



Provost's Task Force  
On  
Innovation and Excellence in  
Teaching, Learning and  
Technology

Report to the Provost  
(Abridged Fall 2015)

## **Introduction**

Lakehead University is committed to excellence in teaching and learning. Teaching and learning is at the heart of our role as a university, and front and centre in our Academic Plan. The Academic Plan has 5 priorities, all of which have tangible connections to teaching and learning. Lakehead University's commitment to teaching and learning and access to higher education has been critical to our success. The Provost's Task Force's terms of reference and mandate (attached in appendix A) charged the committee with making high-impact, actionable, and cost effective recommendations as part of our ongoing pledge to excellence and innovation in teaching and learning.

Recently, the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities initiated a province-wide differentiation process whereby each Ontario University would "differentiate" itself and minimize duplication. The results of this process were Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs). Lakehead University's SMA states that the University is "focused on developing a learner-centred and engaged student and faculty community. The University places an emphasis on the quality of teaching and the student experience." The SMA further indicates that the University will focus on access to education, especially first-generation learners and Aboriginal learners.

Lakehead University faculty commit considerable time and energy to teaching and learning. It is a core component of the University's activities, and of each faculty members' role within it. But excellence in teaching and learning requires a wide investment from people, support units, and administrators across campus. Therefore, we must continue to develop ways to work collaboratively across existing administrative and academic units in order to achieve our educational goals.

To build upon our teaching successes we must foster a culture where teaching and learning matter—a culture built on the principles of collaboration and adequate support to create the conditions for innovation and excellence. Lakehead University has a long history of success in teaching and learning and a well-established reputation as a “value added” institution. We believe that investments in teaching and learning will be felt across the institution in terms of recruitment and retention, as well as in student, faculty, and staff engagement.

The message that Lakehead University is fully committed to improving its teaching, and that this is an important focus for all of us, means that we must engage in a process of renewal.

The Task Force determined that the Instructional Development Centre has never had the resources to be able to offer an appropriate range of supports for faculty and instructors. Overall, the Centre’s administrative successes have been admirable and include helping to set strategic objectives like social justice for the university; the successes are especially admirable given the existing structure and funding for the IDC. The Task Force recommends the re-organizing of current offices to form the framework for a more impactful teaching and learning centre that will better support faculty teaching and learning needs, and continue the Centre’s administrative successes.

The guiding principles and recommendations outlined in this report collectively represent a way to further support teaching and learning as a core element of the mandate of Lakehead University. To achieve the important and ambitious goals for Lakehead University set out in the Academic Plan and our recent Strategic Mandate Agreement, we table the following series of 5 principles and 18 recommendations. The principles and recommendations detailed below outline high-impact, actionable and achievable items to further build a culture of teaching excellence and innovation at Lakehead University

## Principles

The Task Force takes the following five principles as necessary for guiding decisions and providing overarching direction for the specific recommendations that follow. These principles reaffirm the necessity of consistent commitment and support to teaching and learning in governance and by administration. They reaffirm the necessity of finding a balance between research and teaching, the need to build a teaching culture open to collaboration, and the necessity of taking pride in being a university committed to inclusivity.

*Principle 1: Teaching and research must be consistently reaffirmed as the twin pillars of the University, and central to the core purpose, mandate, and Academic Plan of Lakehead University.*

Lakehead University's Academic Plan articulates the strong connection between teaching and research. The Plan also sets achieving excellence in teaching, learning, and research as an academic priority for the university. Over the last 15 years, Lakehead University has built a reputation for research excellence, proving that cultural and institution-wide change is possible in a short period of time. In part, the shift in research culture at Lakehead University was the result of wider government investment in research beginning in the mid-1990s. Currently, there is a similar provincial dialogue on re-evaluating and re-committing to quality teaching and learning in higher education.

The Task Force strongly believes teaching demands a similar focus of energy and resources as research. In order to create a culture conducive to innovation and excellence teaching should be maintained as a priority, supported by adequate recognition and resources to ensure a reasonable workload. The committee noted that good teaching requires investment in creating the conditions in which faculty have the time, energy, and resources to engage in a rejuvenated teaching

culture and to participate in professional development opportunities that are specific to their needs and interests.

