. Students are expected to learn the material presented by the faculty, and demonstrate that they have learned the material through essays, exams and labs. Nowhere in this process are students required or encouraged to interact with their peers or faculty, meaning that the traditional lecture-style classes miss a valuable opportunity to enhance student success.

Student interaction with peers has been shown to positively influence overall academic development, knowledge acquisition, analytical and problems solving skills, as well as overall student self-esteem.³⁸ Additionally, increased opportunities for peer interaction within the classroom bring students into contact with students from diverse backgrounds, which have also been positively correlated with desirable post-secondary outcomes.³⁹

More importantly, the classroom is the only venue in a post-secondary institution where all types of students undoubtedly interact. For this reason, it is vitally important that teaching be done in a way that facilitates interaction between students, as well as between students and faculty.

There are a multitude of engaging pedagogies centred on active and collaborative learning principles, such as classroom-based problem solving, peer teaching, service learning, discovery learning, inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, case-based learning, and various forms of electronic technologies such as clickers and simulation software. Other promising instructional practices are supplemental instruction, peer tutoring, reciprocal teaching, attributional retraining, concept-knowledge maps, and one-minute papers. Research indicates that the greater the repertoire of teaching methods, the more effective the learning experience, especially when teaching approaches are aligned with student abilities and preferred learning styles and learning aims.⁴⁰

³⁷ Jillian Kinzie, *Taking Stock*, p. 148

³⁸ Kuh, et al., 2007, 58

³⁹ Kuh, et al., 2007, 59

⁴⁰ Bourner (1997). Cited in (Kuh et al, 1997, p. 91).

Community and Peer Based Learning

Community-based learning is an idea that has been proposed as an effective way to facilitate collaborative learning at the first-year level.⁴¹ One example of a learning community starts with co-registering (or being co-registered) in classes and tutorials so that they discuss topics and attend lectures with a consistent group of peers.⁴² Some large universities in the United States have already adopted models where students co-register in blocks of 25 to 30.⁴³ They attend larger sized lectures, but stay together for discussion in smaller group. This is similar in principle to tutorials, but the difference is that this discussion group stays consistent between classes.

Tinto proposes that organizing classes in this manner will require students to work together across classrooms, encouraging them to become more active and involved in each other's learning.⁴⁴ This is supported by evidence that has been available for quite some time. A 1976 study on peer learning found that seventy-percent of students felt more involved with a collaborative teaching model.⁴⁵

Collaborating with others on academic work and problem solving prepares students to deal with the messy, unscripted situations they will encounter daily during and after university and substantially increases the amount of time and effort students spend learning.⁴⁶ Peers are noted to be one of the strongest influences in student cognitive, behavioural, affective and psychological development and one can argue that in increasingly diversifying Canadian campuses an important source of facilitating dialogue between the different social strata.

Problem-Based Learning and Inquiry-Based Learning

The Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and inquiry-based learning model has gained a strong foothold in health science education.⁴⁷ This teaching model, employed by the faculty of Health Sciences at McMaster University, is a more recent Canadian example of the benefits of collaborative learning. In 2005, the PBL program won the Alan Blizzard award for innovation in teaching and learning, partly due to its success in helping students collaborate and communicate with one another. In fact, one of the goals of the program was to foster community-based learning.⁴⁸ In an open letter, one student recalled the impact PBL had on his learning experience. As he describes, "I can see now that I am a much more mature learner than many students I know from other faculties."

Through testing active and collaborative learning approaches, it has been found that students learned more effectively through cooperative group work. One study found students were more likely to "characterized the classroom environment as friendly, nonthreatening, fun, and dynamic" and "reported a sense of belonging and camaraderie because they regularly interacted with peers and learned from each other."⁴⁹

The government and our institutions should place a priority on the value of undergraduate student learning and encourage the widespread adoption of these progressive and more effective educational philosophies. With provincial support for similar collaborative learning opportunities, prospects for collaborative learning could be extended to students from all faculties and programs.

⁴¹ Tinto, Vincent, *Taking Student Retention Seriously*, (Syracuse University: April 15, 2002), 4.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 5.

⁴⁵ Falchikov, Nancy. *Learning Together: Peer Tutoring in Higher Education* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2001), 35.

⁴⁶ Christensen, J., & Joy, M. (2010). *Taking Stock: Research on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*(pg 146). Montreal & Kingston: Queens University Press.

⁴⁷ Allen and Duch, 1998; Duch, Gron, and Allen, 2001; Rutherford and Ahlgren, 1990.

⁴⁸ McKinnell, Jennifer, et al., *Skill Development with Students and Explicit Integration Across Four Years of the Curriculum*, (McMaster University: 2005), 8.

⁴⁹ Ebert-May, Brewer, and Allred, 1997.

Recommendation Three: The provincial government should place a higher priority on university capital projects designed to promote collaborative and active learning.

The steps forward are to challenge the conception of the existing learning facilities on Ontario campuses – the fifty minute lecture in tiered classrooms with fixed seating – to understand the evolving role of diversity and modern technology on the ability of upcoming generations to successfully learn within our existing pedagogy. Emphasis over the long run instead should be on developing “learning spaces” that facilitate and provide facilities for faculty, administration, librarians and students as they so desperately need to become effective facilitators of learning. The institutions need significant funding if they wish to modify their existing fixed seating classrooms with tables and chairs on cantors, integration of wireless technology, and significant increase in laptop outlets for supporting hybrid learning pedagogy. The effort here must be to carefully develop hybrid courses that bring together the best of both worlds rather than simply supplanting existing didactic lectures onto the online format.

Some institutions have shown incredible leadership through the provision of learning space tailored to support collaborative learning. For example, learning commons space has been established in a number of university libraries across Ontario. Some of these spaces have been constructed with funds provided by the recent federal and provincial infrastructure programs, such as the Lakehead Learning Commons.

Should collaborative and community-based learning become more prevalent however, it is vitally important that universities are able to provide adequate meeting space to all students who need access to it. This space should be extended beyond the traditional sphere of the library. To enhance student success, scholars have recommended changing the way we design our campuses to emphasize principles of flexibility, rich stimulating environments, places for group learning, having all resource available, and active and passive places.⁵⁰ Since the classroom is the one place where students are certain to meet, it has been proposed that making classrooms the locus of campus community is a sure way to facilitate engaging classroom environments.⁵¹

For schools seeking to show leadership through the promotion of collaborative and community based learning, efforts to provide the necessary infrastructure should be supported provincially. This will not only provide institutions another incentive to move to a collaborative teaching model, but would give them the resources to do it effectively.

Investments are needed to repurpose existing classrooms so that they are able to support new methods of teaching and learning. There is a growing recognition in the sector that the traditional lecture method of teaching is inferior to active and collaborative teaching pedagogies. Unfortunately, our classrooms have been built in a way that facilitates the lecture method and prevents the broad use of new techniques, such as problem-based learning and learning communities. To encourage this transformation and improve the quality of education and future productivity of our students, our universities must have adequate funding.

Recommendation Four: Universities must actively promote the use of alternative assessment methods.

In the transformation of our understanding of effective teaching philosophy from passive to active, there is a corresponding consideration on the effectiveness of the assessment of learning outcomes.

By changing the methodology of our teaching practices, we are effectively changing the way the information is being sent to and received by the student and how they are processing the data. This progression of our teaching pedagogy calls into question the widely used archaic methods of measuring student performance, and whether our assessment tools should aim to modernize with the way teaching and learning is within the academy.

⁵⁰ Colin Beard and John P. Wilson, *Experiential Learning: Second Edition* (London: 2006).

⁵¹ Kuh, et al., 2007, 117.

There is strong support for an evaluation of the types of measurement and assessment tools that students experience, considering the overemphasis that is currently placed on multiple choice 'Scantron' exams in first-, second-, and many third-year classes. Our institutions should complement the efforts to teach in an active capacity by increasing the options for testing students in an active style which could be flexible to students' individual strengths and needs. Often there are students suffering from learning disabilities which continue to go undiagnosed or untreated. This poses serious concern for students who are not setup to best perform in the traditional assessment criteria of university.

Recommendation Five: The provincial government must provide incentives for universities to develop a first-year seminar program with the aim of providing at least one small class experience to each first-year student.

Student engagement at the first year level has an enormous impact on student success. Programs focusing on the first year experience have been positively correlated with a variety of positive outcomes, such as higher persistence and graduation rates.⁵² Several initiatives have been proven to have a particular impact on student success, and it is of vital importance that when institutions deal with financial strain these programs are not the ones that suffer.

First-year seminars have taken a wide variety of forms across the institutions that have utilized them. Some are an orientation to university style learning, while others are subject-based and presided over by faculty members. The common thread throughout these programs is that they teach not only course content, but facilitate closer interaction between students without university experience, and faculty or staff who are familiar with success strategies. Through this interaction, students learn not only what is taught, but how to learn it.

The National Survey of Student Engagement findings show additional benefits for students who participated in a first-year seminar. Controlling for a variety of student and institutional characteristics, findings show that those in a first-year seminar were more challenged academically, reported more active and collaborative learning activities, interacted more frequently with faculty, perceived the campus environment as being more supportive, gained more from their first year of college, and made greater use of campus services.⁵³

First-year seminars have been identified as a useful strategy in increasing first-to-second-year retention because "the instructor also serves as the students' advisor, to strengthen the likelihood of connecting to an advisor relationally as well as in terms of easy availability." Moreover first-year seminars can assist in "creating a sense of community in the classroom, providing a 'home' for first-year students struggling to navigate a 'new environment, which can enhance their satisfaction with the campus climate."⁵⁴

Another advantage of first-year seminar programs is the positive impact they have on students with diverse study skills. First-year seminars have the greatest impact on the least academically prepared students. Students who have taken first-year seminars have shown higher grades and reenrollment rates. Since success in first year has been linked with persistence and success in upper years, the opportunity to increase success in first year is an opportunity that must not be missed.⁵⁵

Recommendation Six: The provincial government must provide incentives for universities to implement a capstone project for each student in their final year.

