

E-Learning Task Force

REPORT TO THE PROVOST

MAY 2013



Western



Western University

E-Learning Task Force

REPORT TO THE PROVOST

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Preamble

The E-Learning Task Force has undertaken a review of e-learning at Western in the context of rapid changes in higher education provincially, nationally, and, indeed, globally. Growing demand for online courses at Western, mirroring increased enrolments in online courses at many other universities, reflect a change in student interest and expectations. Developments in technology raise the prospect of new pedagogical practices, the implications of which faculty members are exploring for teaching and learning in a range of disciplines. While there is no doubt that the use of technology in learning is advantageous, public policy directions in Ontario lend a sense of urgency to the development of e-learning initiatives, and are aimed particularly at access, student mobility, and—perhaps wishfully—efficiency.

For the purposes of this Report, it should be noted that by **e-learning** the Task Force means all shades of technology-integrated learning, from online components of face-to-face courses to blended or hybrid courses to fully online distance courses.

The Task Force found varying levels of engagement with e-learning on campus in both undergraduate and graduate learning, in regular and professional programming: some programs have embraced the possibilities and are keen to see the University mount a coherent, well-supported strategic effort to support e-learning; others have yet to be persuaded of the opportunity in e-learning. The Task Force consulted widely across the Faculties and identified a number of themes, opportunities, and challenges that inform this report. The overarching messages that reached the Task Force were these:

- **Academic priorities must inform Western's e-learning strategy**
- **Pedagogical and technical support and resources are key for faculty engagement**
- **Policy and planning processes at Western constrain e-learning and must be revised**

In what follows, these themes are taken up in detail. Many of the ideas that follow are situated in the context of fully online courses, but are generally applicable to the other forms of e-learning as well. This report is intended to be action-focused, taking into account the unique operational and policy context at Western; the Task Force has identified a series of recommendations that will lead to increased engagement in e-learning.

Vision for E-Learning at Western

In keeping with the University's focus on the student academic experience, e-learning at Western must be known for its student-centred pedagogical practices, its focus on deep and active learning, and its commitment to quality and outstanding academic standards.

Guiding Principles

- **Academic Imperative**

Development of e-learning at Western is motivated first by potential for student learning and the academic demands of a given discipline. University policies governing the development and approval of courses and programs apply to online offerings just as they do for traditional onsite courses.

- **Quality**

As a learning experience, online courses at Western must be as effective as face-to-face courses, with due attention being paid to curriculum and course design, pedagogical practice, academic standards, and the role of these courses in promoting undergraduate degree level outcomes.

- **Pedagogy**

Online courses are learner centred, characterised by innovative and evidence-based pedagogical practices, and engaged, active learning.

- **Student Experience**

Course and program development are designed to provide students with flexibility and choice to support quality learning experiences and degree completion. Appropriate academic and technological support

promotes student success, in keeping with Western's commitment to the student experience. Retention and student satisfaction are key performance indicators.

- **Accessibility**

Where appropriate, online course and program offerings enhance access for students, and extend Western's reach globally.

- **Technology and Administrative Support**

The technological environment supports course delivery and student learning, and extended hours of technological and administrative support are available.

- **Planning and Budgeting**

The management structure supports the strategic design, development and delivery of courses and programs, including appropriate incentives for academic units.

- **Partnerships**

Western will consider entering partnerships that enhance student choice and mobility, enrich the development of its online offerings and the student academic experience, and bolster its reputation.

Current Practice, Challenges, and Opportunities

Faculty Engagement

The majority of online undergraduate courses at Western are developed and taught by Limited Duties instructors, whereas graduate courses are more often taught by regular faculty who have membership in the SGPS. While the Task Force heard from several tenured faculty members who are champions of e-learning and innovative pedagogy, the predominant themes from faculty reflected concerns, including:

- Increased workload in both development and delivery of online courses
- Insufficient support and resources, both pedagogical and technological
- Concern about loss of student contact
- Lower teacher and course evaluations
- Protection of intellectual property

Several expressed fundamental concerns about the changing role of faculty, and, indeed, some perceive e-learning as a threat; if first-rate content is widely available through Massive Open Online Courses and by other means, as it is in some disciplines, could the role of faculty begin to resemble that of tutors or teaching assistants?

One of the important challenges for e-learning at Western will be to engage faculty. To increase its online presence, the University must find ways to incent and support faculty and to ensure that the online learning experience is not a compromise of academic standards. According to current faculty who are innovative and masterful e-learning teachers, e-learning provides a rich and effective learning environment, and Western can do more to leverage the expertise of these champions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Provide pedagogical resources in support of course development and instructor training, and robust technological support for course delivery
 2. Provide appropriate teaching assistant support for online courses, as determined by the Faculty and program
 3. Develop a teacher and course evaluation instrument specifically appropriate and designed for online courses
 4. Develop awards to recognize outstanding online teachers and teaching assistants
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Student Experience

Administrative support for students in online courses is currently provided by staff in the Office of the Registrar and the ITS Helpline while academic support services are primarily provided in person on campus. Most students in online courses are currently registered as Western students, and they choose online courses largely for schedule flexibility. Western will want to ensure the quality of online courses and enhance the technological, administrative and academic support (e.g., writing, learning skills, counselling) available to online learners.

