Report of the sub-committee of the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion

Teaching and Learning

Sub-committee on teaching and learning

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Learning diversity context

The Teaching and Learning Sub-committee is interested in the diversity of learning methods. Diversity is being defined as the variety of characteristics of all students enrolled at the university, such as "culture, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender, socio-economic status, age, civil status, fields of interest, values, communication skills, family support, learning methods, and cognitive, physical and sensory abilities" (Burgstahler and Cory 2008, 4).

The sub-committee is also interested in inclusive teaching practices. It defines educational inclusion as proactively considering diversity when designing and offering courses.

Barriers to diversity among learning methods

- Professors and administrators don't really understand the reality of student diversity.
- Professors teach to the average student: they teach to the majority, which is to the detriment of students from diverse backgrounds.
- Professors teach within an expert paradigm (a professor-centred approach) rather than guiding student learning (learner-centred approach).
- Teachers see diversity as an additional task or burden. Some people still hold to an elitist mentality.
- Students are under-prepared and under-supported for dealing with daily life and Canadian university learning (e.g., international students; students with disabilities; first-generation students; Indigenous, Métis, and Inuit students; students arriving from secondary school or the labour market; etc.).
    - Students are faced with a new learning culture upon arriving at university
        - ☐ This can cause challenges for reception, information processing and expression, attention spans, fatigue levels, task organization and persistence, and mental health (anxiety, depression, etc.).
        - ☐ This can also influence understanding of course content, learning structure and effectiveness, class engagement and participation, exam or work performance and the way in which students respond to course requirements.

Inclusive teaching recommendations

1. *Teach professors and administrators about different learning methods and inclusive teaching practices, so that they:*

a. Act as responsible citizens and student role-models

b. Consider differences, reduce barriers to learning and support students' full potential

c. Maintain school standards and high expectations while offering flexibility (choices) in how students demonstrate comprehension of the material considering their context and background, skills, and previous experiences

d. Transition towards learner-centred teaching

2. *Move away from the myth of the average learner:*

Proactively design student-centred courses to meet all students' needs. These courses will:

a. Include a variety of instructional approaches, activities that engage students and evaluation strategies

b. Come in different formats (e.g., oral, visual, written)

c. Value socially contextualized knowledge building in positive and safe learning spaces that encourages more than just cognitive growth: learning communities; learning circles; meaningful professor-student interactions; and project-based, problem-solving and other deep learning approaches (rather than rote learning)

d. Use a variety of educational technology suitable for targeted learning results that support all students' learning

e. Include a wide variety of examples and content from different situations (diversity of contexts and perspectives)

f. Fit in with a program/departmental attempt to design an inclusive syllabus

3. *Develop the teaching and learning culture* at the University of Ottawa through clear, reinforced and continual messaging promoting the consideration of the diversity of learning methods when designing and offering courses and designing curricula:

a. Integrate a variety of learning methods and inclusive teaching practices into existing policies

b. Have leaders at all levels of the administrative structure continually reinforce the importance of diversity and inclusion

c. Incorporate this into the university professor performance evaluation process (annual reports; tenure and promotion; hiring of part-time and new professors)

d. Incorporate this into the Quality Assurance Office's evaluation process

e. Provide targeted resources to help selected students get oriented to university life

"We naturally learn in different ways for various reasons. There is no single pathway to learning that everyone follows, but instead variable ways of learning based on diverse goals and values. This analysis of education should be the starting point of teaching and learning, the groundwork of pedagogy from top to bottom." Kurt W. Fisher, Harvard Graduate School of Education (Rose, 2013, p. ii)

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