To this end, there should be a position in senior administration charged with ensuring that teaching and learning have the coordinated institutional supports and focus they demand as among our primary roles. Furthermore, there is the need for a strengthened Senate Committee that can address the range of institutional supports necessary for teaching and learning as a primary academic activity, and strategic goal, of this university.

*Principle 2: Clear support and direction from senior administration, campus leaders charged with making financial decisions, and key figures in each faculty is necessary for innovation and excellence in teaching and learning, as well as the successful transition to new forms of teaching and learning.*

Lakehead University has a strong core of excellent faculty members engaged in teaching and learning. However, the Task Force recognizes that major shifts in our approach to teaching and learning require a significant investment from faculty, and therefore instructors require time and resources to make the investment. Such investments have the potential to make substantial contributions to excellence and innovation in Lakehead University's culture of teaching for both faculty and students. The committee believes that further support for faculty is essential so that they do not feel like they are working "against the grain" of the university's culture. In short, a shift in teaching and learning culture will require support through enhancement projects and clearer direction on emerging priorities. Strong and coordinated leadership will be essential to a renewed status for teaching and learning.

Faculty across both campuses must have adequate support to explore new and innovative teaching pedagogies and practices, including unit, faculty and institutional support. Sufficient human and financial resources must be assigned

to the development and delivery of services and supports. Every administrative portfolio, including the Dean of Graduate Studies and Vice-President of Research and Economic Development (which are perceived as separate from teaching and learning), must demonstrate support for teaching and learning.

The significance of quality teaching in the processes of hiring, promotion, tenure, renewal, and merit need to be continually reaffirmed. Engagement in professional development for teaching and learning should be recognized on annual reports and during merit and promotion, tenure, and renewal.

*Principle 3: Lakehead University should support and celebrate innovation and excellence in teaching and learning.*

Lakehead University should acknowledge and celebrate innovation and excellence in teaching and learning in multiple ways. It should provide opportunities for faculty to engage in collegial professional development and work collaboratively with colleagues across its campuses. Effective communication that is specific to faculty is essential to creating the conditions for a teaching culture of collaboration, innovation, and excellence. And the hard work of faculty needs to be recognized, and rewarded where appropriate.

*Principle 4: Lakehead University should take pride in and further welcome a diversity of learners. The University should take pride in its reputation as a university committed to equity and access. It should foster an institution-wide culture to match the diverse student body and make teaching accessible to all students.*

Lakehead University's Academic Plan reiterates the institution's commitment to social justice (defined as "proactively promoting equity, fairness, and dignity, as well as solidarity of community members across societies and cultures").

Further, the Academic Plan indicates that “diversity is reflected in its people, its programs, and its curriculum.”

Building on our reputation, we should embrace becoming a university of access. Although “accessibility” is frequently narrowly defined in reference to disability, the committee encourages defining access more broadly to include students with disabilities but also first-generation learners, indigenous students, distance learners and international students, all of whom enrich the university’s academic and social life.

*Principle 5: Wherever possible, the University must work to create synergies between teaching and research to ensure they inform each other.*

Excellence in teaching must be considered in conjunction with Lakehead University’s goal of research intensity. Both teaching and research require significant commitments of time and energy and are often described as being mutually reinforcing. However, for this to be realized, the University should create opportunities for engagement and enrichment. There is potential to have this engagement positively influence undergraduate and graduate students’ experience.

## Recommendations

The Task Force makes the following 18 recommendations. They are organized under the guiding principles that inform them; however, a few of the recommendations could reasonably fit under more than one of the principles. As such, we recognize the principles to be generative as opposed to strictly directive of the terms of the recommendations.

