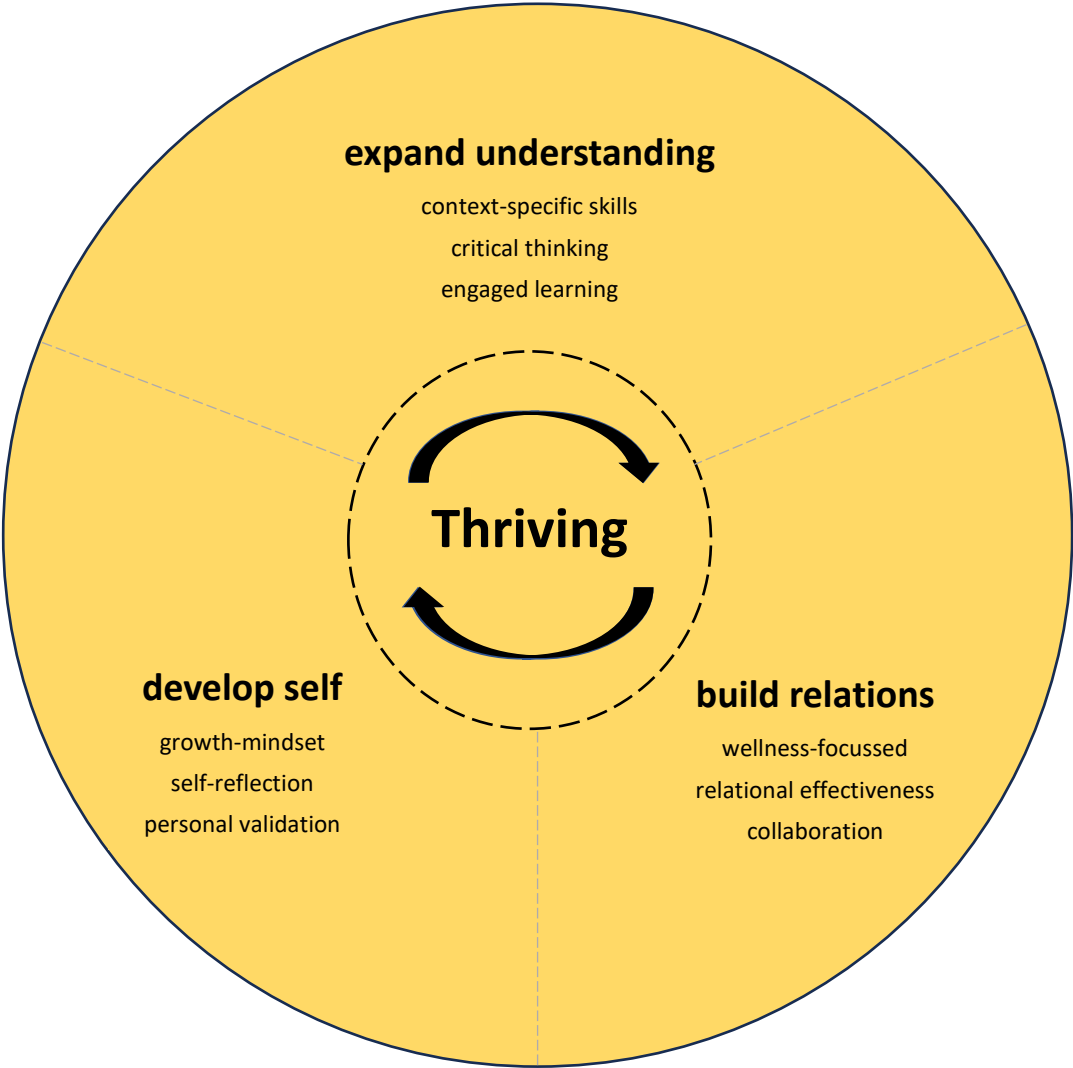


# Waterloo Student Experience & Engagement (WatSEE) Framework

The WatSEE Framework articulates the elements of the Waterloo student experience and engagement that we believe are fundamental to our students thriving. This report provides a brief justification for and description of WatSEE.