Evidence has shown the benefits that capstone projects can offer senior level students, taking forms such as a thesis project or lab project. A 'high-impact' experience at the end of a student's baccalaureate education provides a forum

⁵² Kuh, et al., 2007, 79.

⁵³ Kuh, *Piecing Together the Student Success Puzzle* p. 80

⁵⁴ Laurie A. Schreiner, *Linking Student Satisfaction and Retention* (Coralville, Iowa: Noel-Levitz, 2009).

⁵⁵ Carstens, 2000. Kuh, *Piecing Together the Student Success Puzzle* p. 80

for the student to demonstrate the full breadth of their learning in a highly intensive capacity. With capstone projects, students have the opportunity to develop “research partnerships and mentoring relationships with faculty” while providing senior students the availability to engage in academic discussions that extend learning outside of class all contributing to the student’s “intellectual growth and satisfaction with their experiences.”⁵⁶

The opportunity for students to partake in the academic challenge of a final culminating assignment is overwhelming valuable. An experience of this calibre requires students to engage in a problem-based/inquiry-based activity that asks them to apply all that they have learned over their four years of university.

The Ontario government should adopt the expectation that every undergraduate student finishes their degree with a final cumulative project. Provincial incentives are required to push institutions in this positive direction, either through direct funding or a change in the accountability framework.

Recommendation Seven: Funding must be designated by the provincial government to improve instructional support centres to encourage innovation in teaching and provide ongoing professional development for Ontario’s post-secondary educators.

At present, most campuses have the equivalent of a Centre for Teaching and Learning to encourage better teaching practices but they are not mandatory and often it is teachers who need help most who get it the least. Individual institutions have made commendable efforts to improve the support offered to instructors; however real progress will only be made when the Province recognizes the need to improve teaching and responds with the first step of a significant investment in these support centres.

Instructional support and professional development programs in Ontario must encompass a number of important areas such as: training in language, sensitivity, diversity, as well as recommendations on effective pedagogical practices. Often instructional support centres are the first area to receive funding cuts amid a university’s budgetary difficulties; however, the promotion of high quality teaching cannot be an optional investment in the institutions that are expected to be educating our citizenry.

The amount of funding needed to give these Centres the resources they need to create change is uncertain. Students suggest that an average increase in funding of \$500,000 at each university, a total investment of \$11 million a year, would empower these Centres to do what is necessary to change the culture around teaching and learning on their campuses. Moreover, this funding would send a signal to the universities that the government is serious about improving the quality of teaching and learning on our campuses.

Recommendation Eight: Quality teaching must have equal consideration with research performance for all decisions relating to hiring, promotion and tenure.

Teaching and research are often said to be of equal value, but in reality most institutions heavily favour research in decisions related to hiring, promotion and tenure. One study shows that faculty estimate “evaluation of teaching is rated around 20-30% in salary, promotion and tenure decisions, compared to 60% or more for research.” This is particularly troubling given that both student satisfaction and engagement are so strongly linked with student success.⁵⁷

To ensure that teaching quality is weighted equally with research in relation to hiring decisions, it is essential that the sector come together to arrive upon a mutually beneficial solution to the issue. If government action is required it is preferable that it stem from a broad consensus across the PSE sector. For this reason, OUSA proposes that

⁵⁶ Laurie A. Schreiner, *Linking Student Satisfaction and Retention* (Coralville, Iowa: Noel-Levitz, 2009).

⁵⁷ Kuh, et al., 2007, 10.

students, the government, institutions and faculties come together to discuss why and how our institutions should hire the faculty who wind up teaching undergraduate students.

Recommendation Nine: The provincial government must mandate that all Ontario universities conduct and improve teaching evaluations. The results should be easily accessible to students.

While all Ontario universities have some form of student evaluation of teaching, many of these assessments employ questions that provide little insight into the quality of the in-class learning environment. The ubiquitous “Overall, how would you rate this course?” question is insufficient, and yet these are being used internally to measure student satisfaction with the learning experience. A recent HEQCO review of these assessments found them to be “valuable and important tools for the assessment of teaching – but only if they are developed and supported with the understanding that validity is determined by much more than simply the ways students respond to individual items on a survey.”⁵⁸

Students and taxpayers contribute a great deal to Ontario universities in exchange for quality education. As a student, one contributes to the university through tuition payment. Thus, the accessibility of information on quality is of the greatest concern to Ontario students. In addition to knowing how their tuition is benefiting them, students must be able to make informed decisions about course selection and the faculty they develop working relationships with.

The vast majority of teaching evaluation survey results must be made available to students in order to provide instructor and institutional accountability. Because some collective agreements between universities and faculty associations prevent open access to professor evaluations, this may require that future collective agreements include this requirement.

Recommendation Ten: The provincial government must ensure that teaching quality is a fundamental part of all future multi-year accountability agreements.

As recognized recently in the recent Browne Report in the U.K., “the regulation of quality is central to the credibility of the higher education system.” As students and the public are both contributing to the investment in higher education “they will have to be assured that investment is not being wasted on substandard provision.”⁵⁹ Students are pleased to see the emphasis on quality that has resulted from the recent implementation of multi-year accountability agreements. These agreements though have not provided for true accountability in practice as institutions receive funding regardless of the quality of the learning environment.

Furthermore, the current MYAAs are not specific enough to hold institutions accountable for the quality of teaching and learning. Rather than a blanked report-back on quality improvements, specific targets and measures under the umbrella of teaching quality should be created. One example would be to set long- and short-term targets for the number of undergraduate courses using some form of active learning, for example, 30% of undergraduate classes in the next two years and 50% of all undergraduate classes in five years.

More broadly, students encourage the government to “focus assessment and accountability efforts on what matters to student success”. The role of the government should be to provide incentives for postsecondary institutions to responsibly report and use information about the student experience to improve teaching and learning quality.⁶⁰

Recommendation Eleven: The provincial government must develop incentives for all new instructors and teaching assistants to be given formal instruction in teaching methods and practices.

⁵⁸ Gravestock, P. and Gregor-Greenleaf, E., *Student Course Evaluations: Research, Models and Trends*. (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2008).

⁵⁹ The Browne Report, p. 47

⁶⁰ Kuh et al, 2007, p. 120

One of the systemic problems with teaching at Ontario universities is the fact that professors are often not required to complete formal training in teaching. While many schools have opportunities for professional development, usually these are not mandatory. This is a concern for OUSA considering the impact a skilled teacher can have on student success. Unfortunately, mandating current professors to attend formal teaching training wades into the territory of the collective agreements worked out between faculties and institutions.

For this reason, students believe that another way to ensure that instructors at Ontario universities receive adequate training in teaching is for the training to be incorporated into PhD programmes. A pocket of funding should be made available to universities if they are able to develop teaching training programmes for PhD students or new instructors. Since many Ontario universities already have centres for teaching and learning, these efforts could be utilized to coordinate the development of these programmes.

The benefits of providing these incentives are clear. Teachers aware of educationally effective pedagogies in the United States have had positive results engaging students from diverse backgrounds with differing learning styles.⁶¹ Even for those PhD students not seeking teaching positions, the ability to communicate information effectively is still useful.

Many universities also rely heavily on student teachers, be it undergraduates or graduate students. Most of these instructors are not required to complete any training with regards to teaching, yet these instructors are on the front lines with students. They should be required to have some training. To ensure there is a consistent education experience for students, providing our student teachers with proper teaching techniques is essential to student success.

Recommendation Twelve: Ontario universities and the provincial government must raise the profile and importance of teaching and learning on university campuses.

Students feel unequivocally that the balance between teaching and research is off on Ontario campuses. The government and institutions have a strong role to play in ensuring that the undergraduate learning experience is of the highest quality, and teaching and learning is the most critical component of that experience. Raising the profile of teaching and learning is necessary to change the culture on our campuses. The following are some examples of how this can be achieved:

1. Appoint a teaching and learning leader in each department to work with their colleagues in improving the department's teaching, learning and assessment strategies and to assist in reviewing and designing curriculum because "change in teaching also requires effective leadership at the departmental level."⁶²
2. Establish a senior administrative position such as an Associate Vice-President of Teaching and Learning at each institution.
3. Require all universities to create an institutionally-specific Taskforce on Teaching and Learning to report progress to the government on efforts being made to stimulate quality teaching and learning on their campus.

Recommendation Thirteen: The provincial government should create and fund Ontario Teaching Chairs.

In 2005, the provincial government pledged \$25 million to create research chairs at universities across the province.⁶³ These prestigious appointments are given to researchers who are "acknowledged by peers as a world leader in the

⁶¹ Kuh, et al., 2007, 91

⁶² *Taking Stock*, page 241

⁶³ Council of Ontario Universities, *Ontario Research Chairs Background* (Toronto: 2010).

field.” The money for research chairs is provided to allow professors the ability to focus on research alone during the time of their funding. This contributes greatly to the culture of excellence in research that exists in Ontario.

But in addition to research excellence, Ontario’s faculty are also developing leading edge curriculum and pedagogy that will have an immeasurable positive impact on the next generation of students. As Teaching Chairs, these professors would be relieved of traditional research responsibilities so they could focus efforts on advancing the scholarship of teaching and learning. Furthermore, these individuals would be ambassadors for improved teaching quality, raising awareness among their colleagues and driving cultural change with regard to teaching and learning at our institutions.