*Principle 1: Teaching and research must be consistently reaffirmed as the twin pillars of the University, and central to the core purpose, mandate, and Academic Plan of Lakehead University.*

1. The position of Vice-Provost, Teaching and Learning should be established.

In order for teaching and learning to have the profile and resources commensurate with being one of the primary goals of the institution, it is necessary to task a senior administrative position with primary responsibility for providing leadership at the institutional level and supporting the establishment and operations of a new teaching and learning centre. The position of Vice-Provost, Teaching and Learning would ensure there was a permanent voice with considerable administrative weight to advocate for teaching and learning at Provost's Council, Deans' Council, and Senate. The committee notes that the latter is especially important.

The new Vice-Provost would be charged with leading the administrative side of the new teaching and learning centre and ensuring its successful operation in light of all the recommendations here. This position would ensure that administrative work is not the sole work of the centre and that faculty members involved or seconded to the centre had the time to focus their work on the front lines of teaching and learning.

2. The scope and responsibility of the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee should be significantly expanded, with a revised and expanded terms of reference and composition.

The Senate Teaching and Learning committee (STLC) should become the key advisory and decision-making body for teaching and learning initiatives across the university. We recommend that the STLC be revised and restructured to have a similar structure to the Senate Academic Committee (SAC), with a core body of representatives and a number of working sub-committees with additional members who are not also members of the main STLC. Mimicking the structure of SAC would allow the committee to accomplish more of the necessary work related to teaching and learning and would make the work more manageable, while engaging more faculty and administrative staff in key discussions on teaching and learning.

The revised Senate Teaching and Learning Committee should include representatives from all faculties as well as all relevant administrative units, including the library. Student representation at the undergraduate and graduate level should be maintained.

The Senate Teaching and Learning Committee should absorb the Senate Academic Information Technology committee to reflect the indivisibility of teaching and technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with a revised sub-committee focused on technology and teaching positioned as a replacement. The revision of the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee should also include the transformation of Senate CEDL and Senate Library from standing Senate committees to standing sub-committees of STLC. In addition the new STLC should have standing sub-committees on: accessibility, student feedback on teaching, teaching awards, and technology. In regard to the latter, the committee noted the lack of overall strategic direction for setting academic

priorities for technology acquisition and maintenance and a need for stronger academic information technology governance. The standing sub-committee alone could not take on the institution-wide task of setting priorities, but it could provide direction in regard to teaching and learning needs, including the purchasing of equipment and software as well as consultation on classroom needs and design.

A new Senate Teaching and Learning Committee with balanced representation would have the added benefit of more closely mirroring the Senate Research Committee, making clearer the two shared priorities of teaching and research. The new Senate Teaching and Learning Committee would be the appropriate body to review applications for Lakehead University Teaching Chairs and other incentive programs outlined in this document, as the Senate Research Committee does for internal research awards and research chairs.

3. Continuing Education and Distributed Learning (CEDL) should be moved from the portfolio of the Vice-Provost, Student Affairs, and become one of the responsibilities of the new Vice-Provost, Teaching and Learning, or of the Provost directly. The mandate of CEDL should be revised and expanded to form the foundation of a new teaching and learning centre as outlined in Lakehead University's Strategic Mandate Agreement. The new centre should be adequately funded and able to assist in the operationalization of Lakehead University's Academic Plan.

Lakehead University's Academic Plan includes a significant number of teaching and learning initiatives. These initiatives require high-level support that reaches out to all faculty in order to have meaningful engagement and enact change.

Section 2.2 of the Strategic Mandate Agreement reads: "The Instructional Development Centre (IDC) is being expanded to include a nimble team of

technology, pedagogy, and curriculum (including Aboriginal curriculum) specialists. The expansion is necessary in order to support innovative approaches to a wider range of pedagogical initiatives, and to help support and improve the delivery of technology-enabled learning both on its campuses and in Lakehead's virtual classrooms.”

Teaching and learning support for all academic units is essential. A new teaching and learning centre needs to be able to effectively and equitably meet the needs of its faculty who want personalized teaching and learning support. A new centre should be able to meet the need for professional development for a wider range of people associated with teaching and learning, for example including librarians. The new centre should form a hub of teaching and learning activities and be a key centre to facilitate a culture of collaboration to overcome existing silos.

