

ENV Teaching Fellow (TF) Activity Report, Fall 2015 – Winter 2016

- by Simron Jit Singh

Simron Singh was appointed the new ENV Teaching Fellow (TF) in August 2015. Keeping with previous practice, the ENV TF continued to work closely with representatives of the different units, students and CTE liaison in the Faculty of Environment. The TLC meets twice a term to review and discuss initiatives / proposals to support the mandate of the TF. At the start of Fall 2015, the TF met Dean Jean Andrey, and Associate Deans (Jeff Casello, Paul Parker and Ian Rowlands), and the Director, CTE to discuss TF activities in the coming period. Supporting the Teaching Fellow in this period was a PhD student, Kaitlin Weedmark-Kish, the Teaching and Learning Associate (TLA). The TF activities in the reporting period are structured as (a) Events, (b) Projects and Initiatives, (c) Dissemination and Outreach (d) Consultations / Meetings.

A. EVENTS (Trainings and workshops)

TA Training Workshop (23 participants)

September 23rd 2015, 11:30 – 4:00 pm

In collaboration with the Centre for Teaching Excellence (CTE), a TA training workshop was organised on being an effective and confident TA. The session began with a panel of four former (and experienced) TAs from the Faculty of Environment who answered questions and shared their experiences with the group. This was followed by an hour presentation on 'tips and tricks' for handling difficult situations and dealing with common issues. Lunch was provided.

New Instructors Workshop (5 participants)

October 5th 2015, 12:00 – 2:00 pm

New instructors in the Faculty of Environment were invited to attend a workshop to welcome them and provide them with relevant information to start as colleagues at UW. The event was a panel format, in which the speakers were: Mary Burden from computer services, Ian Rowlands on strategic initiatives, Katie Kish on experiential learning, Monica Vesely (CTE) on teaching workshops and services provided, and a question and answer session with Mary Louise McAllister, former ENV Teaching Fellow. Lunch was served.

Luncheon #1: The Future of Teaching (40 attendees)

November 25th 2015, 11:30 – 1:00pm

At the first TLC luncheon of the year we welcomed Jeff Casello and Steve Alexander to speak about the future of teaching from their perspectives. The talk was very well attended and included a rich half an hour discussion between the presenters and the audience. Lunch was served. Link to the event: <https://uwaterloo.ca/environment/events/future-teaching>

TA Training Coffee (3 participants)

January 18th 2016, 11:30 – 12:30 pm

For TAs who began in the Winter term we held a discussion over coffee to discuss concerns, 'tips and tricks' for their new position.

Luncheon #2: LITE Grant Recipients (35 attendees)

March 1st 2016, 11:30 – 1:00 pm

At the second luncheon event we highlighted two of the LITE grant recipients from the Faculty of Environment. John McLevey talked about using data in the classroom and Dan McCarthy discussed the indigenous knowledge course run by himself and indigenous elder, Peter Schuler. Again, the audience participated in a lively discussion for the second half of the event. Lunch was served. Link to event: <http://greentea.uwaterloo.ca/teaching-events>

Student Teaching Excellence Committee (STEC) and TLC Joint Event: The Importance of Social Media in Academia (50 attendees)

March 9th 2016, 11:30 – 1:00 pm

Initiated by STEC and supported by the TLC, a panel of social media experts came together to discuss the importance of social media in academia. The panel included Faculty of Environment social media all-stars Ian Rowlands, Markus Moos, Marta Berbes, and Sam Toman. This event was aimed at improve the teaching and learning experience for ENV graduate students. Lunch was served. Link to event: <https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/the-importance-of-social-media-in-academia-tickets-22169322039>

B. PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

ENV Strategic Report on Experiential Education

A major initiative of the TF this year was to prepare a status report on Experiential Learning (EL) in the Faculty of Environment, and propose recommendations to further EL practices in line with the ENV strategic plan: "As a campus leader in experiential learning, we will ensure that all our students have opportunities for meaningful and varied out-of-the-classroom learning." To this end, we gathered significant amount of documents and resources from across the university. After identifying instructors who are engaged in EL in the faculty, we invited them for a 'conversation on EL'. Across both terms, five focus groups with 19 faculty and staff participants were held, each for about 90 minutes. In addition, we held four expert interviews, and one World Café with students to gather first hand feedback, knowledge and information on EL. The report attempts to define EL for ENV, includes an overview of EL at various institutions and at the University of Waterloo, highlights existing EL supporting infrastructure, and concludes with both short-term and easily implementable recommendations as well as more long-term considerations. Currently, the draft report is under review by the TLC who will meet and discuss the recommendations in May 2016.

