Report of the Associate Dean, Teaching to Faculty Council, 2023 – 2024

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The Associate Dean of Teaching's portfolio began in July 2023. It was created in response to the increasing demands of the Teaching Fellow role. In this role, the Associate Dean of Teaching aims to support effective teaching practices within the Faculty of Environment, serving as a conduit between institution-wide teaching priorities and the faculty's strategic and individual goals, all while advocating for the Faculty's best interests.

Faculty of Environment Teaching Fellow:

As a Teaching Fellow at the University of Waterloo, the past year has been marked by significant contributions to various university teaching initiatives, showcasing leadership and collaboration across multiple projects and levels. This role has been instrumental in consulting on and advancing several key areas within the institution, including teaching for wellness—initiatives aimed at integrating wellness into teaching practices and promoting a holistic approach to education that supports both student and instructor well-being. Additionally, we have engaged in initiatives to measure and improve teaching effectiveness, employing evidence-based strategies such as peer review of teaching to foster a culture of continuous improvement in teaching practices.

We have also consulted on many institutional-level teaching initiatives, acting as the conduit for information between our faculties and the institution. Throughout these initiatives, the Teaching Fellow role has facilitated collaboration with diverse faculty members, promoting best practices and fostering a supportive community dedicated to educational excellence. These collective efforts have significantly contributed to the advancement of teaching and learning at the University of Waterloo and within the Faculty of Environment.

Accessible Education: Instructional Programs and Practices Team

As part of the Instructional Programs and Practices project team within the Teaching Innovation Incubator's Accessible Education project, significant contributions have been made to advance disability inclusion initiatives in response to the new AODA recommendations. This project is the primary focus for the Teaching Fellows this year, with all members engaged at various levels.

The team has been working towards creating alternate program pathways, ensuring accessible experiential learning opportunities, developing accessibility standards for teaching and learning, and identifying a process to establish bona fide and essential academic requirements for programs and courses. Led by Diana Skrzydlo and Donna Ellis, the team includes representatives from various faculties and academic support units. The Teaching Innovation Incubator supports the team by connecting it to campus expertise, guiding the project's direction, and coordinating campus-wide communication. Monthly meetings focus on addressing AODA recommendations and determining the best implementation strategies.

Outline Repository Champion:

The Outline.uwaterloo.ca project, referred to as Outline, is a locally developed digital course outline repository. The project provides an intuitive interface for instructors to author course outlines that are consistent, accessible, and directly correlated to Quest data. Working with Monica Barra as Outline Champions, efforts have focused on increasing outline adoption across all faculties, particularly in the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Health.

Key initiatives have included:

- **Faculty Engagement:** Meeting with key stakeholders in the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Health to promote the tool and address questions.

- **Student Support:** Hiring a student to help upload outlines from these two faculties.

- **Advocacy:** Attending Faculty Resource Committee (FRC) meetings to further advocate for Outline.

- **Collaboration:** Connecting the Teaching Fellows and the Outline development lead to advise on future development of the tool, including faculty-specific outline requirements and accessibility needs.

Further contributions also include serving as a member of the Outline Instructor Advisory Group, helping to approve changes to Outline and making recommendations for future development. These efforts have significantly enhanced the accessibility, consistency, and usability of course outlines at the University of Waterloo.

Peer Review of Teaching:

As the University of Waterloo moves towards a more holistic approach to teaching, including the use of the Teaching Effectiveness Framework, peer review of teaching emerges as a vital component. Teaching Fellows have been actively engaged in discussions and the implementation of peer review of teaching within the university. However, the specific procedures for conducting peer reviews within each faculty are still being developed.

Having completed the CTE peer review of teaching training and drawing from insights gained through discussions with Teaching Fellows in other faculties, peer reviews have been undertaken within the Faculty of Environment. Utilizing the Teaching Effectiveness Framework, collaboration with the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Johanna Wandel, has resulted in a proposed approach to selecting reviewers and outlining the implementation process of peer review within the faculty. This initiative aims to establish a structured framework for peer review that aligns with the faculty's unique needs and priorities, fostering a culture of continuous improvement in teaching practices.

Teaching Conversations Series:

In Fall 2023, we launched our Teaching Conversation Series - aimed at uniting our Environment teaching community. These gatherings, co-facilitated by our Environment CTE liaison, Julia Burke, have served as valuable platforms for exchanging best practices, addressing challenges, uncovering resources, and fostering connections among instructors and instructional support staff within the Faculty of Environment. The events, warmly received by participants, consistently draw representation from each school and department. Topics covered so far include engagement in large classes, generative AI, and efficient accessibility strategies. We are committed to extending this series into the upcoming Fall, with a focus on addressing topics of significant interest to our Environment instructors.

Other Initiatives:

Throughout the past year, my involvement in other various initiatives has further contributed to the promotion of effective teaching within the Faculty of Environment. One notable undertaking included leading the Student Experience Survey, where I spearheaded the development of Environment-specific questions tailored to capture the unique dynamics and needs of our student body. Additionally, lead the nomination process for the University of Waterloo Distinguished Teaching Award, identifying and honoring individuals who have made exceptional contributions to the educational landscape of the faculty. Overseeing this process allowed us to celebrate educators who demonstrate outstanding dedication, innovation, and impact in their roles. Furthermore, my continued involvement in the Educational Technologies Advisory Group has been instrumental in shaping the integration of technology into teaching practices within the University of Waterloo and the Faculty of Environment. In addition to these initiatives, organizing and running the Grand River Envirothon Competition, with invaluable support from the Associate Dean, Undergraduate Studies, Recruitment, the Ecology Lab, and faculty, staff, and students from the Faculty of Environment, has offered valuable experiential learning opportunities for high school students from our region.