CEDL provides considerable support for faculty who teach online or by distance and already has staff with knowledge of teaching and learning. Currently, Lakehead University's online learning platform (D2L) is housed and financially supported by CEDL, although professors from across the campuses, teaching on campus or blended courses, use the platform. CEDL currently reports to the Vice-Provost, Student Affairs; our recommendation to move CEDL to the portfolio of the Vice-Provost, Teaching and Learning, or directly to the Provost and Vice-President (Academic), would align the work CEDL does more closely with the academic priorities its work supports.

We recommend re-organizing and revising CEDL to develop a new teaching and learning centre based on a hub and spoke model. CEDL should be renamed and staff may need to have their existing roles reviewed and revised based on the wider scope and mandate of the new centre. The current IDC Coordinator should be absorbed into this new model to ensure continuity and to assist with the expansion of the new centre's role in assisting departments through the

mandatory Quality Assurance process. A new centre built from the foundation of CEDL should form the hub in a hub and spoke model of teaching and learning support with spokes to the library, TSC (particularly the Multimedia and Desktop Support units), the Student Success Centre (in particular the Writing Centre and the Math Assistance Centre), Lakehead University International, and Aboriginal Initiatives. All of these spokes already play very important roles in supporting learning.

The new teaching and learning centre should pursue permanently allocated office space in the Chancellor Patterson Library. The library's recent changes have created a vibrant learning commons to which a teaching and learning centre would add by connecting learning to teaching. Further, a teaching and learning liaison librarian would support faculty members' research on teaching and learning as well as assist in finding additional discipline-specific teaching and learning support. TSC already has a presence in the library through the Help Desk, and this could be combined with faculty support. This also complements plans to connect the library on the Thunder Bay campus with Orillia through its technology-enabled teaching labs.

An essential component of the new centre with regard to supporting teaching will be academic members serving as leaders and mentors, who can connect directly with other faculty members. The re-allocation of existing resources will be essential given the constraints of the current fiscal climate, and to ensure that the new centre is not built upon a model of volunteerism.

The Task Force recommends this re-organization; we therefore suggest that the Provost lead a discussion with relevant stakeholders to discuss the necessary re-allocation of resources to accompany this change.

The current Coordinator of the IDC is essential to operationalizing recommendations 3 and 7. She has the necessary institutional knowledge to ensure a smooth transition to a new centre and will ensure the current activities of the IDC continue.

*Principle 2: Clear support and direction from senior administration, campus leaders charged with making financial decisions, and key figures in each faculty are necessary for innovation and excellence in teaching and learning, as well as the successful transition to new forms of teaching and learning.*

4. We recommend a university-wide program of enhanced strategic support for teaching innovation and excellence with specific funding for innovative teaching and learning enhancement projects to encourage and make possible transformation toward key teaching and learning priorities.

Providing incentives to faculty and teaching staff is necessary to create the conditions for innovation and excellence in teaching and learning. Incentives should include course release stipends and grants. A portion of the current IDC budget should be allocated to fund strategic stipends and grants.

The stipends and grants should be awarded to faculty-proposed projects that are pilot projects for innovative teaching. Proposed projects should be accompanied by a plan for knowledge mobilization within and beyond the Lakehead University teaching community. Projects should also be supported by a faculty Dean—ensuring a project’s significance and its suitability as an important component of a faculty member’s teaching dossier for processes like promotion, tenure, and renewal as well as merit. Ongoing support from the new teaching and learning centre will be essential. Preference should be given to projects that are collaborative in nature and will contribute to institutional academic priorities.

Pilot projects supported by the program for excellence and innovation should include projects on accessible teaching incorporating the principles of universal design for a diversity of learners (including but not limited to students with disabilities, international students, Indigenous students, mature students, and first-generation learners). Pilot projects could assist in the process of transformation, identify best practices for each individual discipline/unit, and encourage broader buy-in from the University's teaching and learning community.

5. We recommend tasking a senior committee, representing a variety of user groups including the teaching and learning community, with providing strategic support for the Technology Services Centre (TSC), and communicating resource use and progress to stakeholders.