Leveraging the culture of Learning – a STEC / TF Initiative

The TF identified working with STEC (Student Teaching Excellence Committee) as a key partner in the faculty to leverage the culture of learning. In October 2015, priority areas for collaboration were identified. STEC was created in Fall 2012 by the former ENV TF (Mary Louise McAllister) with the mandate “to enhance the teaching and learning experience of Faculty of Environment students at the University of Waterloo through the development of teaching and learning initiatives...” (STEC homepage). The first initiative was a call for ideas around ‘innovation in learning’ that resulted in funding an initiative on peer-to-peer learning. This will be implemented in Fall 2016.

Link to the call: <http://greentea.uwaterloo.ca/teaching-research-groups/env-innovation-in-learning-competition>

Sponsoring participation to the UW-OND 2016 Conference

In order to encourage participation of ENV faculty and students to the 2016 teaching and learning conference (Opportunities and New Directions: Learning from Challenge and Failure), the TLC approved the sponsoring of first 20 ENV registrations. “This year’s Conference theme is an opportunity to open up discussions with our colleagues, our students, and ourselves around the beliefs we hold about challenges, setbacks, and failure in the context of teaching and learning at the University.” The initiative was announced through newsletter and email.

Link to the conference: <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/university-waterloo-teaching-and-learning-conference-ond-2016>

Funding to attend and present at Teaching Conferences

For building capacity among the ENV instructors, the TLC approved funding criteria to attend teaching conferences. While funding is limited and competitive, one criterion is effective dissemination of insights back to ENV, either through one of the TLC events and/or a blog.

ENV Teaching Excellence Awards (TEA)

The framework and nomination for two ENV teaching awards was first prepared by the former TF and was approved by the Dean’s Admin Group. In February 2016, the TLC reviewed the document again (for the purpose of implementation) and felt the need to make (minor) amendments to the documents, which were then approved on 24th March by the Dean’s admin group. The TEA will be put in place in the Fall 2016.

C. DISSEMINATION (OF TEACHING RESOURCES) & OUTREACH

Updating the Teaching Handbook (September 2015)

The (unofficial) Teaching Handbook of the Faculty of Environment was first produced by Mary Louise McAllister (former ENV TF) in 2014, which contains valuable information on scheduling practices, arranging course materials, preparing course outlines, ethics, working with TAs, examinations and resources and support available to instructors. By working with a number of experts and administrative staff across the Faculty of Environment we updated the Teaching and Learning Handbook: <http://env-blogs.uwaterloo.ca/green-tea/files/2015/10/Teaching-Handbook.pdf>

Newsletter #1

December 3rd 2015

The TLC disseminated the first GreenTea newsletter at the beginning of December highlighting the term activities, upcoming teaching and learning conferences, and resources and news on teaching and learning, and projects. We also highlighted the three Faculty of Environment LITE grant winners for this year.

Link to the newsletter: <http://greentea.uwaterloo.ca/2015/12/04/fall-2015-newsletter>

Newsletter #2

February 26th

The second newsletter was sent out on February 26th using a new format with news highlights in an email, and link to the specific items on the GreenTea homepage. This newsletter highlighted upcoming events in the Faculty of Environment, and beyond, upcoming conferences, funding opportunities, and new teaching resources.

Link to the newsletter: <http://greentea.uwaterloo.ca/2016/03/16/winter-2016-newsletter>

Redesign and maintaining the GreenTea Homepage

The ENV TF has a homepage under the name 'GreenTEA' (<http://greentea.uwaterloo.ca>).

During this period, the homepage was restructured and updated to streamline the content available online. This was based on a site plan meeting to decide on the best organizational strategy for the vast amount of content available on the website and how they can be accessed with ease. After reorganizing the content, we were offered by IST/MAD to transfer contents to the Waterloo Content Management System (WCMS), an easy to use interface, better visual appeal, common university interface and support provided by MAD/IST. The migration of contents is currently on and will complete in May 2016. The pilot can be viewed on:

<https://pilots.uwaterloo.ca/teaching-environment-action/>

Once this is complete, the TLA will be able to get training to be the site manager and maintain the homepage (WCMS for Site Managers – SEW 101).

D. CONSULTATIONS AND MEETINGS

The TF served as a point of contact to the CTE and other Teaching Fellows. Responding to requests for information and/or dissemination of teaching events and resources (OND, or nominations for the Teaching Excellent Academy - TEA) was spread throughout the reporting period. The TF was also approached by instructors every now and then for advice, opportunities or comments on course outline. The TF attended the following meetings on a regular basis:

- UW Teaching Fellow meetings, once a month chaired by Mario Coniglio, AVP Academic
- The TF is a member of the Dean's Admin group and executive council that meets every two weeks
- TLC meetings held twice a term
- Meetings with the TLA at least 3-4 times a month