## Creating a Common Vision of Student Experience Priorities: WatSEE

### Background

Students are at the centre of the University's mission and their experiences with us matter. Student experience happens inside and outside the 'classroom'<sup>1</sup>. The 'Waterloo Student Experience' encompasses our students' perceptions of their interactions with us regarding their academic and intellectual development, experiential education opportunities, campus life, and well-being. The student experience is the shared responsibility of Faculties, Academic Support Units (ASUs), the Affiliated, Federated Institutions of Waterloo (AFIWs), and students. This responsibility occurs at the individual (e.g., instructors, advisors, service providers), activity (e.g., curricula, events, clubs, athletics, residence, work terms), and structural levels (e.g., institutional practices and policies).

A [2019 External Reviewers' Report](#) on the Waterloo Student Experience articulated strengths (Figure 1) and recommended areas for improvement (Figure 2). Repeated external student perception survey data align with the 2019 Review's identified areas for improvement: we have relational work to do with our students to improve their experiences of interactions and support. The 2019 recommendations were made before high profile, external events underscored and exacerbated social inequalities affecting our students that include racism, settler colonialism, sexism, heterosexism, cisgenderism, and ableism. The student 'playing field' is not level. Going forward, student experiences need to be informed by equity, compassion, and impact. Student experiences need to be viewed through an intersectional lens that purposefully decentres Waterloo's historically Eurocentric roots. We have enough evidence to know that our approach to student experience needs to change; we need to disrupt the status quo.

### Creating a Framework for the Waterloo Student Experience & Engagement (WatSEE)

The University of Waterloo's [mission](#) is to *"advance learning and knowledge through teaching, research, and scholarship, nationally and internationally, in an environment of free expression and inquiry"*.

Waterloo needs a student experience framework that articulates objectives and guides practices and metrics. The Framework helps us confirm our actions, identify gaps, and plan changes. Waterloo Student Experience & Engagement (WatSEE) considers '*learning*' to be a transformative activity that integrates academic learning and student development; thus, learning is not restricted to academic programming and student development is not separate from academic programming. We are all in this together.

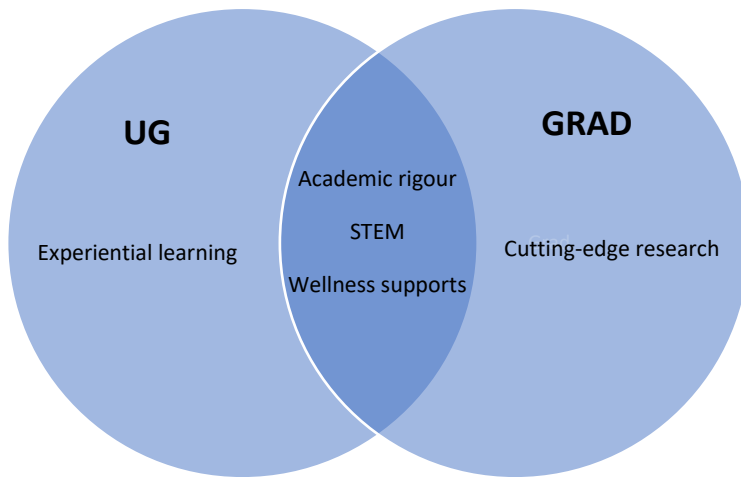
WatSEE acknowledges the holistic, interconnectedness of student learning, which occurs through all interactions with members of the university. Our students are listening and watching. Holistic, interconnected student learning means that while institutional contributors (e.g., instructor, residence life coordinator, student service specialist, academic advisor) may prioritize on specific elements of WatSEE, they remain mindful of and willing to incorporate other elements, where feasible. Operational excellence must reach beyond intent because impact is what matters.

WatSEE provides a lens for guiding student experience activity and assessment at the University of Waterloo. We want our students to do more than survive; we want them to thrive.

