

Managing Growth and Change Sub-Committee Report

Presented to Union College Committee on February 20, 2020

Based on the discussions from our October 29, 2019 meeting and the subsequent follow-up from faculty the following 3 themes with specific recommendations are what faculty would like to bring forward to management as a call to action to improve the academic and learning success of our students. The culture at the college has been negatively affected with the enormous increase in admissions that have put a strain on our processes and procedures to maintain a high quality of education. This crisis will have long term and lasting effects on the success of our graduates and the college's reputation (and current students) that we are now only beginning to see. For example some organizations that have had a long-term relationship hiring graduates and allowing student projects have decided to no longer consider Conestoga College as a source of quality graduates and students after engaging with the newly developed post-graduate programs. This tarnishes the future credentials of graduates and the credential of past graduates and harms the college's brand and reputation.

The themes identified are:

PRE-PROGRAM PREPARATION

1. Mandatory attendance (and attendance tracking) for both for orientation (pre-program) and class attendance.
2. Improved and verified English language proficiency for students.
3. Faculty training and development to support the increasing diversity in the classroom.

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

4. Maintaining consistent academic standards (across schools/programs/sections) / ensuring evaluations match course and unit learning outcomes.
5. Consistent application of academic integrity policies and processes.

STUDENT SUPPORT

6. Improved support for students.
7. Increase in faculty workload for student interactions and support.

PRE-PROGRAM PREPARATION

1. Mandatory Attendance (Pre-Program Orientation + Class Attendance)

Problem/opportunity

Mismatches in culturally rooted academic expectations can strain international students' interactions and relationships with professors or academic advisors, which consequently impacts their academic adjustment (Hung & Hyun, 2010; Kim, 2007; Mukminin & McMahon, 2013; Sato & Hodge, 2009). The earlier students are familiar with program expectations the better their outcome. Some students only start to attend class for the first time in weeks 2 or 3 of a course/program. Attendance is not taken seriously. There are several absentees in every class. Some come late to class and some leave early. Students underestimate the importance of attending class in achieving academic success in an applied experiential learning environment.

Recommendations

- 1) Program orientation MUST be mandatory for students. Making program orientation mandatory and have programs to extend orientation beyond a 4-hour event. Students start to build relationships with faculty, fellow students, and the program as a whole outside of the classroom. This orientation will ensure all students are welcome and the program can start to build the culture of working together. Students also require an early and support transition of academic expectations and norms. This will also ensure students are beginning to deal with all the transitions to college / Canada.
- 2) If keeping attendance is mandatory for ministry reporting then a simple and easy to use system for tracking and managing attendance should be considered, such as a swipe-in/swipe-out to the classrooms.
- 3) In continuation with 2, a warning could mean an email notification to the student on the low attendance and the implications of such a trend.

2. Improved English Language Proficiency

Success in any academic venture requires that students be proficient in the language of instruction. While Conestoga requires a 6.5 level pass in all 4 bands of IELTS, it is clear that success in IELTS does not translate into the ability to receive post-secondary instruction in English, or to write college-level tests and assignments in English. There are many challenges with externally validated IELTS scores including fraud, testing consistency, and the length of time between testing and the student arriving in Canada to study. This challenge has been well documented in the investigative reporting done between the Toronto Star and the St. Catharines Standard, titled "The Price of Admission". In which the crisis created at the college and the response is available. This should not have been a surprise to Conestoga College and we should leverage the lessons learned from Niagara and other post-secondary institutions that have drastically increased the # of international students in a very short period of time.

<https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2019/09/26/how-niagara-college-dealt-with-an-international-student-crisis-on-campus.html>

Recommendations:

- 4) Several professors, especially those in the trades, have expressed concerns that poor English skills have the potential to create safety hazards in the classroom or shop. Students who work with woodshop machinery, cooking appliances, sharp instruments, welding tools, or electrical equipment can be a danger to themselves and their classmates if they do not comprehend verbal and written instructions. Some Indian students have been embarrassed because they have walked into the wrong washroom.
Recommendation: Conestoga MUST implement its own English test for all international students whose first language is not English. Students who fail should be directed to complete either remedial or EAP courses before they begin their diploma studies (mandatory, not optional).
- 5) Students with poor listening and reading skills in English have difficulty understanding both verbal and written instruction. This means that professors spend an extraordinary amount of time re-explaining instructions to students, often bringing them down to the simplest levels. This slow pace of instruction can frustrate domestic students and create challenges to faculty who still must cover the whole curriculum in the same amount of time.
Recommendation: Classes with large numbers of international students MUST be capped, or faculty must be granted more time on their SWF to account for the special needs of these students. CA 11.01 G 2, 11.02 C 2 (x)
- 6) Course-based registration allows students to choose their own timetable, including the option of choosing online courses. Many international students work, or live far away (in Brampton), and therefore opt to take online courses to decrease the hours they are required to be on campus. On-campus, students often opt for classes with friends, creating an imbalance of international and domestic students in the classroom and limiting interaction with native English-speakers.

Recommendation: International students should not be allowed to sign up for online courses—especially Communications courses. Course-based registration should be discouraged. Classes should be balanced between domestic and international students to encourage more interaction with native English-speakers.

3. Faculty Development and Support for Increased Diversity in the Classroom

Faculty are finding more difficulty in identifying and supporting the increased diversity and challenges (academic and behavioural) facing them in the classroom. This increased diversity has led to a decrease in classroom effectiveness and difficulty following instructional plans when students are not prepared and do not have an adequate level of English proficiency needed for academic success.