The Ontario Research Chair program provides \$150,000 per faculty member. At the same unit cost, 100 teaching chairs, or an average of five per university, could be established for \$15 million. By undertaking this initiative, the Ontario government would be sending a clear message that teaching quality is important and our faculty will be rewarded for being some of the best teachers in the world.

Student Success in the Broader Learning Environment

Principles

Principle Eight: The broader learning experience a student receives outside the classroom is critical to student success.

The standard university experience is not defined primarily by time spent in class. While the classroom is critical, outside-the-classroom institutional conditions and experiential learning are as important if not more important to a student’s university experience.

A student’s out-of-classroom experience contributes substantially to their learning and growth development, with “participation in co-curricular activities positively related to persistence and is associated with other outcomes such as interpersonal skills, self-confidence, and leadership”.⁶⁴ Factors such as size, organizational structure and the student focus of the institutional mission are related to student success.⁶⁵ Additionally, opportunities for extra-curricular growth, such as clubs, athletic programs, as well as residences, have been positively correlated with persistence and engagement.⁶⁶

An education is not simply defined by what a student learns in a classroom, but by the diverse avenues a student will inevitably take to grow during their time in school.

Concerns

Concern Nine: There is not enough support from universities to enrich the broader learning environment.

Each week, the average student spends in the neighbourhood of 20 hours in class, leaving seven times that number for life outside of class. Much of this time is spent on campus, especially at the more residential universities, and it is the activities pursued in these hours that make up the broader learning environment and truly shape a student’s success. Unfortunately, Ontario universities have traditionally taken a narrow view of their responsibility to provide a high quality learning environment, confining the vast majority of discussion and effort to the in-class experience, and

⁶⁴ *Taking Stock*, page 150

⁶⁵ Kuh, et al., 2007, 73

⁶⁶ Kuh, et al., 2007, 59-66.

doing little to actively and systematically encourage students, staff, faculty and community members to remain on campus and engage with one another.

Extracurricular activities are one important element of the broader learning environment that receives far too little attention. Through a vast array of opportunities provided by student clubs and student government, students learn to lead, to serve, to tolerate, to work collaboratively and to take initiative in their lives and their community – fundamental lessons that are mostly absent from traditional curricula. Unfortunately, necessary funding for student clubs and initiatives is often difficult to acquire except through funds from student government or private donation. Furthermore, students are considerably more likely to receive recognition in the form of institutional awards or scholarships for their academic pursuits than for their work in the community, which sends the message that these extra-curricular learning experiences are of lesser importance.

Health and wellness opportunities are crucial to the broader learning environment, as they ensure that physical health complements the mental agility developed inside and outside the classroom. Again universities view athletics and additional health costs as an ancillary service, charging sometimes hundreds of dollars in additional fees for basic access to facilities and further user fees to enrol in specific programs or teams.

Diversity and internationalization are also recognized as key elements of a strong broader learning environment by both institutions and government, yet government and institutions continue to view international undergraduate students first and foremost as a source of revenue, rather than a benefit to the university community.

Even infrastructure for the broader learning environment is considered of secondary importance. Although there is wide-spread agreement that high-quality athletics and recreation space and student life space are important to student success, the physical infrastructure for these pursuits is paid for through student ancillary fees.

Some progress has been made in recent years through initiatives such as the creation of Learning Commons, defined by York University as “a dynamic, collaborative environment on campus that provides assistance to students with information and research needs. It combines individual and group study space, in-depth reference service, and instruction from a variety of sources, including librarians and information technology staff.”⁶⁷ Spaces such as York University’s ‘Learning Commons’ are vital in supporting the broader learning environment insofar as it relates directly to the in-class learning environment. Yet the idea of a university-funded commons that provides the same “dynamic, collaborative environment” for students engaged in equally important extra-curricular activities has yet to be realized.

Concern Ten: Opportunities for students to further their educational experience through meaningful work study programs can be threatened by administrative decisions and budgetary constraints.

In the 2009 provincial budget, the government invested 90 million dollars into summer employment opportunities for youth, which was predicted to cause a growth of over 100,000 jobs.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, this was coupled with a summer that featured the highest student unemployment rates since 1977.⁶⁹ While the 2010 summer saw a slight recovery in student employment numbers, they were still below the precedent of previous years. Therefore, students who need work are being left out of the system, and having to make up the lost income. Consequently, the demand for work study jobs is likely to be higher than it normally would be as a result of this.

Many of our Ontario universities require that students have completed an OSAP application to be eligible for work study at their institution, meaning that students unable or unwilling to take on more debt are unable to take advantage of work study programs. It has commonly been regarded that the observed increase in working students is a result of

⁶⁷ York University, *The Learning Commons Concept*, available at <http://www.library.yorku.ca/ccm/Home/preview/infolit/commons/learning-commons.en>

⁶⁸ Government of Ontario, *Ontario Budget Background: Preserving and Creating Jobs* (Toronto: 2009).

⁶⁹ Statistics Canada, “Latest release from the Labour Force Survey” (Ottawa: Human Resources and Skills Development, 2011).

tuition inflation; however, it is important to examine all the reasons why university students work to understand the importance of work study programs. Aside from supplementing financial aid, the Canadian Student Survey demonstrated that working to avoid borrowing, to establish an independent source of income, to gain career experience are all common reasons to seek employment. In fact, only 62% of students reported working to pay for school related necessities, meaning the Ontario Work Study Plan is likely inhibiting a greater proportion of students from applying than originally expected.

What is most important is that due to lingering financial uncertainty and increased demand for work study placements, a small percentage of students are able to benefit from the learning experiences that can come with meaningful employment. Work study has been positively correlated with higher retention and graduation rates⁷⁰, especially in minority and low-income student groups as well as upper-year undergraduates. Nevertheless, decreased attrition only provides a small glimpse into the benefits of increasing employment opportunities through work study programs. While, the relationship between employment and student success is contested in the literature, there is a general consensus that work study programs and the type of employment they provide is beneficial. Work study programs offer a welcoming environment for students to gain valuable experience and build self-esteem through recognition for their contributions and achievements.

Concern Eleven: Experiential learning opportunities are inadequately promoted with limited availability in Ontario universities.

Active engagement is one of the core tenants of learning, but this learning does not end at the classroom. Students participate in a multitude of experiences in the broader learning environment that teach students about themselves, provide them with new skills and knowledge, and increase student engagement in both formal and informal learning.⁷¹ Some of this learning is not formally coordinated by our institutions, such as students learning to cope with strict time constraints or their roommates. However, given the important role that universities play in stimulating learning and student development, formal opportunities for experiential learning must be fostered.

Unfortunately, this is not often a high priority at many institutions. Opportunities for students to participate in primary research with faculty, work in paid or voluntary employment, international experiences, or pursue learning outside the classroom vary considerably from university to university. For example, at the University of Waterloo, nearly half of students participate in between four and six co-operative work terms that provide these students with immeasurable experience and learning opportunities. While several other universities have co-op and internship programs as well, the programs are not widely available to most students and come with significant additional fees.⁷² Similarly, undergraduate research opportunities available at McMaster University are generally unparalleled in any Ontario university and are often restricted to a select number of fourth-year research projects. Finally, international experiences, such as exchanges, field work, development projects, semesters abroad, and research opportunities, have demonstrated positive impacts on student learning, yet are taken up by only 2% of university students due to a lack of funds, low awareness of opportunities and administrative constraints on students.⁷³

Recommendations

Recommendation Fourteen: Universities must dedicate resources to foster the broader learning environment.

While traditional higher learning takes place inside the classroom, many post-secondary students learn just as much from participating in extra-curricular activities. Through athletics, arts, charity work, student governance

⁷⁰ Kuh, et al., 2007, 28.

⁷¹ Colin Beard and John P. Wilson, *Experiential Learning: Second Edition* (London: 2006).

⁷² Peggy Sattler, *Work-Integrated Learning in Ontario's Postsecondary Sector* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2010).

⁷³ Association of Universities and Colleges of Ontario, *Canadian universities and international student mobility* (Ottawa: 2007).

and other endeavours, students develop leadership skills, see the benefit of contributing to their community and experience immense personal development. If Ontario students are to gain the most from their education, it must include these extra-curricular opportunities and our universities must commit to supporting a broader-learning environment on and around campus.

The role of universities in this pursuit is paramount. The institutions themselves must instil a culture of learning on campuses that spreads everywhere, not just in classrooms. Support for students to undertake research, employment, exchanges and experience real world opportunities, is a crucial element of a strategy for student success. Beyond formal opportunities, students should be supported in more informal pursuits. Extracurricular and clubs organized by student associations should be supported with campus space and shared resources. Co-curricular transcripts which document a student's involvement outside of academics may be a way to promote the broader learning environment, as would student leadership development opportunities. Adequate campus space must also be constructed and set-aside for study and meeting space where students can work and socialize with their peers.

Recommendation Fifteen: Universities must expand the availability of work study opportunities and consider all students eligible to apply.

To get through the difficult period ahead, where students will have immediate costs but be faced with a poor job market, it is absolutely essential that support for work study programs be increased, and that eligibility for these programs be expanded to all students. Currently, some universities only make the Ontario Work Study Plan available to students who have a processed OSAP application for the corresponding academic year.⁷⁴ To ensure that students facing difficult financial circumstances have access to employment, it is imperative that these opportunities be open to all students attending post-secondary institutions and not simply students in the OSAP system. It is also important to realize the role work study programs can play in overall student development and success; an opportunity which should not be exclusive to OSAP applicants.