TSC provides a myriad of services, with a variety of often-specialized needs, to all members of the university community. The ability of TSC to provide support is limited by the range of demands on it, the budget available to it, and the lack of strategic direction it is given.

The Task Force recommends the tasking of a senior committee, representing a variety of user groups including the teaching and learning community, with assisting TSC by providing strategic direction and governance, and in communicating resource use and progress back to the wider university community. This work might involve: the drafting of a strategic plan for the unit; providing oversight of policies and direction undertaken by TSC, and of major decisions made with regard to the operation of TSC in light of a strategic plan; and providing suggestions and input for TSC while communicating progress to the University community on projects and resources.

6. We recommend that the Provost and Vice-President Academic empower Deans to use existing mechanisms to promote engagement with teaching and learning.

A key element in encouraging innovation and excellence is ensuring that relevant policies and governing documents that support teaching and learning are in place and, more importantly, that those policies and governing documents are put into practice evenly and consistently. The University's desire to build a culture where students and faculty thrive must be reflected in the equitable application of appropriate policies and governing documents. These include responses to annual reports from faculty, career development increments, and mechanisms akin to the directive on small class sizes that count as load. Further, we recommend that relevant stakeholders meet to discuss modifying faculty annual reports to include a required written statement on improvement and/or innovation in teaching and learning

Deans should be charged with developing an annual teaching and learning leadership plan for their Faculty. This plan might include new initiatives the faculty will be trying in order to develop their teaching, and a report on the success of recent teaching and learning initiatives. The plan would address how concerns about teaching in the Faculty are going to be addressed, and what activities both the Dean and faculty members will be undertaking to support and develop teaching.

Support and guidance from the Deans will be essential to ensure a balanced workload among the complex elements of faculty work. A clear balance in teaching load would support innovation and create the conditions for further engagement in teaching and learning.

7. The Task Force recommends that the current activities of the Instructional Development Centre (IDC) be limited to the existing work of the Coordinator, and that the remainder of 2015 be devoted to designing and building a new teaching and learning centre at Lakehead University to be up and running in 2016.

The Instructional Development Centre has run on a less than modest budget with limited resources and staff for the last five years. Its presence on campus has largely been due to the dedication and passion of previous Directors, who were willing to work well beyond the limited resources. The incongruence between the stated academic priorities of teaching and learning in the Academic Plan and the funding of teaching and learning support is striking. The IDC has undertaken a review of the university's teaching and learning initiatives and conducted an environmental scan of initiatives at other institutions throughout North America. Based on some of the findings, under-utilized offerings (e.g. Graduate Student Instruction Development Programs and the IDC workshops) are being discontinued. If Lakehead University truly desires to have sustained excellence in teaching and learning, it must adequately support teaching and learning initiatives through a renewed teaching and learning centre.

The rest of the 2015 calendar year should be devoted to re-organizing and re-building a coordinated teaching and learning centre, with practices and activities as recommended below.

*Principle 3: Lakehead University should support and celebrate innovation and excellence in teaching and learning.*

8. Lakehead University should create opportunities for better communication and collaboration in teaching and learning at and across all its teaching locations. This should include ways to facilitate faculty and student exchanges as well as collaborative teaching opportunities across the University, and at all teaching sites. Collaboration could include team teaching across multiple departments or Faculties, or across its campuses.

Teaching and learning is a core aspect of all faculty positions and, as such, it should include a consistent and continual practice of revising pedagogy, teaching, curriculum, and content. Opportunities for greater collaboration and connection among faculty may help encourage engagement and provide opportunities for innovative collaborative teaching and learning. Appropriate support and avenues for communication are essential to building a culture of collaboration, including opportunities for team teaching across campuses, faculties and units as well as exchanges among faculty and students.

Collaboration may also encourage innovation in allowing faculty to share the risk and burden of engaging with new pedagogies or teaching practices.

9. The new teaching and learning centre should establish Communities of Practice based on faculty needs and interests.

Communities of practice (CoP) are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, and who learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (Wenger, 1998).