Recommendations:

- 7) Instructors/professors need cross cultural training to interact and connect better with international/Indian students. Research indicates that early relationships and rapport are key to any relationship including teacher-student.
- 8) Send some faculty to India to sit in on and report on a variety of high school courses (English, Math, Computer in particular) taught at a variety of schools in different provinces to provide some context to the challenges Indian students are having in our classes.
- 9) Provide role-playing workshops to aid both faculty and students new to Canada and/or Conestoga with classroom and learning performance.
- 10) Have Classroom Mentors volunteer to sit in on class. Have program transition mentors, who are returning students or faculty with at least 5 yrs. experience. Add the experience to their cocurricular records, SWFs or contract.
- 11) Work on ice breakers, projects, etc. that have students and faculty in the classroom encounter relatable experiences; have it count toward College incentive awards, credits and or be no more than 10% of assessment. Aim is a willingness to integrate vs. being manipulated integration. (Example: M. Raza's map icebreaker, LinkedIn).

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

4. Maintaining Consistent Academic Standards

Problem/opportunity

Faculty are hearing statements from students such as “the program is a joke” because their only goal is to “get into Canada”. Some courses have modified the evaluations so that students are successful, but at the same time the evaluations are no longer matching the taxonomy of the course outcomes. Some examples were shared where the outcome states “analysis” yet students are asked to simply “identify” on a multiple choice exam question. Faculty also believe that chairs and academic manager need to support faculty decisions and not forgive integrity issues or change student final grades.

Recommendations

- 12) There needs to be a clear and positive message coming from ALL the Chairs (better yet from the person the Chairs report to, or the President himself). The message should emphasize that it is imperative to not pass students (for fear of it reflecting poorly on the instructor), if the students clearly have not met expectations.
- 13) For those international students who are going into post grad programs, it would be helpful for students to provide an equivalency certificate for their degree such as ICAS or WES. Our TESL program is also a post grad program, and we have a requirement for any students who are applying with a degree completed outside of Canada to provide such an equivalency certificate. This requirement would be beneficial for other programs as well.
- 14) The equal application (including enforcement as applicable), of College policies, academic standards, and support/counselling for all students, whether they are international, or domestic.
- 15) There MUST be a detailed audit in place to ensure that course evaluations meet the taxonomy of course and unit learning outcomes. This is especially critical when courses are tied to professional association / credentials. Currently this verification is entirely within the visibility of individual instructors only.

5. Consistent Application of Academic Integrity

Poor English skills can also lead to problems with Academic Integrity. Students who either do not understand an assignment or know they are not capable of doing it themselves, sometimes opt for unethical solutions to their problems. These solutions include plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, or contract cheating (buying an assignment online or hiring someone to write it for them). Culture also plays a role, in that some cultures do not view academic integrity the way Ontario colleges do.

Recommendations:

- 16) Recently, faculty have been using the online reporting system to help track academic integrity incidents. It takes time to find the incidents, contact the student, meet with the student, and then report it online. First offenses often require the student to rewrite the assignment, which requires faculty to mark a second assignment. Faculty also spend a great deal of time in and out of the classroom explaining academic integrity to students who are completely unfamiliar with the concept.
Recommendation: Faculty should receive extra time on the SWF, or overtime if the faculty is on contract, to accommodate the extra time spent on these issues.
- 17) Faculty are concerned that, while they report the incidents, there seems to be no consequences to the students beyond their class, even for repeat offenses.
Recommendation: There must be real consequences for repeat offenders. Chairs should be following up with

students who are repeat offenders. Students should be mandated to complete the online modules before being allowed to re-submit an assignment.

- 18) Faculty have followed department policies regarding late assignments, missed assignments, or academic integrity, but are sometimes overruled by management when they enforce consequences stated in the policies. Recommendation: Management (chairs, deans, etc) must support faculty when they enforce these policies.
- 19) Faculty have been putting information into the database but have received no feedback. Faculty have not been informed if management intends to respond to the issues, or if any action or change is planned based on the information found. Recommendation: Management should share information from the database with the faculty and the union. i.e. number of incidents, number of second or third incidents, types of incidents, and should discuss an action plan that includes input from the faculty.

STUDENT SUPPORT

7. Improved Support for Students

Ultimately it is the student who suffers if they are not qualified and prepared to engage in a college level program, whether this is their academic, language, or living preparation (i.e. adequate place to stay with access to the college facilities). It is our belief that there needs to be an increase in student supports to assist with students who have been accepted into our programs and are not achieving minimal academic standards.

Recommendations:

- 20) Provide upgrading international student qualifications and providing funding for such for students that have been admitted however are not demonstrating necessary skills or competencies (ie. Language). In addition to ensure international students are supported physically and their mental health is utmost considered.
- 21) Develop bridging or foundational programs for international students could be developed with a focus on language specific training.
- 22) International students need an opportunity to be in an EAP class for a term to help ready them and improve their chances of success.
- 23) Have a Student Success course required for all newcomers to Conestoga which should NOT just be an online course.
- 24) Classroom discipline and etiquettes should be taught/included into a 101 course (similar to Conestoga 101). The students must be aware of the disciplinary actions and how it can impact them.

5. Faculty Workload for student interactions

Problem/opportunity

A sizable amount of time is spent in student interactions (especially international students). The activities include, but not limited to, emailing students regarding assignments, additional class time spent in re-teaching and additional effort spent in marking papers written by students with poor English proficiency.

Recommendations

- 25) Need a process and a reporting system to effectively track all the time spent in such student interaction activities.
- 26) All such activities there should be a recorded, tracked and reported to program coordinator
 - a. For full time faculty, the student interaction hours should be accounted for in the workload.
 - b. For part-time/partial load faculty, the student interaction hours should be billable.