Moreover, the opportunity to work on campus in partnership with university programs provides a unique learning experience for the institution and student. It has been reported that “campus jobs help [students] to learn to work with people who are different from themselves, understand how to operate in diverse situations, learn about themselves as individuals, achieve competence, and help others”. Additionally, a moderate amount of on-campus work has been positively correlated with student success, since it can enhance student understanding of how institutions function⁷⁵ and the importance of collaboration in achieving success in university and beyond. Finally, increasing the amount of positions available in work study programs will allow more students to find meaningful jobs during the summer and limit the need to work long hours during the school year. Reducing working hours to between 1-14 hours per week during the school year has been shown to increase persistence in students enrolled in post secondary education.

Programs such as McWork at McMaster University offer students meaningful employment opportunities through the university.⁷⁶ Jointly funded by the institution and the provincial government, McWork offers employment that is knowledgeable about students' educational needs during their term of employment. Similarly, the Work Study program at the University of Western Ontario is jointly funded and available to all students in financial need, connecting students to local jobs that fit their academic schedules. These are excellent examples of already existing institutional-provincial partnerships that provide students the kind of employment conducive to student success. These opportunities must be available to all students in need, not simply those in the OSAP system.

⁷⁴ McMaster University, Website, (October 2009); accessed online at http://sfas.mcmaster.ca/work_study/jobs.html#owsp

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Recommendation Sixteen: The provincial government must create incentives to increase the availability of work-integrated learning opportunities.

Work-integrated learning is the process whereby students integrate learning from experiences in educational and practice setting to deepen understanding. These types of experiences include apprenticeships, co-op education, work placements, service learning, experiential learning, practicum, field placements, internships and practice-based learning. There a number of documented benefits to students from these types of out-of-class learning, including career exploration, improved prospects for employment, opportunities to apply theory to practice, development of marketable skills, increased self-confidence, personal growth, civic engagement and financial compensation. Employers also benefit from improved productivity, reduced training costs, better connections to community and post-secondary institutions, and highly motivated employees.⁷⁷

Co-operative education, for example, formally integrates a student's academic experience with work experience, typically through alternating terms for work with remuneration for the student. Co-op graduates report higher earning and employment rates, increased career satisfaction and more advanced career upward mobility compared to non-co-op graduates.⁷⁸ The programs also allow institutions to utilize their physical space more effectively, given the number of students who are off-campus during any given term.⁷⁹

Service learning is another approach to work-integrated education that integrates volunteerism and community service into post-secondary education. This is a model that has gained popularity at a number of Ontario institutions and has learning benefits to students, and economic benefits to the community. It is widely considered to be an educationally purposeful activity.⁸⁰ This kind of learning represents an opportunity for students to become engaged in learning both in and outside the classroom. More fundamentally, this type of involvement is shown to be positively correlated with persistence.⁸¹

In 2005, the J.W McConnell family foundation distributed a series of grants which allowed for the creation of community service learning departments at recipient universities across Canada.⁸² Unfortunately, there are no guarantees that these departments will be continued when the grants stop. Concern has been expressed by the Service Learning workers across Canada that funding will not be sustained.⁸³ Additionally, many Service Learning departments do not have the financial resources to reach out to faculties and implement service learning in the classrooms, severely inhibiting the effectiveness of these centres.⁸⁴

These opportunities are excellent for students, but at times the university will impede a student from completing a work-integrated learning opportunity within their interest area as this focus does not align with the institutions. This is a practise that needs to change as a student should be allowed to pursue opportunities that advance their academic and personal success.

As an educationally effective practice conducive to student success, supporting work-integrated learning should be a provincial priority, by not only ensuring the longevity of these opportunities, but also that they have the desired impact on student learning. Furthermore, it could have long-term impacts on the effectiveness and flexibility of the labour

⁷⁷ Peggy Sattler, *Work-Integrated Learning in Ontario's Postsecondary Sector* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2010).

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ James Downey, J.G. Kalbfleisch, and R.D. Truman, *Co-operative Education: Greater Benefits, Greater Costs* (Waterloo: University of Waterloo, 2002).

⁸⁰ Kuh, et al., 2007, 103.

⁸¹ Kuh, et al., 2007, 59.

⁸² Canadian Alliance for Community Service Learning, Website, (October 2009); accessed online at http://www.communityservicelearning.ca/en/welcome_history_canada.htm

⁸³ Canadian Alliance for Community Service Learning, Website, (October 2009); accessed online at http://www.communityservicelearning.ca/en/documents/ScanofCSLinCanada_000.pdf, 13.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

market. Four out of five new labour market entrants are college and university graduates, and ensuring these graduates have valued skills and experience would go a long way to ensuring both economic and student success.⁸⁵

Recommendation Seventeen: The provincial government should provide incentives for universities to develop comprehensive Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programs.

There are few opportunities that can facilitate discovery and skills development as effectively as undergraduate research opportunities programs (UROPs). UROPs are an integral part of university life in many American universities, but these opportunities have never been fully explored in Ontario, or even Canada. Recently, McMaster University started a pilot project for undergraduate research that is believed to be the nation's first university-wide UROP.

UROPs have the following characteristics:

- Undergraduates submit proposals outlining their research plan, subject area and faculty sponsor;
- Once approved, students work with faculty researchers on selected projects of shared interest, on projects they devise themselves, or on an ongoing research project from one of the academic departments, professional schools or research centres;
- Students work full-time for summer terms or part-time during the year within an academic department at the university; and
- The research results are presented to the public or can appear in academic journals.

Undergraduate research contributes to the academic culture of an undergraduate education. Involved students feel a part of scholarly history, their work having been recorded and presented to current and future students. Groups of students work together, further defining new areas of study. This is the type of environment within which excellence flourishes, an environment of free, critical thinking, combined with independent research.

The student or students are given control of the direction of their research, with faculty providing assistance in the learning process. These programs allow students to develop highly transferable skills in research, writing, analysis and communication. There is a clear benefit to all students, whether they wish to pursue further education or other opportunities outside academia.

This type of program is linked with objectives at various levels of government. The federal Conservative government, in its 2006 election platform, emphasized that "increased promotion of basic and applied research, especially in science and technology, is an essential component of Canada's future economic well-being."⁸⁶ In 2005, Premier McGuinty created the Ministry of Research and Innovation and chose to lead it himself, thus demonstrating his desire to focus on this portfolio. On its website, the Ministry calls innovation "the driver of growth across all sectors of the economy"⁸⁷ and its strategic plan says we must "rebalance the learning environment by providing more exposure to experiential-based learning...with a focus on people at the post-secondary education level and those involved in early-stage research and development enterprises."⁸⁸

Undergraduate research opportunities programs have other benefits for institutions and the province as a whole. UROPs can increase research capacity while maintaining quality. Many universities brand themselves "research intensive" while also claiming to be focused on the individual student. Research and undergraduate learning are seen to be separate enterprises, each distinct from the other. Institutions therefore feel they must decide between supporting their undergraduate teaching mission and supporting their research capacity. Undergraduate research

⁸⁵ Peggy Sattler, *Work-Integrated Learning in Ontario's Postsecondary Sector* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2010).

⁸⁶ Conservative Party of Canada, *Stand Up For Canada: Conservative Party of Canada Federal Election Platform 2006*.

⁸⁷ "Why MRI Was created." Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation. <http://www.mri.gov.on.ca/english/about/MRISStory.asp>

⁸⁸ Ministry of Research and Innovation, *Ministry of Research and Innovation Strategic Plan* (Toronto: Government of Ontario, 2006).

aims to bridge this divide. Funding this type of initiative allows institutions to increase their research capacity without compromising their commitment to undergraduate education.

Students who engage in undergraduate research consistently pursue graduate education. Funding undergraduate research increases the pool of potential graduate students, and initiates student research enterprises at a younger age, allowing students to better define their research pursuits. Given the provincial government's recent emphasis on graduate education, and the looming faculty shortage due to retirement, UROPs would go a long way to increasing the graduate applicant pool.

UROPs can also provide meaningful employment opportunities for students. Resources allocated towards undergraduate research offer much needed summer employment for students already struggling to earn enough to cover the ever rising costs of post-secondary education. Financial compensation for undergraduate students conducting research is lower than industry standards, allowing funds to be spent on employing greater numbers of students, while also funding high quality research environments.

While not all undergraduate students will participate in these initiatives, undergraduate research will undoubtedly enhance the university experience for all students by raising the level of intellectual activity, and therefore providing additional opportunities for personal growth. Studies have shown that participation in undergraduate research, "...made it more likely that students mastered complex scientific concepts and developed critical and independent thinking skills."⁸⁹ Furthermore, the literature on teaching and learning considers undergraduate research to be a 'high-impact practice,' correlated with "elevated performance across multiple engagement and desired-outcomes measures."⁹⁰

Recommendation Eighteen: The provincial government should provide incentives for universities to develop campus business incubators, entrepreneurial challenges and broad-based idea accelerators.

Campus business incubators, entrepreneurial challenges and broad-based idea accelerators provide students with an opportunity to explore and develop a new idea or business concept with the help of faculty and local advisors. They provide meaningful opportunities for university students to develop skills, enhance learning and gain experience, all of which allow them to move on to higher levels of education or the workforce.

A campus business incubator provides operational expertise, including the ability to facilitate the establishment and growth of new business. The concept of an incubator draws on the U.S. experience, where ideas generated by student entrepreneurs have led to successful multi-billion dollar businesses such as Yahoo! The trend has reached the UK, where a number of firms have supported students setting up start-up businesses. The development of campus incubators in Canada and Ontario has been quite limited, with a few notable exceptions.⁹¹

This concept is in line with the provincial government's election platform, which lists "strong support for innovation" as one of the cornerstones of a stronger Ontario.⁹² In fact the 2008 Ontario Budget lists "strengthening the environment for innovation" as part of the government's five point plan for the economy.⁹³

By participating in a business incubator, students gain knowledge and experience in the process of drafting business plans and raising capital, as well as access to a network of professional advisors. Most incubators offer working space to the start-up companies in a campus-style environment, which allows the occupants to network with each

⁸⁹Nnadozie, Emmanuel, John Ishiyama and Jane Chon. Undergraduate Research Internships and Graduate School Success. Kirksville, MO: Truman State University, 2001.

