Recommendations to the VPA on the Task Force on Teaching & Learning’s Report: by the VPA’s Advisory Council on Teaching & Learning

February 11, 2010

Convened in December 2009, the VPA's Advisory Committee on Teaching and Learning (VACTL) reviewed the recommendations made by the Task Force on Teaching and Learning (TFTL) and advised the VPA on implementation.

Priorities

VACTL recommends accepting the five high-level recommendations and their sub-recommendations proposed by the TFTL. Upon a decision by the VP Academic to implement the recommendations, a team would prioritize the TFTL’s sub-recommendations and plan an implementation in conjunction with the 2010 - 2013 Academic Plan. VACTL recommends the following priorities for implementation:

(1) Recommendation #1: Create a vision statement and principles around teaching and learning. This requires immediate attention as the vision statement and principles set the stage for the other recommendations.
(2) Recommendation #2: Begin communication, community and celebration initiatives.
(3) Recommendation #5: Establish the teaching and learning support system, in phases.
(4) Recommendations #3 and #4: Identify priorities for short and longer-term implementation and plan carefully with an awareness of available resources.

TFTL Recommendation #1: Create a Stronger Vision for Teaching and Learning at SFU

“Establish and communicate a vision statement and principles to provide direction and common purpose around teaching and learning at SFU”

VACTL Recommendations to VPA: Accept Recommendation #1 with a caveat

VACTL supports the notion of developing a vision, principles and directions for teaching and learning at SFU. Rather than the draft vision and principles proposed by the TFTL that appear to be more like a mission and principles, VACTL recommends developing a strong and imaginative vision statement. This statement would (1) emphasize and be orientated towards leadership, (2) encapsulate a “vision” that inspires community members, (3) define SFU’s success in achieving this goal, and (4) promote a distinctive culture of teaching and learning at SFU. Leadership from SFU’s administration as well as other community members is needed.

TFTL Recommendation #2: Develop a Communication Plan for SFU’s Teaching and Learning Community

“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 in all three campuses in an appropriate manner.”

VACTL Recommendation to VPA: Accept this recommendation and its one sub-recommendation.
SFU needs to change the culture around teaching and learning, to articulate expectations about teaching and learning more consistently, and to communicate about available resources and services for instructors at all three campuses.

Implementation considerations:

1. VACTL members recommend broadening activities to include celebration.
2. The VPA should be responsible for ensuring consistent communication about teaching and learning across all units. Communications would centre from the VPA’s office with review and input by the future Council.
3. Communication would be enhanced if there were a single unit responsible for support of teaching and learning for instructors.
4. An important step towards the cultural transformation includes clearly voiced support by senior administrators (including the President) and encouragement and celebration at multiple levels.
5. University Teaching Fellows and other Council representatives with their respective constituencies would play an important role in communicating within Faculties.

**TFTL Recommendation #3: Improve the Learning Experience at SFU**

“Expand student-centered approaches to teaching within a process of ongoing improvement.”

**VACTL Recommendation to VPA:** Accept Recommendation #3 and its six sub-recommendations.

VACTL suggests, because the term “student-centred” has many interpretations, that members of the University community refer to the TFTL report for a detailed discussion (see p. 5 of the full report at [http://www.sfu.ca/tftl](http://www.sfu.ca/tftl)).

Implementation considerations:

1. Significant care, communication, and support-building are required to implement these recommendations.
2. Because teaching and learning are pragmatically about recruitment, engagement and retention, the emphasis in sub-recommendation 3.5 on early investment in students and recruitment is recognized as being particularly important.
3. The significance for SFU in making expectations about students' learning experiences more explicit needs to be recognized and explored.
4. Implementation planning needs to reflect practical considerations and realistic resourcing given the budgetary challenges departments are facing and potential increased workload for individuals: everyone needs to contribute (institution, Faculties, departments, individuals) and while much would need to be done by departments, support needs to be provided centrally.
   a. Since resources will be limited in the foreseeable future, consideration and planning around this recommendation should not require a lot of new resources, but rather should focus on priorities and a related realignment of resources.
   b. Focus on one or two initiatives and ensure that they are well accomplished, rather than attempting to implement all of the sub-recommendations.
5. Providing institutional support towards a culture of experimentation and cross-Faculty initiatives to nurture enthusiastic instructors is crucial.
6. Engaging students in initiatives such as involving them in pilot projects, where the learning experience includes both students and instructors is recommended.
7. Pilot projects that may then be expanded to other departments or Faculties later require support.
8. Because they are different and may require different proportions of emphasis on teaching and research, it is important to carefully consider the applicability of these recommendations to both undergraduate and graduate students.
9. Promotion of learning expectations and modalities needs to be well founded and reflected in practice.
TFTL Recommendation #4: Recognize, Evaluate & Reward Teaching

“Increase 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”

VACTL Recommendation to VPA: Accept Recommendation #4 and its eight sub-recommendations.

Two types of issues requiring attention are: (1) policies and procedures that are not carried out systematically or consistently and (2) absent or silent policies and procedures that already exist that could be integrated to signal more strongly that teaching and learning are SFU priorities.

Implementation considerations:

(1) Add a means to help junior faculty members to develop evidence of their teaching.
(2) Encourage and support more graduate students in teaching development as they teach at SFU and prepare to become faculty members.

TFTL Recommendation #5: Create a Teaching & Learning Support System

“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”

VACTL Recommendation to VPA: Accept Recommendation #5 and its eight sub-recommendations.

Implementation of this recommendation is key to the success of the other recommendations since planning, operationalization and evaluation of the other recommendations necessitates communication, input, and collaboration by multiple stakeholders. The support system is integral to foster cultural change.

Implementation considerations:

(1) It is essential that this be done consistently with existing SFU policies and governance. The new system will enhance and add to existing collaborations among individuals, departments, Faculties, support units and administration.