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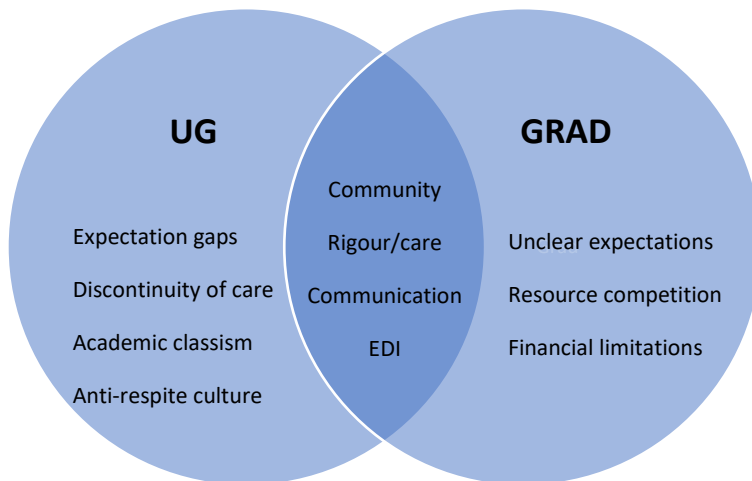
<sup>1</sup> The term 'classroom' is not meant literally. It is intended to convey academic learning environments including those that are physical (e.g., classroom, lab, clinic, field, work term), digital (e.g., online courses), and relational (e.g., instructor-student, supervisor-student, and work term employer-student dyads).

**Figure 1: Perceived Student Experience Strengths**



*Figure 1: **UG & GRAD:** Academic rigour (and excellence); STEM (UW focussed on STEM disciplines); Wellness supports (multiple units focussed on student wellness and success); **UG:** Experiential learning (led by Co-op); **GRAD:** Cutting-edge research (this would also draw and benefit UGs).*

**Figure 2: Potential Areas for Student Experience Improvement**



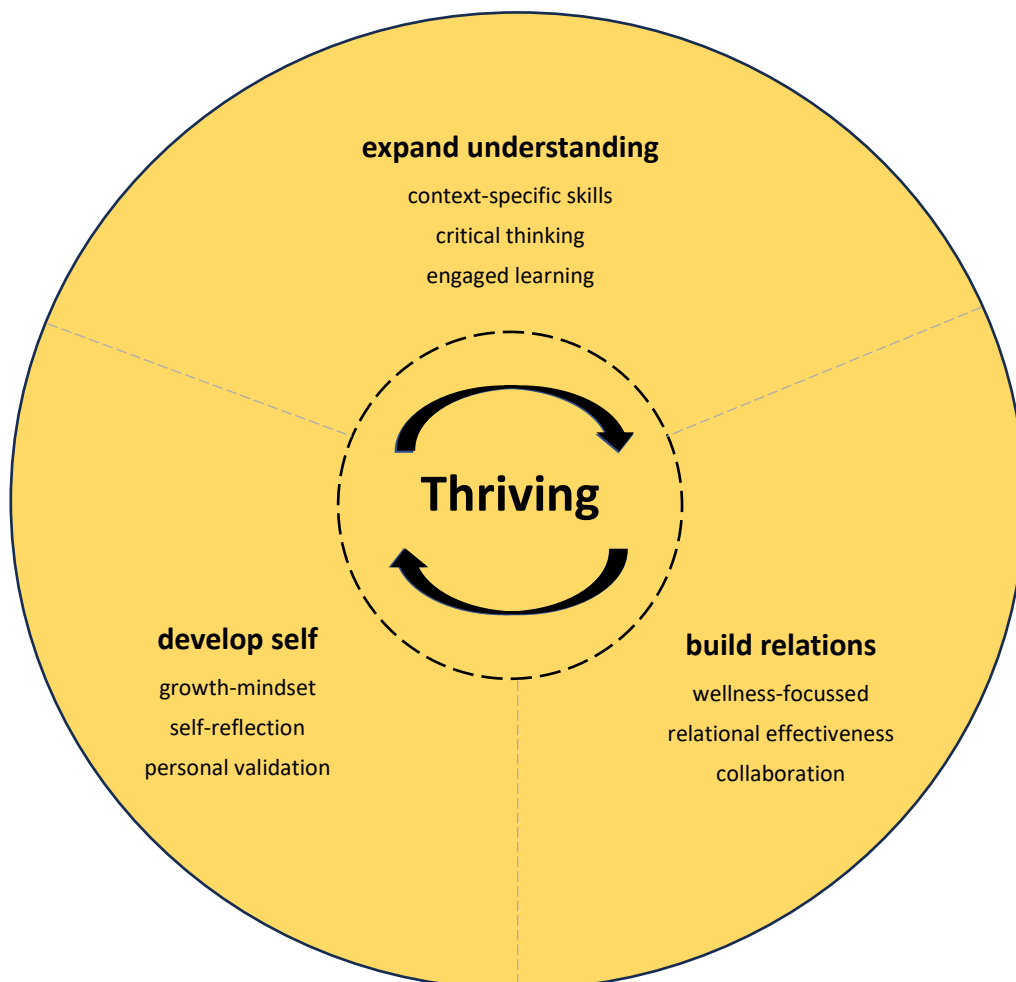
*Figure 2: **UG & GRAD:** Community/connection (insufficient); Rigour/care (disconnect); Communication deficiencies (content, format and timing); EDI (marginalized students are most impacted by processes and practices yet unaddressed in self-report); **UG:** Expectation gaps (relative to experience); Discontinuity of care (particularly after 1<sup>st</sup> year); Academic classism (STEM and Co-op valued most); Anti-respite culture (no opportunity to recover/reflect, particularly with co-op stream); **GRAD:** Unclear expectations (of students and supervisors); Resource competition (with UGs); Financial limitations (regarding tuition costs and funding options, especially among visa students).*