⁹⁰ Association of American Colleges and Universities. *College Learning for the New Global Century*. Washington: 2007.

⁹¹ Examples in Ontario include the University of Toronto's Exceler@tor, the University of Waterloo's VeloCity, and McMaster University's Campus Incubator.

⁹² Ontario Liberal Party, *Moving Forward Together: The Ontario Liberal Plan 2007*.

⁹³ Government of Ontario, *2008 Ontario Budget: Growing a Stronger Ontario* (Toronto: 2008).

other and use their collective expertise. These collections of 'micro-businesses' form what is known in Japanese as keiretsu – a group whose members rely on each other for synergy. The financial sponsors of an incubator invest in the future worth of resident members of the network through investment in-kind and recoup their investment in the long term from the increase in equity value of successful businesses. The sponsors also accept a proportion might fail. These start-up entrepreneurs in turn will in due course decide if they wish to remain within the supportive environment of the incubator or move out and live on their own, giving up the synergies of the group in return for corporate freedom.

It should be noted that campus incubators focusing on the development of students' ideas are quite different from incubators focusing on the commercialization of research. These incubators have become quite popular recently, particularly in the biotech sector. At McMaster, the new Centre for Learning and Discovery will have lab space for a Biotech Incubator.⁹⁴ In London, the University of Western Ontario and the City's Economic Development Department have partnered on the London Biotechnology Incubation Centre.⁹⁵ These models do not share the same goals and outcomes as student-focused campus incubators or entrepreneurial challenges.

Broad-based idea accelerators are quite similar to campus incubators; however, the objective is not entrepreneurial success. These kinds of programs or facilities allow students to develop a concept that may have a positive social impact on a particular group or region. This may involve the development of community art, sustainable engineering projects or the establishment of a framework for human rights advocacy organization in developing countries. An example of an idea accelerator is the Artisan House Incubator in Bristol.

Recommendation Nineteen: The provincial government should expand the financial support available for university students to engage in international experiences and should work to increase the diversity of international opportunities available.

International exchange opportunities are incredibly beneficial to student success. Students are given a chance to experience different teaching styles and unique research, but more than that, personal development is stimulated. This results in increased creativity and freedom of thought, as well as an understanding and appreciation for other cultures and ways of life. In addition to the personal growth achieved through international programs, these experiences are also beneficial to Ontario's economy. In 2003 it was estimated that U.S. companies lose \$2 billion a year due to inadequate cross-cultural knowledge among employees.⁹⁶ The benefits of international experience cannot be over-emphasized.

There are currently a number of programs that are offered at Ontario institutions that provide international exchange opportunities, however, the number of students involved in these initiatives is relatively small. The number of international opportunities must be increased and financial support must be made available to encourage students to take advantage of these opportunities. There is currently government support through the Ontario International Education Opportunity Scholarships, which provides up to \$2,500 for students studying abroad. This is a welcome first step and would provide a small amount of support for these students, and the government must continue to explore ways to incentive these learning opportunities.⁹⁷

One of the biggest hindrances to students participating in these international experiences is a lack of promotion. Currently there is little work done to educate students, not only about the opportunities that are available to them, but also how to fund these opportunities. With a greater focus on educating students about these programs, we can expect a higher rate of involvement.

⁹⁴ Easton, Shelly. "Ontario's newest funding investment benefits students, McMaster president says." McMaster Daily News. April 14, 2003.

⁹⁵ Van Raay, Chantall. "Biotech incubator proposed for Research Park." Western News. October 14, 1999.

⁹⁶ Ben L. Kedia and Shirley Daniel, "U.S. Business Needs for Employees with International Expertise" (paper prepared for the Conference on Global Challenges and U.S. Higher Education at Duke University, Durham, NC, January 2003), pp. 5, 12-14, 17.

⁹⁷ Government of Ontario, "Enhancing the Learning Experience of Postsecondary Students" (Toronto: 2009).

There are clear benefits to a system-wide program of financial assistance for international exchange. Such a program would enhance the educational experience of numerous students by giving the opportunity to study abroad when financial barriers would normally hold them back. Moreover, if existing international exchange programs were coordinated through an international exchange co-operative, or universities engaged in more collaborative efforts around international exchange, this might increase the diversity of international opportunities available.

The United States Senate declared 2006 as the “Year of Study Abroad.”⁹⁸ Ontario universities are working hard to provide new opportunities for their students but they do not have the same level of support that the U.S. Senate has shown. It’s time for the government to lead the way.

Student Success through Support Services

Principles

Principle Nine: Student support services are a fundamental part of fostering student success.

Universities across Ontario are inherently different, in terms of structure, organization, and focus. Though universities operate in different ways, and while their over-arching autonomy must be respected, there remain core areas of support that should be present on each university campus. In order for students to be successful in their educational endeavours universities must be equipped with support centers that will foster a community which encourages diversity and makes students feel welcome and included in the fabric of the institution, regardless of their situation.⁹⁹ By creating and supporting partnerships between students, faculty and student affairs personnel, universities across the province can foster a culture of student success.¹⁰⁰

Student supports exist on campuses across the country because they provide essential resources for success. Universities that do provide “effective advising” have students who are more likely to persist and graduate.¹⁰¹ After collecting information on OUSA member schools regarding what student services currently exist at Ontario universities, it was revealed that support centres are most commonly attached to, or are affiliated with, student affairs departments.¹⁰² Health, counselling and disabilities services are universal, while other essential supports such as aboriginal and equity services exist but vary in scope and reach. Of significant importance is a focus on the mental health of students. Students must be provided with a properly funded mental health program at their university to ensure that mental health is never a barrier to students’ success. The fundamental belief of students is that certain key support services must be in-place and of high-quality at all institutions in Ontario. In fact, in a 2010 survey of undergraduate students, student services placed as the second highest priority for investment after financial aid.¹⁰³

To underscore the importance of student supports to success, Queen’s university may be used as an example, considering that it has the highest retention rate in the province at 97% between first and second year and 92% for overall degree completion.¹⁰⁴ Given these impressive numbers, it is important to note that almost 40% students make

⁹⁸ “Why Study Abroad? The Benefits of International Education.” Georgia Perimeter College.
<http://www.gpc.edu/~gpcglobe/Students/benefits.htm>

⁹⁹ Kuh, et al., 2007,43-53.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 99.

¹⁰¹ Tinto, Vincent. “Taking Student Retention Seriously.” American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY. 15 Apr. 2002. Lecture. 2.

¹⁰² Wood, Phil. “Interview with Dr. Phil Wood, Dean of Students at McMaster University.” Personal interview. 2009.

¹⁰³ Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, *What Students Want* (Toronto: 2010).

¹⁰⁴ Deane, Patrick. “Interview with Dr. Patrick Deane, Vice-Principal (Academic) at Queen’s University.” Personal interview. 2009.

use of the writing centre and learning common services alone.¹⁰⁵ This percentage would only grow if the plethora of other support centres' available and widely utilized by students were included.

Principle Ten: Universities much be a welcoming and supportive environment for all students.

University campuses should be living microcosms of the larger global village. Unfortunately, universities currently are inaccessible for many students due to a variety of financial, informational, motivational and institutional barriers, and these barriers can be exacerbated if you are a member of an underrepresented or minority group. It is integral to the health of the post-secondary education system and our province that all students be welcomed on our campuses. Many students need additional support to succeed in universities, and some students who are members of underrepresented and minority groups may require higher levels of support when work their way through the post-secondary education system.

For example, students with physical and mental disabilities require very specialized assistance and technology that focuses on helping students achieving learning outcomes. Additionally, students of particular minority groups, such as Aboriginal students, international students, mature students, and queer students all require a unique and focused service that provides resources to build local communities and to assist them in their academic and personal pursuits.

It is important that our institutions are encouraging contact among students of different backgrounds, as well as actively seeking to incorporate diverse perspectives into class discussions. With a diversity of perspectives and experiences, which is necessarily brought to the table when underrepresented groups are present on campus, more opportunities are available for students to interact and share their unique experiences.

With more and more students who identify as members of underrepresented groups entering post-secondary education, it is for the benefit of the institution to update their support mechanisms to ensure all students succeed. Underrepresented groups must feel welcome on their campus. Reports on persistence and student success agree that institutions where students are accepted and supported for their social and academic needs, house students who persist. Therefore, when campuses create an environment where underrepresented groups feel comfortable, not only will they become more engaged, but also more likely to succeed.

Principle Eleven: Students must be adequately supported by institutions at several critical points in their education and during the many transition points in a students' university career.

Students are faced with many transitional points throughout their universities careers and need formal support during these times to properly navigate each transition. A transitional point can be extremely demanding of students as they are trying to become accustomed to a new lifestyle, to what is expected of them, and when they form important opinions about their institution and their willingness to persist and succeed.

There are three critical points when a student will require the most support, but each of these points will require different support so a cut and paste model across the board will not be effective. The first point at which students will require assistance is during their transition into university and this process is something that should occur over the entire first year. Providing students with the resources to better integrate into their university is key for student success. The second point at which students need more specialized support is after a student has been required to withdraw from school as a result of being unable to meet degree requirements to advance. Finally, students upon graduation need to be support in their post academic careers and how to transition into future education or employment opportunities.