Coordination will be required initially to bring together faculty members who share an interest in teaching and learning; additionally, some limited ongoing support may be required. The CoP would be open to all members of the Lakehead community who are involved and/or interested in research on teaching and learning, and should be allowed to evolve and change over time to build a culture of excellence in teaching and learning. The Teaching Chairs would be a vital part of this program.

10. The University should establish a Lakehead University Teaching Chair program.

Based on the success of the Lakehead University Research Chair program, we recommend that a similarly modelled program be established to fully recognize and support excellence in teaching. The Teaching Chair program could support a minimum of three tenured faculty members (from three different Faculties) selected through an established review process, and based on exemplary research and teaching track records. Each chair would hold the position for a period of three years, with terms staggered so that one new chair starts each year. These Chairs will form a cohort group to support each other, and be supported by Lakehead's new teaching and learning centre. Chairs should propose a program of teaching-related research.

Each Chair would receive research funds dedicated to the scholarship of teaching and learning and, to facilitate their work, have a reduced teaching and service load. Chairs would have a detailed plan for how results will be disseminated within and outside of Lakehead University.

Outcomes for the Chairs' work should be based on evidence and established best practices, be clearly articulated, and could include:

- Development and delivery of a core undergraduate course in their Faculty, preferably a first year course;
- Mentoring 3–5 faculty members; and
- Mentoring graduate students into teaching.

The goals of the program are first and foremost to formally illustrate the importance and value of teaching at Lakehead University. Additional goals include: supporting and rewarding high quality undergraduate teaching; providing opportunities for professional development in teaching; supporting the dissemination of teaching expertise across faculties; providing mentorship to other instructors and graduate students interested in improving their teaching; and ensuring quality first-year courses across the University, which are critical for recruitment and retention.

11. Lakehead University should celebrate and reward teaching excellence and innovation. We recommend a review of existing policies on teaching awards and the development of a fuller suite of teaching awards to recognize the diversity of instructors, teaching, and stakeholders involved in recognizing excellence and innovation. A fuller suite of awards should reflect the institution's relatively small size to ensure that awards remain meaningful.

Teaching awards are important for recognizing excellence in teaching, innovation, and educational leadership. A teaching awards program should reward teaching excellence and innovation, while encouraging engagement in the overall quality of education for Lakehead students. Most Ontario universities offer a wider range and greater number of awards. We recommend an expanded suite of awards be established to acknowledge the diversity of teaching, to encourage collaboration among and across units, to recognize innovation, and to encourage knowledge production in the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Awards should be rigorously adjudicated and widely celebrated. High-level awards need not be given out annually for the sake of handing out an award. The announcement of award winners should be accompanied by a coordinated communication campaign to celebrate teaching excellence as part of a concerted effort to improve the profile and presence of teaching excellence on our campuses and online. No university annual report or other official document celebrating Lakehead University should be published without documenting recent achievements in teaching and learning. This is a no-cost way of supporting innovation and excellence in teaching and learning.

12. Lakehead University needs to improve internal communication.

The Task Force is concerned about how to communicate with and provide information to faculty. The current Media Relations department is primarily focused on communication intended for outside of the University. Internal communication from Media Relations is currently limited to the twice-weekly emailed Communications Bulletin. It is widely recognized that the Communications Bulletin is largely ignored, although members of the committee noted that it has been substantially improved in recent years. Communication through Deans and Chairs has become a primary way of communicating with faculty, although challenges in this regard have been noted and include timeliness. A new strategy for internal communication directly related to faculty members' work is needed. One suggestion for improvement is the development of two separate bulletins: one focused on Lakehead events and announcements, and another providing work and task-related information (drop dates, deadlines, work-related announcements, etc.). The committee also noted the absence of a central communication hub for faculty and students to find the appropriate office or offices for support and services.

*Principle 4: Lakehead University should take pride in and further welcome a diversity of learners. The University should take pride in its reputation as a university committed to equity and access. It should foster an institution-wide culture to match the diverse student body and make teaching accessible to all students.*

13. All staff, faculty, contract and sessional instructors, and graduate assistants should be provided with opportunities for on-going training in best practices for inclusive teaching and learning that addresses accessibility, language, ability, culture, and the personal and academic needs of a diverse student body.