WatSEE is rooted in the understanding that students arrive with their own unique set of passions, interests, prior knowledges and lived experiences and that learning includes helping them make useful connections with their Waterloo-gained knowledge and skills. It presumes students are partners in their learning and development. WatSEE is not the product of one theory; it emerges from a consideration of multiple sources including:

- Waterloo’s strategic plan commitment to [developing talent for a complex future](#) and [strengthening sustainable and diverse communities](#)
- The [Okanagan Charter](#) (Waterloo as a signatory)
- The [Scarborough Charter](#) on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canada (Waterloo as a signatory)
- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: [Calls to Action](#)
- Waterloo’s [Wellness Collaborative Priority Areas](#)
- Waterloo’s [Future Ready Talent Framework](#)
- Student development theories focused on student success (e.g., Cuseo, 2013), student thriving (e.g., Schreiner et al, 2020) and critical theoretical perspectives to redress cultural, historical, racial, gendered, sexuality, and class roots of trauma and consider Indigenous land stewardship (e.g., O’Hara, 2020)

Thriving is foundational to student success. It occurs through practices that support students being able to expand understanding, develop self, and build relations. These three thriving student experience drivers, and their determinants are shown in Figure 3 (determinant descriptions follow the figure). Employing a thriving student experience lens, activities and processes can be initiated, continued, or revised, and mapped to elements of the model (see the Appendix for potential examples).

**Figure 3: WatSEE Framework**



## Thriving Student Experience Framework Elements

### expand understanding:

Context-specific skills: Students expand their understanding and discard false or outdated understandings through academic, work-integrated learning, and campus life programming. Discipline-based training includes identifying and synthesizing relevant information and adopting and promoting technology. Student learning is respectful of different ways of knowing and evaluated based on meeting learning objectives that are aligned with learning activities.

Critical thinking: Students ask questions, define a problem, examine evidence, and analyze assumptions and biases. They avoid irrational reasoning and oversimplification, consider other interpretations and perspectives, and appreciate the complex and multifaceted nature of ambiguity.

Engaged learning: Students feel responsible for their learning, their connections within the university community, and their opportunities to learn about themes related to historical context, social landscape, and physical territories. They make meaningful connections between their learning, their life, and their goals. Students have the space and time to invest energy outside the 'classroom'.

### develop self:

Growth mindset: Students develop a growth mindset by believing they have agency regarding their education, their intelligence can evolve, and their effort, perseverance, and resilience can lead to positive outcomes. These beliefs support their interest in lifelong learning.

Self-reflection: Students reflect on their learning experiences and build connections to previously gained experiences and knowledges. Self-reflection includes attention to and interest in self-assessment of knowledge, skills, and abilities. This work empowers students to understand how they relate to the world around them.