¹⁰⁵ Babington, Doug et al. "The Writing Centre at Queen's University Annual Report". Queen's University. 5 Mar. 2008

Concerns

Concern Twelve: Students face challenges in persisting and succeeding through to graduation.

University is not only an adjustment in learning style; it is a fundamental lifestyle shift for entering students. Some students are prepared to handle this change effectively, and others face more difficulty. It is of vital importance that our classrooms are equipped with the resources to detect and deal with students who face difficulties in their first year of studies. Research has identified several key groups of students with low student engagement rates (which have been correlated with persistence and student success), as well as several risk factors that show up early in a student's academic career.

- *Off-Campus Students:* NSSE data has shown that students who live on-campus tend to be more engaged than students who live off-campus.¹⁰⁶ This finding is unsurprising as on-campus students have easier access to support resources, are more likely to be full-time students, and have more time for academic preparation between classes. Additionally, access to faculty is easier for on-campus students. Living on-campus is important in first year, when students are least aware of the support services offered by the university.
- *Part-Time Students:* Part-time students tend to have greater obligations to family responsibilities, as well as off-campus work, inhibiting their ability to take part in certain educationally enriching opportunities.¹⁰⁷ These opportunities include study abroad programs, extracurricular events, as well as workshops run by academic support services.
- *Aboriginal Students:* Approximately 30 per cent of Aboriginal students leave PSE without graduating in their first or second year of study, compared with only 13 per cent of non-Aboriginal students.¹⁰⁸
- *Rural and Northern Students:* Many rural and northern students can experience familial isolation when attending institutions in large urban areas.¹⁰⁹ Difficulties adjusting are manifested in the fact that rural students are somewhat more likely to drop-out of all forms of postsecondary education than their non-rural counterpart.¹¹⁰

Additionally, factors such as attendance habits, drop and add patterns, early semester and midterm grades, as well as high school performance can all indicate a student who is at risk of dropping out.¹¹¹ Universities must be ensured not only the resources to track this data, but for student affairs professionals and advisors to be able to reach out to students who are in danger of falling through the cracks.

Concern Thirteen: There is insufficient information and tracking of each student's progress, and as a result there is not enough proactive assistance given to students that are struggling.

Many students struggle with the demands of university. Fortunately, many academic and personal support services are a proven method of increasing persistence and helping students succeed. Unfortunately, those who drop out of post-secondary education are the least likely to use these crucial services, and the need to ensure these services reach those who need them most when they need it most must be a top priority for institutions and government.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ Kuh, et al., 2007.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Finnie, Ross, Stephen Childs, Miriam Kramer and Andrew Wismer. *Aboriginals in post-secondary education*. L-SLIS Research Brief, Toronto: MESA Project, 2010.

¹⁰⁹ Finnie, Childs and Wismer, *First generation post-secondary education students 2010*

¹¹⁰ Shaienks, Gluszynski and Bayard 2008

¹¹¹ Kuh, et al., 2007.

¹¹² Richard Wiggers, *Recent Findings of HEQCO Sponsored Research*, Presentation to HEQCO Research Conference on Enhancing Student Success in Ontario Postsecondary Education (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2010).

The inability to track students from high school to post-secondary education, and the failure to track students from one post-secondary institution to another makes the gathering of comprehensive data on participation, persistence and attainment rates in post-secondary education extremely difficult in Ontario. More worrisome is that without the ability to track students, they cannot be provided with proactive support to students who are, or are prone to, struggle both inside and outside the classroom. Currently the assistance is only provided when a student self-identifies as facing difficulties or it is recognized through professors and academic advisors noticing consistent poor performance. As noted in a recent study of persistence, "PSE institutions must identify which of their students are at elevated risk of leaving their studies and provide them with support programs created for and tailored to them so that they can make the necessary adjustments over time and succeed."¹¹³ Developing such an early warning system is necessary if we are to be proactive in ensuring student success, and not reactive.

Concern Fourteen: There is not enough support for students in their transition into and out of post-secondary education.

Students are in a very vulnerable place when transitioning into and out of university as they adjust to their new environment. Most students will move out of their parents' house for the first time when they go off to university, and for the first time, students are forced to live without the comforts of home and their parents. It is at this time when responsibilities like laundry, meals, time management and general accountability for one's self are finally solely on the students shoulders. Furthermore, the academic responsibilities and difficulties are amplified from secondary school, which can cause students an extraordinary amount of stress. With all these new pressures on students, there are not sufficient supports to assist through this important transition.

Similarly, there are fears and anxiety for many students upon leaving university. Many are seeking out graduate education or permanent employment for the first time, and there is an inadequate amount of support in helping students transition away from being an undergraduate student.

Concern Fifteen: Students often lack programs that support them academically as these programs are underfunded.

At some point in every student's academic career they will undoubtedly face difficulty in successfully completing an assignment, exam or course. It is during these crucial moments that he or she may teeter on the brink of non-completion. Often, students will turn to specific academic support programs in order to find the assistance they need. Unfortunately, these support programs are the first to be cut in times of financial challenge and so often lack the adequate and reliable funding needed to be sustainable year after year.¹¹⁴

As the demographics of the average undergraduate student continue to change, the chronic underfunding of academic supports has even graver consequences. With increased focus on accessibility for post-secondary education, new types of students fill seats in classes. These new students bring new gifts as well as new challenges to their learning environment. Often, students from diverse backgrounds are misunderstood or their challenges ignored "...these differences in learning style are sometimes viewed as academic deficiencies requiring remediation."¹¹⁵ Elsewhere, this paper explores the importance of varied pedagogy; however, without concurrent academic support students will continue to miss their opportunities for success. While many campuses have tutoring or writing centres and academic advising, many of these services are not sufficiently funded and lack capacity to reach out to and help students in need, and remedial services are either nonexistent or poorly developed.

¹¹³ Conrad, M and Morris, K., *Shifting from Retention Rates to Retention Risk: An Alternative Approach for Managing Institutional Student Retention Performance*. (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2010).

¹¹⁴ Wood, Phil. "Interview with Dr. Phil Wood, Dean of Students at McMaster University." Personal interview. 2009.

¹¹⁵ Kuh, et al., 2007, 91

Concern Sixteen: There is a lack of a centralized and holistic approach to quality healthcare services at Ontario universities.

The current health care practises at most post secondary institution are doing an admirable job, but are lacking one key component. Currently a student can present themselves at a counselling service with what the student feels is a psychological issue and counselling services will do a great job treating that students. Unfortunately some campus when this student presents themselves at counselling services they will not share this information or see if this student could be better served by health services.

Students should be able to arrive at any of the health services location on campus be it Health Service, Counselling Services, or Disability Services and know in the end they will receive the correct treatment from the correct group currently this services is not provided at most institutions.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, students can face significant wait times at many university health centres for both physical and mental health appointments, which can undermine the quality and effectiveness of care for students.

Concern Seventeen: Student support services are not adequately supported and students who are in need of these services are often unaware of their existence.

One troubling aspect of the way we fund student affairs offices, which run crucial student support services across campuses, is that it is not consistent across campuses. Difficulties can arise when attempting to guarantee a certain level of quality in mental health or disability services when institutions run such vastly different programs with such vastly different student fees.

Additionally, university contributions to student affairs budgets at some institutions have been frozen, and departments have been asked to absorb inflationary increases.¹¹⁷ This has meant, according to some student affairs professionals, that departments are being forced to make difficult choices with regards to what programs to keep and which to lose. At a time when student success and post-secondary education is important to Ontario's future in a knowledge economy, student support services should not be reducing in size and quality.

Support services provide a vital service on all university campuses as they assistance students in all ways so they can be the best student possible. These services can only be helpful if they are effectively advertised so all students, but especially at-risk students, know they exist. Having a student without the knowledge of these services is just as useful as not providing the service at all. Emphasizing this point, a study found that early leavers made significantly less use of available student support services, particularly tutoring and counselling services.¹¹⁸ Additionally, Ontario students who were surveyed both at the beginning and end of their first year indicated that the availability of student success supports was significantly less than anticipated.¹¹⁹ Another study of supports provided at Ontario colleges found that a majority of students at-risk of not completing their program did not take advantage of the remedial services.¹²⁰ To be effective, student support services must be developed in a holistic manner and "woven into comprehensive plans of action" that address the academic, social, emotional and financial needs of students.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Mental Health Summit, *Support Services: Collaboration Among Service Providers*, Presentation (October 29, 2010).

¹¹⁷ Wood, Phil. "Interview with Dr. Phil Wood, Dean of Students at McMaster University." Personal interview. 2009.

¹¹⁸ Educational Policy Institute. *Access, Persistence, and Barriers in Postsecondary Education: A Literature Review and Outline of Future Research*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2008.

¹¹⁹ Mancuso, M., Desmarais, S., Parkinson, K., and Pettigrew, B. *Disappointment, Misunderstanding and Expectations: A Gap Analysis of NSSE, BCSE and FSSE*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2010.

¹²⁰ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. *Final impacts report: foundations for success project*. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2009.

¹²¹ Bezanson, Lynne, Peter Dietsche, Glen Jones, and Alan Wright. *Neither a moment nor a mind to waste*. Policy Summit Backgrounder, (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2008).

Recommendations

Recommendation Twenty: The provincial government must create a new special purpose operating grant within the funding formula that incentivises improvement of student support services.