A move toward a broad implementation of accessibility at the university will require intensive training and work, particularly for those providing the training and for faculty encouraged to implement these models in their classes.

If inclusive learning is to gain ground in Lakehead University's classes, the University will need to provide the following:

- Administrative support at high levels;
- Training;
- Opportunities to formally report innovative teaching practices on annual reports and have them recognized;
- Establishing an award to recognize accessible and inclusive teaching;
- Incentives for faculty; and
- Support for empirical research by way of pilot projects as outlined above in recommendation 4.

Incentives may require short-term investment, and the Task Force recognizes the challenges of the current fiscal climate. The Task Force strongly recommends the

consideration of these incentives as a long-term investment in teaching and learning with the potential for considerable impact in retention and recruitment.

14. Lakehead University should prioritize writing support for all students to promote the writing skills necessary for academic success. The University must be prepared to meet the specific needs of International and Aboriginal students.

We recommend providing coordinated support for all undergraduate and graduate students, including Aboriginal and international students. The support currently offered by The Writing Centre could become a joint project of the new teaching and learning centre and the Student Success Centre. The University should also be proactive in establishing a first-year writing class to address the needs of incoming students.

15. Lakehead University should encourage, and provide resources to ensure, institutional and faculty responsiveness to the student body in indigenizing and internationalizing the curriculum, as well as making learning accessible by removing unnecessary barriers to educational access wherever possible.

We must foster an inclusive learning environment for all students. The committee noted the significance of students being able to have culturally appropriate components in the curriculum. The priorities of indigenizing, internationalizing and making curriculum inclusive must be undertaken in nuanced, specific, and meaningful ways in order to respect historical and contemporary differences within those umbrella categories. Faculty must have adequate and appropriate support in order to undertake these initiatives. Support should include the provision of training to staff and faculty that will

enhance understanding of first year student transition challenges. This will require having a clear and coordinated plan for internationalization that addresses both recruitment and retention.

16. Experiential learning opportunities should be prioritized.

The University has committed to developing Community Engaged Scholarship by including Community Service Learning in its Academic Plan. Students learn in a variety of ways and the University should support incentives for designing and implementing experiential learning course components to enrich the student experience and achieve learner outcomes based on current research and best practices.

*Principle 5: Wherever possible, the University should work to create synergies between teaching and research to ensure they inform each other.*

17. The Senate Research Committee should recognize the Scholarship on Teaching and Learning (SoTL) in assessing applications for research and travel funding. The Committee and the new teaching and learning centre should work together to ensure SoTL is recognized and rewarded as legitimate scholarship.

SoTL is a form of practitioner-led research into teaching and learning, in which researchers not only undertake research on teaching and learning for their own improvement, but go beyond by applying the same rigour associated with traditional disciplinary research, and dissemination of their results through peer reviewed journals and conferences. The Institute for Scholarship of Teaching and

Learning at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta provides the following summary as a way of encapsulating the various elements of SoTL:

The scholarship of teaching and learning generally includes: rigorous, systematic, and evidence-based study of student learning in one's own course; the understanding and improvement of student learning and/or teaching practice as its ultimate goal; commitment to disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary peer-review and appropriate public dissemination; impact beyond a single course, program, or institution—advancing the field of teaching and learning to build collective knowledge and ongoing improvement.

Encouraging and supporting SoTL at Lakehead University would have institutional benefits. As Subbiondo (2013) suggests, SoTL is necessary “because as concerns about academic quality erode the credibility of higher education, we need to consider ways to improve the quality of education and publicize our progress.”

18. Lakehead University should provide support to encourage more undergraduate research initiatives, linking student interests with faculty research projects, highlighting successful projects, keeping a website of undergraduate research funding opportunities, and providing increased opportunities for undergraduates to engage meaningfully in research. This initiative should be a cooperative effort between the Office of Research Services and the new teaching and learning centre.