Personal validation: Students from diverse identities, experiences, and lived realities feel authentically seen, heard, and validated. Their concerns, questions, and success matter. Students have a right to harm averse, accessible, and respectful engagement but also hold the responsibility to reciprocate that approach.

### build relations:

Wellness-focussed: Students are encouraged to consider their wellbeing while navigating their postsecondary journey. Wellness is centred in a holistic perspective. Equity, compassion, and social justice inform the supports offered across all areas of the university community.

Collaboration: Students seek interpersonal connections, collaborations, and relationships with peers, faculty, staff, and administrators. They work effectively together by seeking and including diverse viewpoints and commit to improving relationships with one another and with the natural world.

Relational effectiveness: Students effectively interact and collaborate with people from varying backgrounds. They explore ways to make meaning of their social worlds, identify how their sense of self is constructed, and recognize how diverse relationships can enrich and inform their perspectives.

## **WatSEE Framework Assessment**

WatSEE provides a lens for guiding student experience activity and assessment that occur at the levels of strategic plans, units, and individuals.

As part of activity assessment, we have and will continue to use external perception surveys (e.g., NSSE, CGPSS, CUSC, OUGS, CCSW). External surveys provide relevant feedback on an array of metrics and allow us to compare ourselves to other post-secondary institutions; however, their use can be limited by their inability to connect with individual institutional terminologies, practices, and priorities.

At present, there is no internal, central, comprehensive 'student experience' survey. A Waterloo internal survey that generates disaggregated equity data is essential to us accurately capturing and characterizing student perceptions of our impact on them over time. Creating a relevant internal survey depends on first creating a framework to describe basic tenets of student experience. WatSEE enables the adoption of key institution-wide student experience priorities. One option is to employ a cascaded model, where Faculty- or program-specific priorities or short-term questions about student programming experience are added to the institution-wide priorities. The Waterloo survey would logically involve:

- A set of institution-wide questions asked of all students
- Optional additional questions:
  - Faculty/program-specific asked of students enrolled in that Faculty/program
  - Short-term theme questions asked of all relevant students (e.g., advising, technology)

Adoption of institution-wide student experience objectives (WatSEE) will help set the stage for building a set of questions and aligning the impact of work across units. Later, Faculties, ASUs and AFIWs can consider if there are a small number of other student experience priorities that are unique to their environment/context.

## Exemplar Sources/Resources Considered<sup>2</sup>

### People

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice President, Academic &amp; Provost</li> <li>• VP, Research &amp; International</li> <li>• Associate VP, Indigenous Relations</li> <li>• Associate VP, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion &amp; Anti-Racism</li> <li>• Associate VP, Academics</li> <li>• Associate VP, Graduate Student &amp; Postdoctoral Affairs</li> <li>• Associate VP, International</li> <li>• Associate Provost, Students</li> <li>• Associate Provost, Co-operative &amp; Experiential Education</li> <li>• Faculty             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Deans</li> <li>○ Associate Deans (some)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessibility Services</li> <li>• Athletics &amp; Recreation</li> <li>• Campus Housing</li> <li>• Centre for Career Action</li> <li>• Centre for Extended Learning</li> <li>• Centre for Teaching Excellence</li> <li>• Co-operative Education</li> <li>• Counselling Services</li> <li>• Equity Office</li> <li>• Graduate Student &amp; Postdoctoral Affairs</li> <li>• Human Rights, Equity &amp; Inclusion</li> <li>• Indigenous Relations</li> <li>• Institutional Analysis &amp; Planning</li> <li>• Legal &amp; Immigration Services</li> <li>• Library</li> <li>• Organizational &amp; Human Development</li> <li>• Registrar’s Office</li> <li>• Secretariat</li> <li>• Sexual Violence Prevention and Response</li> <li>• Student Success Office</li> <li>• University Communications</li> <li>• Wellness Collaborative</li> <li>• Work-Learn Institute</li> <li>• Writing &amp; Communication Centre</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association</li> <li>• Graduate Student Association</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President’s Anti-Racism Task Force</li> </ul>

### Readings

Cuseo, J. (2013). Seven timeless and universal principles of student success: Research-based, learner-centered educational processes strongly associated with academic achievement and degree completion. [https://www.wvaspa.org/uploads/1/6/0/6/16063526/seven\\_principles\\_of\\_success\\_research\\_practice\\_manuscript.pdf](https://www.wvaspa.org/uploads/1/6/0/6/16063526/seven_principles_of_success_research_practice_manuscript.pdf) Accessed January 31, 2023.