Western is nationally recognized for the student experience it provides, and the Task Force sees an opportunity for the University to broaden this commitment to its online student experience and further differentiate itself. By developing innovative online services and programming that engage students, build community, and support student success, Western will extend its reputation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Extend the hours of technological support services and increase the number of support staff
2. Develop analytical framework to assess the effectiveness of online courses
3. Develop orientation materials or workshops for students on how to be a successful online learner
4. Develop training workshops for teaching assistants on supporting the best student experience in online learning

Pedagogical Support

Central support for e-learning is provided through the Teaching Support Centre (TSC), which houses Distance Studies, and by the Instructional Technology Resource Centre (ITRC) in ITS. The Coordinator of Distance Studies works closely with programs, instructors, and the ITRC to develop online courses. The TSC has recently developed an online course on online instruction (the Online Instructional Skills Workshop) that is now being made available to faculty. The ITRC assists instructors in the use of instructional technology, helps in the preparation of online content, and maintains the systems and software that support instruction.

The Faculty of Health Sciences and the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry have their own instructional designers to support e-learning in their programs. The Faculties of Social Science and Engineering have appointed senior academic leaders to guide online learning in their respective Faculties, and they are working with the Teaching Support Centre to realize progress. A number of the other Faculties have identified instructional designers as a priority in their own academic and budget plans. The need for additional expertise in instructional design is widely recognized, and the allocation of resources in this area will do much to facilitate Western's online presence. Faculties that have made the investment in instructional design are leading in e-learning innovation, and those efforts will be bolstered by additional central resources that have recently been made available.

There is a need for pedagogical training, including best practices for time management, facilitating online discussion and engagement, providing effective feedback, and dealing with scholastic offences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Appoint instructional designers centrally in support of course development

2. Develop a robust training program through the Teaching Support Centre to prepare faculty and teaching assistants to teach online
 3. Arrange a forum each term to bring online instructors together to share ideas and build community
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IT Infrastructure

Western's Learning Management System (LMS), Sakai, is the primary platform for web-based online courses, although some instructors are experimenting with platforms such as Edmodo and using a wide range of technology, from Facebook to Skype to Google apps. Some instructors reported constraints to do with "locking down" themes in Sakai, bandwidth, and ease of use. Programs in Medicine and in Education have infrastructure to support synchronous online delivery of courses, but Western lacks general use "smart" classrooms that are set up with cameras and technology to enable high quality course delivery and development or classrooms where faculty can experiment with the use of the new technologies to enhance learning. Several instructors are interested in exploring the pedagogical use of mobile devices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure sufficient bandwidth for reliable delivery of courses
 2. Develop functionality in Sakai
 3. Develop means to support development of mobile apps
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Policy Context

Currently most online courses at Western are developed and delivered in accordance with the UWOFA Collective Agreement, which addresses, among other things, remuneration for online course development, licensing of intellectual property, and course renewal. Constraints of the current Collective Agreement policy were widely noted across campus. Senate academic policy has also not kept pace with e-learning practices, and the E-Learning Working Group will be bringing forward revisions through the Senate approval process. The Task Force heard concerns about the limiting effect of the current MTCU policy on ancillary fees, and it is hoped that discussions between the COU and the Ministry will result in improved access to online learning materials. Finally, among the accredited undergraduate programs at Western, accreditation standards in Engineering and Law require all instruction to be face-to-face; in these programs, e-learning initiatives focus on learning enhancement and support. Opportunities remain, however, in the graduate programs in these Faculties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Begin discussions with respect to Collective Agreement provisions for online and blended courses
 2. Bring forward revisions to Senate academic policy for approval
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Management, Planning and Budgeting

At Western e-learning is supported centrally through Distance Studies, which provides advice on strategic course and program development, but planning and budgeting with respect to online courses is decentralized. The Task Force heard from most programs that the budget processes within their Faculties do not support e-learning, and in some cases online courses represented a direct additional cost to the academic unit with no offsetting revenue. With sufficient enrolment, online courses represent a revenue source, and Western should develop planning processes that support an enhanced online presence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Provide Faculties with enrolment and revenue data for online courses and request comment in the annual planning process
 2. Develop an incentive plan for academic units to develop and deliver online courses
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Three-Year Action Plan

The Task Force recommendations are recast as action items in Appendix 4, along with a timeline and projected outcomes in three years.

Several of the action items have budget implications, and specific proposals will be brought forward through Western's annual planning and budgeting process. Among the factors that play a key role in the financial sustainability of online initiatives are class size, student demand for courses and programs, effective marketing and promotion, and incremental student enrolments, including international students.