As has been explored throughout this paper, the goal of Ontario's post-secondary education system cannot simply be to fill first year seats; it must be about keeping seats full until students complete their studies. There are many ideas on how best to help student persist, but beyond debate is the concept of student support. Academic life is meant to challenge and push individuals beyond their capacity, and periodically, this will create serious difficulty. It is important that during these periods, when students are most at risk of not completing their studies, that they are able to quickly find and utilize services meant for their help.¹²²

The Ontario government has a variety of tools at its disposal to encourage institutions to fully and reliably fund student support centers. While one option might be rolling punitive measures into the Multi-Year Accountability Agreements, OUSA believes that a more successful option will be creating incentives. Within the Ontario funding formula, a number of special envelopes and grants are explained. The Quality Assurance Fund, for example, had a specific amount of money set aside for the funding of, amongst other priorities, student support centres. Each special grouping of funds is intended to target specific aspects of the post-secondary educational system for improvement.

Tying monies to student supports that do not already exist on every campus will encourage universities to take advantage of funding. Similarly, in places where one form of the services already exists, a specific envelope of funding will free up important operating funds for other uses and provide an element of reliability of funding to student services that it is currently missing. Incentives will ensure student success. Centres that are accessible and well funded will provide the necessary support students need to persist and complete their studies. An American study found that those institutions that increased expenditures on student services positively influenced graduation and persistence rates, and suggested reallocating funding to student services as a necessary step in improving student outcomes.¹²³

This funding could be eligible for supporting a wide variety of critical student services and facilities, including but not limited to: early warning systems, athletics and recreation, disability services, career services, personal counselling, off-campus housing, indigenous or aboriginal services, food banks, queer student services, women's centres, health services, legal aid services, international student services, ombudsperson, campus security, academic counselling, student success or student life offices, writing centres, and child care facilities.

Recommendation Twenty-One: The provincial government must provide incentives for the creation of early warning systems to ensure institutions are proactively assisting students in need.

Student affairs departments are vital to student success, and it must be ensured that they have the resources to be proactive about retention. Some of the most important work identified for them in literature regarding student success lies in keeping track of student behavioural patterns.¹²⁴ Student profiles should be kept track of, with information regarding attendance patterns, drop and add information, early semester grades as well as preregistration information. This would allow student professionals to have a better overall picture of a student's ability to succeed, as well as make them more aware of a student's particular learning needs.

At some institutions in the US, innovative early warning systems have already been developed. Fayetteville State University, for example, employs an early alert system where faculty members contact student affairs professionals if

¹²² Tinto, 2002, 2.

¹²³ Douglas A. Weber and Ronald G. Ehrenberg, *Do Expenditures Other Than Instructional Expenditures Affect Graduation and Persistence Rates in American Higher Education* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Higher Education Research Institute, 2009).

¹²⁴ Kuh, et al., 2007, 116.

a student is experiencing challenges during the first two weeks of the semester.¹²⁵ Mentors are able to then contact students and refer them to the appropriate resources. The benefit of having this kind of intervention happen early is that it happens before students develop biases or prejudices towards a particular class. Carleton University has recently implemented a similar early warning system that based on first semester grades of first year students, contacts those that are struggle and invites them to come to a consultation session and make an action plan improving their post-secondary success. During consultation, students can be put in touch with existing support services and discuss other strategies to help them cope with the university workload, including switching majors, course load or institutions.¹²⁶

If we truly wish to ensure all students have the opportunity to reach their full potential, the Ontario government will need to track the progress of its students from primary through post-secondary education. This data can then be used to identify barriers to education and to make improvements in the system. A comprehensive, transparent tracking system would provide additional data on topics such as the impact of tuition fee increases and would inform the public, stakeholders and government as to the best future policy direction to pursue.

The Ontario government has announced plans to use the existing Ontario Education Number to track a student's progress through post-secondary education. Students strongly support this move and looks forward to its implementation. This data will be invaluable in tracking improvements to the system, identifying areas that require improvement, and analyzing trends to identify future needs.

Recommendation Twenty-Two: Universities must support the enhancement of the first year transition.

Student engagement at the first year level has an enormous impact on student success. Programs focusing on the first year experience have been positively correlated with a variety of positive outcomes, such as higher persistence and graduation rates.¹²⁷ Several initiatives have been proven to have a particular impact on student success, and it is of vital importance that when schools deal with financial strain these programs are not the ones that suffer. As one study put it, "retention among first-year students is more likely to occur when students feel a sense of community—a feeling that they belong on campus and are welcome. Campus climate is especially crucial in this first year."

Studies conducted in the mid-eighties found that institutions providing the most extensive orientation programs had higher graduation rates than institutions that placed less of a priority on orientation. The 2005 NSSE reported that students who attended orientation participated in more educationally enriching activities, reported higher satisfaction rates, had improved perceptions of campus, and reported greater developmental gains during their first year.

Recommendation Twenty-Three: Support for transition leading up to and after graduation must be enhanced.

Currently at most post-secondary institutions, there is a first year orientation program for nearly all first-year students. As we state earlier, this transition programming needs some improvement, but for the most part the programming at least is established and reaches the majority of students. The same cannot be said about the senior or graduating year transition.

There needs to be a focus on the graduating transition as this is when students head out into the working world or onto graduate education for potentially the first time and they need to be prepared for that. A graduating student's transition could be something as simple as from the start of fourth year onwards to the completion of the degree in which advising, skills building, and networking opportunities are provided to student.

¹²⁵ Kuh, et al., 2007, 116.

¹²⁶ Carson, J. "Retaining Success: Carleton University has found a new way to keep students from flunking out." *Macleans*, November 22, 2010: 48.

¹²⁷ Kuh, et al., 2007, 79.

By providing strong career services that are proactive and engaging students can have the career advice that they need to be successful quickly after graduation. Other options that need to be explored and improved upon on the mentoring and job shadowing opportunities provided to students. Students should have the ability to work with someone in a mentor setting so the student can best understand what the job is and what it entails. By providing some of these options to students, a stronger graduating transition would be created.

Recommendation Twenty-Four: In addition to services for all students, the provincial government must provide incentives for enhancing support services that focus on underrepresented and minority groups.

The increased attention paid to accessibility in the Reaching Higher plan was an important first step in ensuring that Ontario's future workforce is made up of well-educated individuals. But accessibility alone is not enough. If students fall behind and lack the support to persist through post-secondary education to successful completion then the system is not fulfilling its intended purpose. Given the Ontario government's emphasis on a well-educated population, sitting idly by is not an option. Through the use of targeted funding, institutions should be encouraged to invest in student services and supports for traditionally underrepresented groups.

Support for underrepresented groups on campus is essential for the success of the students and the university. If students do not have to burden their time and energy with exterior stresses, such as feeling marginalized, living with dependants, and overcoming disabilities, they will be more engaged and, consequently, more likely to succeed.¹²⁸ For example, universities that have child care available and at a reasonable rate have students who are more likely to remain in school, complete their degrees and earn higher grades.¹²⁹ As well, providing extended hours to part-time students, mature students and students with dependents are important services that will directly impact their chances of degree completion.¹³⁰

By providing academic and personal support for students from all backgrounds, including underrepresented groups, more students will persist all the way to graduation. Students from underrepresented groups often have more difficulty adjusting to institutional culture and, along with other important groups, often express feelings of isolation and discrimination. Support services designed specifically for Aboriginal students, queer students, female students, and mature students are critical to fostering an environment where students can excel. If the government is serious about increasing persistence and graduation rates, then academic and personal supports for students from underrepresented groups are vital.

Recommendation Twenty-Five: Holistic, high quality and timely health services must be available to all students.

While academic challenge is a necessary part of a university education, some students find that their success is challenged not by institutional expectations, but factors completely outside their ability to control. Fifteen percent of university students will be diagnosed with a mental health condition, which is particularly harrowing when one considers that this statistic only counts those students who seek help.¹³¹ Even more disturbingly, suicide is the second-leading cause of death among university students.

A student cannot begin to chart a course to student success if they are facing these kinds of issues. One of the single most important areas requiring dedicated provincial support is holistic health care. What this really means is that the health services on a campus work together and ensure that a student is provided top notch care from all services that that student requires. For example is a student presents at counselling saying they are having problems

¹²⁸ Tinto, 2002, 3.

¹²⁹ Kuh, et al., 2007, 90.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Anderssen, Erin. "Mental Health Worries." Globe and Mail, 20 Sept. 2009, Globe Campus. <http://www.globecampus.ca/in-the-news/article/mental-health-worries-grow-among-university-students/>.

concentrating and they can't study the student should be evaluated to ensure they are not required to visit either health or disability services to augment the treatment being provided at counselling. By having this holistic approach where all services are working together to help our students we can ensure students are in the best mental and physical state to succeed at school.¹³²

Another focus of health services needs to timely treatment and these issues consistently steams from lack of resources being provided to the healthcare services at a institution. There needs to be not only devoted funding to hire staff, but also funding for physical space and instruments as these are just as important as staff. ¹³³

Recommendation Twenty-Six: Universities must support remedial programs designed for students who have experienced academic challenges.

Not all students are immediately successful in their university experience. For a wide variety of reasons, thousands of students each year find themselves on academic probation or academic suspension. The path back to regular academic standing can be a daunting one, filled with fear of failure as a cloud of disbarment looms over every academic decision that is made.

Many universities have strategies in place to transition and support these students, and it makes perfect sense. Fewer students dropping out means greater retention rates and enhanced statistics for the institution, and also costs significantly less to retain existing students than it does to recruit new ones. But not all programs are designed in a student-centric model, with the individual needs and concerns of the at-risk student placed at the forefront. Many will not address the underlying causes of the academic difficulties; instead offering reduced course loads, or suggesting programs which are perceived to be easier. These programs keep students long enough to get them out the front door with a degree, but often not in a desired length or discipline.