Hernández, E. (2016). Utilizing Critical Race Theory to examine race/ethnicity, racism, and power in Student Development Theory and research. *Journal of College Student Development*, 57, 168-180.

Keeling, R.P. (2009). Learning reconsidered 2: A campus-wide focus on the student experience. *ACPA/NASPA*. Washington, DC.

Kurt, S. (2020). How Can We Align Learning Objectives, Instructional Strategies, and Assessments? *Educational Technology*, November 11, 2020 <https://educationaltechnology.net/how-can-we-align-learning-objectives-instructional-strategies-and-assessments/> Accessed August 16, 2021.

O’Hara, R.M. (2020). STEM(ing) the tide: a Critical Race Theory analysis in STEM education. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*. DOI: 10.1080/10720537.2020.1842825.

Schreiner, L.A., Louis, M.C., & Nelson, D.D. (Eds.) (2020). *Thriving in transitions: A research-based approach to college student success* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition.

Wade, C. (1995). Using writing to develop and assess critical thinking. *Teaching of Psychology*, 22(1), 24-28.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to sources identified on page 4.

## Appendix: Exemplar activities and processes that could positively impact the Waterloo Student Experience

The following strategies are suggestions for consideration, discussion, and impact analysis. Some of these ideas have arisen during consultations in the past and may have already been adopted by some individuals or units. They are neither assumed to be a consequence of the presented WatSEE model nor sufficient in addressing all elements of the model, but they are a potential start for conversations.

### Academic:

Action	expand understanding			develop self			build relations		
	Context-specific skills	Critical thinking	Engaged learning	Growth mindset	Self-reflection	Personal validation	Wellness-focussed	Collaboration	Relational effectiveness
Operate within a learning paradigm, where the focus is on what learners do	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
Consider effective teaching to be characterized by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compassion</li> <li>• Using aligned course and curriculum design</li> <li>• Fostering motivation</li> <li>• Embodying inclusivity through universal design for learning</li> <li>• Encouraging deep learning</li> <li>• Enabling lifelong learning</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Consider effective supervision to involve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compassion</li> <li>• Student success &amp; mentorship</li> <li>• Student well-being</li> <li>• Work-life balance</li> <li>• Respect &amp; inclusivity</li> <li>• Motivation</li> <li>• Prompt, constructive feedback</li> <li>• Deep learning</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓



Action	Context-specific skills	Critical thinking	Engaged learning	Growth mindset	Self-reflection	Personal validation	Wellness-focussed	Collaboration	Relational effectiveness
Align learning objectives, activities, and assessments in all learning environments (implications for instructor and staff training)	✓		✓				✓		
Review student academic loads in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Setting caps on hours/week (40-hours?)</li> <li>Reducing inter-course demand collisions</li> <li>Enabling 'slip days' (e.g., allowing limited flex in deadlines, without penalty)</li> <li>Decreasing final exam weighting</li> </ul>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		
Administer courses with an understanding that student equity trumps student equality	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		
Co-op demands: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain pandemic work term (WT) flexibility – e.g., 12-16-week WT flex (would help address anti-respite care, and support student agency and equity (credit should be tied to meeting LOs, not length)</li> <li>Co-operative Education &amp; Work-Integrated Learning (CEWIL) requires a minimum of 3 WTs; should programs require more than 4 WTs?</li> </ul>	✓			✓			✓		

Action	Context-specific skills	Critical thinking	Engaged learning	Growth mindset	Self-reflection	Personal validation	Wellness-focussed	Collaboration	Relational effectiveness
Undo colonial (decolonize) and reaffirm Indigenous ways of learning, teaching, and structuring power	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Affirm anti-racist/anti-oppressive ways of learning (decentre whiteness)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Require all students to complete training modules (e.g., anti-racism-anti-oppression; Indigeneity & decolonization; consent) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All employees should also complete comparable training, suitable for the audience and performance evaluations should reward completion</li> </ul>	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓
Require baccalaureate students to take one 0.5-unit course from a 'bin' of courses <sup>3</sup> focused on diverse & sustainable communities (aligned with strategic plan)	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓
All Faculties and AFIWs require new faculty to complete training about teaching & learning (CTE or external), with required and optional training rewarded in performance evaluations	✓		✓				✓		
Stop using 'regular' to describe a stream of study (academic classism)						✓	✓		

