Report from Working Group 4: Supporting Diverse Learning Environments

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Summary

Our group worked to envision a desirable future state for learning on the University of Guelph campus, and engaged in explicating and understanding the many ways diversity of learning environments are expressed. We developed a TLI workshop on compassion in the classroom, which was run on May 4th, 2021, and notes from that workshop are attached. We also developed a proposal for a teaching innovation laboratory, also attached. We also came up with several recommendations around promoting a community of learners and supporting instructors in pedagogical innovation. These are attached as well. The last outcomes reflect the conclusion we reached that technology cannot replace effective pedagogy implemented by engaged faculty.

Report

Our initial vision came from asking ourselves: "Wouldn't it be great if we…" which we answered:
- Support diverse learners across continuum of teaching delivery methods from face-to-face to distance education with thoughtful pedagogy.
- Had a system of organizational community that supports diverse learning environments.
- Build a teaching and learning community/communities.

We recognized that success depended on being able to successfully navigate diversity among learners, diversity in modes of delivery, and diversity in the problems we confront.

From this, we propose that at the University of Guelph:

We are great when ongoing attention & action is directed to creating & enhancing *caring, inclusive & open* learning communities.

We recognized in our conversations that an essential ingredient for this work is compassion: compassion for our students, for each other, and for ourselves. Compassion does not mean catering to each person's whims, but a recognition of our shared humanity and interrelatedness in our learning communities. The TLI Roundtable on Compassion and Teaching that we hosted on May 4th was well-attended with approximately 40 participants. We began with a mindfulness visualization exercise, and

followed with three faculty members of our group discussing what compassion in teaching means to them. This followed with a set of eight breakout rooms which each discussed different aspects of compassion in the classroom. Detailed notes for the session are included below.

Our working group also produced a draft proposal and guiding principles for creation of a lab for pedagogical innovation. We envision a space for exploring teaching with technology based on principles of innovation, pedagogical frameworks, inclusivity and accessibility, and flexibility. Ideally there would be a mobile component to this lab, and resources to support its use. We envision the lab being used to support diverse activities including recording of course material and exploring innovative forms of assessment. Finally, we recommend using our University Teaching Chairs (discussed below) as peer-based supports and champions for faculty use of the lab.

Our final document in this report lists a series of recommendations around the general area of supporting faculty development and pedagogical innovation, based on the principle of creating and enhancing learning communities. Greater communication is essential, and we recommend enhancing some of the tools used for communication about our research to include pedagogical activities on campus. We recommend the establishment of University Teaching Chairs, similar to the URCs, and clearly defining the expectations of the chair and how efforts within it are recognized institutionally. We also wish to promote the idea of extending a "hub-and-spoke" model from OTL to the colleges, with each college hosting a teaching and learning centre similar to COESP in CBS.

Though some of our recommendations do require adequate resourcing, we have aimed to make them as actionable as possible and want to express our thanks for the opportunity to work on this important project.