Appendix 1: Task Force Membership

Tom Adam	Teaching and Learning Librarian
Carol Beynon	Associate Vice-Provost, SGPS
Tom Carmichael	Dean, FIMS
Lorraine Davies	Associate Dean (Graduate Studies), SS
John Doerksen (Chair)	Vice-Provost (Academic Programs & Students)
Tom Haffie	Faculty, Department of Biology
Alysha Li	Vice-President (University Affairs), USC
Michael Milde	Dean, Arts & Humanities
Krishna Patel	Director of Administration and Student Services Support
Kem Rogers	Chair, Anatomy and Cell Biology, SSMD
Jean Savage	Associate Director (Client Support), ITS
Christopher Shirreff	President, SOGS

Appendix 2: Working Group Membership

Carac Allison	Manager, Web Team
Debra Dawson	Director, Teaching and Learning Services
John Doerksen	Vice-Provost (Academic Programs & Students)
Lori Gribbon	Director, Recruitment and Admissions
Kim Holland	Instructional Designer, Distance Studies
Gail Hutchinson	Director, Student Development Centre
Katrina MacIntosh	Resource Coordinator, Student Success Centre
Angie Mandich	Associate Vice-Provost (Academic Programs and Students)
Donna Moore	Associate Director, Student Success Centre
Krishna Patel	Director of Administration and Student Services Support
Glen Tigert	Associate Registrar
Carolyn Young	Director, Western Continuing Studies

Appendix 3: Consultations

1. Faculty Meetings

Faculty of Social Science	November 23, 2012
Faculty of Law	November 23, 2012
Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry	November 27, 2012
Don Wright Faculty of Music	November 29, 2012
Faculty of Engineering	November 30, 2012
Faculty of Information and Media Studies	November 30, 2012
Faculty of Science	December 3, 2012
Faculty of Education	December 5, 2012
Faculty of Arts and Humanities	December 13, 2012
Faculty of Health Sciences	December 14, 2012

2. Student Feedback

Media Usage Survey 2013

*Conducted by Gerd Gidion, Luiz Capretz, Ken Meadows, and Michael Grosch
Survey by Office of the Registrar*

3. eConcordia Representatives

Meeting on October 16, 2012

4. TIES@Western: Symposium on E-Learning, March 8, 2013

Seventy presenters, from ten Faculties, Western Libraries, TSC, ITS, WCS
360 participants from across campus

Appendix 4: Three-Year Action Plan

Task	Led by	Completed by	Outcome in Three Years
Course and Program Development			
Develop ten to fifteen new online courses per year with TSC instructional designers	Department, TSC	Ongoing	Forty new Distance Studies courses
Develop five to ten new online courses per year with Faculty instructional designers	Department, Faculty	Ongoing	Twenty new Distance Studies courses Total online registrations to increase by 3,000
Develop three complete Major modules	Department, TSC	Ongoing	Development and delivery of course clusters enable students to complete a Major module online. First cluster: Major in Sociology
Assist full-time faculty in incorporating technology in teaching and learning where appropriate	Instructors, TSC, ITRC	Ongoing	Enhanced student learning through advances in pedagogical practice, including “flipped classroom” practices
Develop ELearning@Western website	Web team, ITS, with broad consultation	December 2013	Consolidation of all e-learning information on one website, including complete course listings for students and links to development tools and programming for instructors
Deliver complete degree online in a program for which there is significant student demand	Department, TSC	September 2016	Through the strategic development and delivery of a complete degree online, Western will enhance its reach internationally
Infrastructure			
Develop “smart” classrooms	ITS, TSC	Three mid-sized classrooms per year	Smart classrooms will serve as laboratories for pedagogical innovation, collaborative learning, course development, and synchronous delivery
Programming and Instructor Support			
Recruit Instructional Designers	TSC	September 2013	The University is supporting the appointment of two Instructional Designers to assist Instructors with course development and pedagogy
Develop e-learning workshops for instructors	TSC, Teaching Fellows, ITRC	First one by January 2014	E-learning workshops will offer professional development for online instructors
Develop an award to recognize outstanding practice of technology-integrated learning	TSC, Senate	January 2014	A new University-wide award focused on online teaching will highlight pedagogical innovation

continued

Task	Led by	Completed by	Outcome in Three Years
Develop e-learning workshops for teaching assistants who teach online	TSC, ITRC	First one by June 2014	E-learning workshops will be part of the Certificate in University Teaching offered by the TSC
Deliver online course designed for online instructors	TSC, ITRC	Twice annually	The six-week course has completed the pilot phase, and each offering will enroll up to twelve faculty
Organize e-learning forum	TSC, Teaching Fellows	Twice annually	E-learning forums will bring online instructors together to share ideas and build community

Administrative

Include Faculty e-learning plans and projected enrolments in Western's annual planning and budgeting process	Provost, IPB	September 2013	Faculty plans for online course development and delivery plans will assist in projecting overall online enrolments and infrastructure needs
Develop teacher and course evaluation instrument for online courses	TSC, IPB, with broad consultation	June 2014	This instrument will take into account unique aspects of online teaching and learning
Develop analytical framework to assess online course effectiveness	TSC	June 2014	This framework will identify key factors of effective course design and outcomes, including student retention

Policy

Revise Senate Academic Policy to reflect current practice	OOR, Associate Deans	December 2013	Revisions of Senate academic policy will facilitate student access to online courses
Review provisions for online courses in the Collective Agreement	UWOFA, University	June 2014	A review of Collective Agreement provisions for technology-integrated learning will lead to greater flexibility for faculty members