More universities are now adopting a structured transition approach, often involving a combination of techniques. A new program at Brock University, launched in the 2009-10 year offers an alternative to academic suspension. Called 'BOOST', this program has created a course focused on skill development, workshops, and other university services, which can be taken concurrently with academic courses instead of having the student spend time away from school during their suspension year. While this is a fantastic "made-at-Brock" solution in response to an identified need, it comes with an additional tuition charge of \$750 for a non-credit course on a cost-recovery basis. Struggling students are now forced to weigh the pro-con of additional tuition into their decision whether to remain in school, or leave entirely.

Remedial programs, short-cuts and transition steps should be as student-focused as possible, while removing as many burdens as possible. As student retention remains a desired outcome for the provincial government, increased support should be made available for programs assisting students in academic jeopardy.

Recommendation Twenty-Seven: Universities must have robust academic advising and tutoring support.

While faculty members can provide guidance and support around material and advice for topics for research, there still needs to be a source for all students to use that provides top quality tutoring services. Providing high quality tutoring, be it peer or otherwise, is a great option for all students as it provides the one-on-one attention that students need to succeed. These tutoring services need to be expanded to not only included large first and second years

¹³² Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Mental Health Summit, *Support Services: Collaboration Among Service Providers*, Presentation (October 29, 2010).

¹³³ Brenda Whiteside, *Mental Health on University Campuses*, Presentation to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Mental Health Summit (October 29, 2010).

classes, but all subjects so students always have someone to turn to. First-year students are more likely to persist when they perceive their academic advisors to be readily available and approachable.¹³⁴

There should be a continued focus for these initiatives to be taken on by the university there they are legitimate and student do not need to be worried about the quality of content or instruction. Also the university can ensure that enough sessions and resources are provided whereas is this task falls to student associations it might be difficult to provided adequate sessions for all students.

Recommendation Twenty-Eight: Student support services should be better coordinated and promoted to students.

Currently most institutions have the vast majority of student services that are necessary for students to be properly supported, but they are underused. There are a number of factors that contribute to this ineffective usage by students, mostly being awareness and convince.

Most services on universities campuses are spread out through the campus and in many different buildings and as a result it requires students to move about campus to receive the support they require. If all services were located in central location and was used like a one stop shop students would not be as disappointed in. By providing a one stop shop service it would act as one large service that students would move between with little problem as the everyone would work together to ensure the student is provided the best care.

For example if a student was facing academic difficulties and arrived at a tutoring service and received support that did not work that tutoring service might not refer them to another service like counselling services. By uniting all services under one management structure it is easier to move a student who appears incorrectly at one service to the appropriate service.

There is also a severe lack of promotion for services and without this students will not know that the university employees people to assist them. This information needs to be better disseminated so students understand their options and who is there to help them.

¹³⁴ Laurie A. Schreiner, *Linking student satisfaction and retention* (Coralville, Iowa: Noel-Levitz, 2009).

Conclusion

The debate over quality includes a broad range of issues, but in the end, the goal is always the same: to ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed.

The conversation must begin with access and advancement. All academically qualified students deserve the opportunity to attend all levels of post-secondary education, and support services must be in place to ensure they are supported throughout. If we are to see true equality in access, it will require changes to tuition fee policies, investments in financial assistance, early intervention and awareness programs, and system-wide targets for access. A student tracking system, such as the Ontario Education Number, must be implemented for post-secondary students to provide the data we need to improve higher education in Ontario.

In an increasingly global world, higher education must provide a wide variety of perspectives and the opportunity to learn about other cultures and ways of life. International students contribute these new perspectives and thereby add tremendously to the learning environment. With competition increasing for the world's best and brightest minds, Ontario must be proactive in attracting and supporting international students from around the world.

One of the most important and under-emphasized aspects of quality is availability of enrichment opportunities outside the classroom. A high quality education must include a fertile learning environment where one may develop new skills, enhance one's learning and simply enrich one's experience. We have offered a number of initiatives which would enhance the learning environment at Ontario's post-secondary institutions, including business incubators and idea accelerators, greater opportunities for international exchange, and undergraduate research opportunity programs. More generally, students are calling on the province to embrace innovative teaching methods and to champion new programs based on inquiry learning, community service learning, and problem-based learning.

But before these opportunities can be realized, Ontario's post-secondary institutions require an increase in base funding to at least the national average. Without it, they cannot hire the additional faculty members that are so necessary to a high quality education.

If we do not take these issues seriously, we are risking the ability of our graduates to be highly skilled and innovative participants in the democratic, social and economic fabric of Ontario and the nation. If we do not act, we are risking the very socio-economic viability and future of our province.

Student Success Policy Statement

WHEREAS student success is a continuum beginning well before students begin their post-secondary education, and continuing after they have graduated;

WHEREAS all academically qualified students should have the opportunity to advance through all levels of higher education;

WHEREAS students in all levels of higher education should have access to meaningful opportunities to enrich their experience, develop new skills, and enhance their learning;

WHEREAS the delivery of varied, innovative and engaging teaching methods is fundamental to creating a successful student;

WHEREAS all university instructors must have the resources to develop their teaching skills to help students succeed;

WHEREAS student success is enhanced by the inclusion of research in the classroom;

WHEREAS it must be ensured that students have high-impact experiences during the course of their degrees;

WHEREAS the broader learning experience a student receives outside the classroom is critical to student success;

WHEREAS student support services are a fundamental part of fostering student success;

WHEREAS universities must be a welcoming and supportive environment for all students;

WHEREAS students must be adequately supported by institutions at several critical points in their education and during the many transition points in a students' university career;

WHEREAS there is an insufficient focus in Ontario universities on supporting student success;

WHEREAS passive lecture-style pedagogy, still pervasive across Ontario, is not as conducive to student learning as other methods of teaching;

WHEREAS university teaching space is too often incapable of supporting and fostering a collaborative and active learning environment;

WHEREAS teaching ability is regarded as less important than research performance when awarding tenure and hiring instructors;

WHEREAS students' evaluations of instructors are not effective enough to truly measure teaching quality and are often not made available to students;

WHEREAS university instructors do not receive regular formal training in teaching;

WHEREAS the culture of Ontario universities is not focused enough on teaching and learning as research is perceived as receiving more investment and support from Ontario institutions;

WHEREAS high-impact experiences are not traditionally recognized as important components in a student's educational experience;

WHEREAS there is not enough support from universities to enrich the broader learning environment;

WHEREAS opportunities for students to further their educational experience through meaningful work study programs can be threatened by administrative decisions and budgetary constraints;

WHEREAS experiential learning opportunities are inadequately promoted with limited availability in Ontario universities;

WHEREAS students face challenges in persisting and succeeding through to graduation;

WHEREAS there is insufficient information and tracking of each student's progress, and as a result there is not enough proactive assistance given to students that are struggling;

WHEREAS there is not enough support for students in their transition into and out of post-secondary education;

WHEREAS students often lack programs that support them academically as these programs are underfunded;

WHEREAS there is a lack of a centralized and holistic approach to quality healthcare services at Ontario universities;

WHEREAS student support services are not adequately supported and students who are in need of these services are often unaware of their existence;

BIRT student success fostered in the classroom, in the broader learning environment and in support services throughout a student's education must be a fundamental priority for Ontario's provincial government and universities;

BIFRT the provincial government must work with and support institutions to develop collaborative and active learning opportunities across disciplines;

BIFRT the provincial government should place a higher priority on university capital projects designed to promote collaborative and active learning;

BIFRT universities must actively promote the use of alternative assessment methods;

BIFRT the provincial government must provide incentives for universities to develop a first-year seminar program with the aim of providing at least one small class experience to each first-year student;

BIFRT the provincial government must provide incentives for universities to implement a capstone project for each student in their final year;

BIFRT funding must be designated by the provincial government to improve instructional support centres to encourage innovation in teaching and provide ongoing professional development for Ontario's post-secondary educators;

BIFRT quality teaching must have equal consideration with research performance for all decisions relating to hiring, promotion and tenure;

BIFRT the provincial government must mandate that all Ontario universities conduct and improve teaching evaluations. The results should be easily accessible to students;

BIFRT the provincial government must ensure that teaching quality is a fundamental part of all future multi-year accountability agreements;

BIFRT the provincial government must develop incentives for all new instructors and teaching assistants to be given formal instruction in teaching methods and practices;

BIFRT Ontario universities and the provincial government must raise the profile and importance of teaching and learning on university campuses;

BIFRT the provincial government should create and fund Ontario Teaching Chairs;

BIFRT universities must dedicate resources to foster the broader learning environment;

BIFRT universities must expand the availability of work study opportunities and consider all students eligible to apply;

BIFRT the provincial government must create incentives to increase the availability of work-integrated learning opportunities;

BIFRT the provincial government should provide incentives for universities to develop comprehensive Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programs;

BIFRT the provincial government should provide incentives for universities to develop campus business incubators, entrepreneurial challenges and broad-based idea accelerators;

BIFRT the provincial government should expand the financial support available for university students to engage in international experiences and should work to increase the diversity of international opportunities available;

BIFRT the provincial government must create a new special purpose operating grant within the funding formula that incentivises improvement of student support services;

BIFRT the provincial government must provide incentives for the creation of early warning systems to ensure institutions are proactively assisting students in need;

BIFRT universities must support the enhancement of the first year transition;

BIFRT support for transition leading up to and after graduation must be enhanced;

BIFRT in addition to services for all students, the provincial government must provide incentives for enhancing support services that focus on underrepresented and minority groups;

BIFRT holistic, high quality and timely health services must be available to all students;

BIFRT universities must support remedial programs designed for students who have experienced academic challenges;

BIFRT universities must have robust academic advising and tutoring support;

BIFRT student support services should be better coordinated and promoted to students.