The Task Force on Teaching and Learning (TFTL) engaged the community in a probing, intensive process to develop recommendations on enhancing teaching and learning support at SFU. The teaching and learning environment was found to be complex, comprising several interdependent, integral components that require attention at multiple levels. The TFTL proposes several interrelated recommendations (in bold below) and sub-recommendations.

The TFTL recommends “establishing and communicating a vision statement and principles to provide direction and common purpose around teaching and learning at SFU” that should be directly incorporated into the VPA’s Academic Plan. This action should promote working towards a shared vision for teaching and learning, provide a basis for strategic planning, and enable support to be organized more effectively. Furthermore, ensuring that learning and teaching-related expectations are articulated institutionally and across all units should facilitate these goals and serve as a basis for planning and prioritization.

SFU enjoys many teaching and learning services and forms of support at its three campuses. Recognizing, celebrating, and communicating our successes enable the university community to benefit from local expertise and develop a stronger culture around teaching and learning. The recommendation to “develop and implement a phased institutional plan to raise awareness of the broad range of SFU teaching and learning successes, services and support for teaching and learning and to ensure that they are recognized, used, and celebrated at all three campuses in an appropriate manner” should ameliorate the perceptions of teaching and learning and facilitate a shift in culture at SFU.

Many academic institutions are redoubling their focus on the student experience and student retention by investing in engaging learning environments and integrating classroom and non-classroom experiences. Expanding student-centered approaches to teaching within a process of ongoing improvement should clarify expectations for student learning, provide more opportunities for experiential learning and learning that extends beyond the classroom, and build on the synergies among teaching, learning and research.

The TFTL believes that recognizing, evaluating, and rewarding teaching will help to foster a culture that implicitly and explicitly values teaching and consequently enhance students’ learning experiences. Valuing teaching in a consistent way will (1) encourage more dialogue and sharing amongst instructors about teaching and learning, (2) ensure processes that recognize and reward teaching, and (3) ensure that ongoing professional development is provided, encouraged and valued. To support these goals, the TFTL proposes “increasing awareness of policy provisions that address the importance accorded to teaching and learning, promote a consistent interpretation of policy provisions, and implement further initiatives that value the teaching mission of the University.”

Including the multiple stakeholders and appreciating their roles, perspectives, and experiences are critical to teaching and learning at SFU. The TFTL proposes to “establish a new, highly-integrated, coordinated and extensive teaching and learning support system that fosters the exchange of ideas and promotion of teaching between teachers within and between programs, between teaching support staff from different venues in the university, and between teachers and teaching support staff.” The support system would draw upon instructors, staff, and students in the planning, design, and implementation of support initiatives, and facilitate communication in a collaborative network. The system would also afford faculty members the opportunity to assume leadership and mentorship roles, and identify and voice unit-specific needs for teaching and learning support.

In sum, teaching and learning at SFU are complex activities that require integrating support at many levels, Recommendations focus on increasing the value attributed to teaching, better recognizing and rewarding teaching, and enabling the university community to benefit from existing expertise and experiences. The recommendations in this report constitute the first step of an unfolding process of discussion, refinement, and elaboration that will lead to the development of implementation plans in a phased, transparent manner. Although implementation will require considerable time and commitment, activities to (1) promote a culture of teaching and learning and (2) develop a new teaching and learning support system are identified as immediate priorities.