<sup>3</sup> Examples could include: Black studies & anti-racism/anti-oppression (BLKST courses; HIST 221; GSJ 208L), Indigenous studies and anti-colonialism (INDG 201, 216, 272; CI 250; GSJ 211; HIST 269, 271), human rights and social justice (CI 100, 200; HRTS 101; PACS 101, 201, 202; GSJ 101, 102, 108; PSCI 100, 150), and sustainability (e.g., ENVS 105; ERS 101, 215, 225, 253, 270; GEOG 207; INDEV 100; SCI 200, 201, 250)

Action	Context-specific skills	Critical thinking	Engaged learning	Growth mindset	Self-reflection	Personal validation	Wellness-focussed	Collaboration	Relational effectiveness
Develop strategies for managing under-performing supervisors (in the face of students who fear reporting and don't know who is a decision-maker)				✓		✓	✓		

### Student Development/Support

Action	expand understanding			develop self			build relations		
	Context-specific skills	Critical thinking	Engaged learning	Growth mindset	Self-reflection	Personal validation	Wellness-focussed	Collaboration	Relational effectiveness
<p>Equity, intersectionality, and wellness informs all our work; for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider 3 pandemics exist: COVID-19, equity &amp; sustainability</li> <li>• Adopt anti-racism goals of confront, challenge, and change our systems</li> <li>• Value identity work (e.g., racial, indigenous, gender) in performance evals and student credit (pay or award)</li> <li>• Using more 'secret-shoppers' may help uncover unequitable policies in practices across units</li> <li>• Increase Indigenous acknowledgements, signage, and art on campus</li> </ul>			✓			✓	✓		

Action	Context-specific skills	Critical thinking	Engaged learning	Growth mindset	Self-reflection	Personal validation	Wellness-focussed	Collaboration	Relational effectiveness
Value: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>student engagement with academic programming and university life</li> <li>cultivating a sense of belonging<sup>4</sup></li> <li>capacity for student wellness</li> <li>relationships that are enthusiastic, compassionate, and respectful</li> </ul>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		
Commit to caring (not just rigour); don't say care, do care			✓			✓	✓		
Continue improving student communication (C4S for students); accessible, helpful, just-in-time			✓			✓	✓		
Adopt trauma-informed practices (meet students where they are)				✓		✓	✓		
Centralize 42 & non-academic 71 case work on campus, with input from student's AD; embed trauma-informed practices				✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
All Faculty, AFIW and ASU strat plans incorporate wellness, including a consideration of intersectional identity						✓	✓		
Provide public-facing high-level OUGS data (like is done for UG surveys like NSSE and CUSC)						✓	✓		
Increase the number of PT jobs for students (e.g., visa grad students)			✓			✓	✓		

<sup>4</sup> A sense of belonging is a two-step process. First, students must belong; this is currently a challenge for underrepresented communities (e.g., Black, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students). Second, a Eurocentric lens cannot be applied to the expectations or measurement of 'sense of belonging'.

Action	Context-specific skills	Critical thinking	Engaged learning	Growth mindset	Self-reflection	Personal validation	Wellness-focussed	Collaboration	Relational effectiveness
Change certain petition processes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop changing all term grades (i.e., even passing/higher grades) in a successful petition and eliminate the petition CR/NCR (this can have negative impacts on students applying to professional/graduate programs)</li> <li>• View code protected petitions as accommodations, not considerations</li> </ul>				✓		✓	✓		
Focus on student ‘purpose’ – personal & professional (enable students to develop awareness & hope on a holistic level); hope is a sense of agency & ability to identify, plan, navigate pathway to reach goal (effective goal setting) Focus on the ‘reason for being’ (Ikigai) – what you love, good at, world needs and get paid for			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		