Undergraduate research opportunities have the potential to provide students with meaningful experiences and skill-building that are important for employment, graduate studies, and professional studies. Involving

undergraduates in research is a high impact practice that can have strong, positive outcomes for students. Recent research shows that students who participate in undergraduate research have better problem-solving skills, better critical thinking skills, more developed analytical abilities, and are better able to communicate the fruits of their research and thought. As well, students who are considering graduate or professional training “have a better understanding of the demands of graduate training in their fields, and benefit from exposure to specific research tools, methods and techniques” (Brownell and Swaner, 2010; Levenson, 2010). Participation in undergraduate research has also been shown to have positive outcomes with regard to degree completion, degree aspirations, and the likelihood of enrolling in graduate school.

Research shows that success is more strongly correlated with participation in research activities in second or later years; first year students have different needs for success in their education, such as writing courses. One barrier to participation in research at the undergraduate level is the assumption that research is restricted to the STEM fields—science, technology, engineering and math (Levenson 2010). We must ensure effective communication on the nature of research in all fields, including the social sciences and humanities, and in creative disciplines (such as art and music) where the product of scholarly work might be creative work.

Lakehead University committed to providing opportunities for undergraduate research in its Academic Plan. The following specific action items would build upon existing strengths and further support undergraduate research initiatives:

- a. Establish undergraduate summer research internships modeled after the NSERC Undergraduate Student Research Awards program and provide an incentive program for faculty with external research grants to encourage them to hire at least one undergraduate team member for a fixed

number of graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, and/or technicians, where appropriate. Interns and undergraduate research team members should be engaged in meaningful paid research.

- b. Support undergraduate students to travel to present, or help in presenting, research at conferences.
- c. Provide disciplinary specific 'how-to seminars' on designing research proposals, writing research abstracts, designing and presenting poster presentations, and making presentations.
- d. Continue to support and enhance the Undergraduate Student Research Conference where students have the opportunity to give presentations or posters with faculty feedback. Faculty from across disciplines should be encouraged to participate and disciplinary differences should be respected.
- e. Develop an undergraduate research portal to connect undergraduate students with research opportunities. (This should be a joint project between the Office of Research Services, the new teaching and learning centre, and the library.)
- f. Continue to support research dissemination at the undergraduate level by supporting the operations of an Open Access Undergraduate Research Journal.
- g. Develop a mechanism for students to access research opportunities by maintaining an active website or portion of the undergraduate research portal that lists classes with embedded research opportunities.

## Composition

The Provost and Vice President Academic invited and appointed stakeholders within the University to join the task force, including: student representatives, faculty representatives (representing both campuses and a mix of academic units), the Chairs of the Senate Teaching and Learning and Senate Academic Information Technology Committees, and staff from relevant support units.

Andrew Brigham, *Manager, Converged Networks, Technology Services Centre*

Joan Chambers, *Assistant Professor, Education* (joined in January 2015)

Martha Dowsley, *Associate Professor, Geography and the Environment and Anthropology*

Monica Flegel, *Chair, Senate Teaching and Learning Committee / Associate Professor, English*

Debra Gold, *Electronic Services Librarian*

Donald Kerr, *Associate Professor and Chair, Education*

Tim Kaiser, *Professor, Anthropology*

Ian Kaufman, *President, Lakehead University Student Union*

Anne Klymenko, *Director, Office of Research Services*

Katherine Kortez-Miller, *graduate student representative*

Rhonda Koster, *(Past) Director, Instructional Development Centre / Associate Professor and Chair, Outdoor Recreation, Parks and Tourism*

Breanne Neufeld, *Coordinator, Instructional Development Centre* (joined in January 2015)

Jane Nicholas, *Director, Instructional Development Centre (Chair) /Associate Professor, Women's Studies*

Alla Reznik, *Associate Professor, Physics / Canada Research Chair in Physics of Molecular Imaging*

David Richards, *Associate Professor, Business Administration*

Marian Ryks-Szelekovszky, *Vice-Provost Student Affairs*

Brett Sharman, *Coordinator, Instructional Development Centre / Quality Assurance* (to December 2014)

Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux, *Vice-Provost Aboriginal Initiatives*

Gwen Wojda, *Director, Continuing Education and Distributed Learning*

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