

Transitioning to online learning and support service delivery

First, it is important to note the list of recommendations you shared is dated February 2020, a month before all college campuses closed due to the pandemic, forcing students, faculty, and service teams to switch to online environments. Addressing the challenges, restrictions and ongoing uncertainties resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic required substantial re-alignment of both academic and business plans in an ever-evolving environment.

A number of new initiatives were launched in 2020-21 to support student learning and wellness during the pandemic:

- New tools and programming were developed to support online orientation activities. They included a new Conestoga Ready app, online program sessions, transition workshops and welcome events for mature, Indigenous, LGBTQ2+ and African, Caribbean, and Black students.
- A digital repository of resources, including videos on learning strategies, tips and math help, was developed to provide additional support for students studying remotely.
- Press Pause, a self-help toolkit designed to help students self-reflect and develop skills for coping with stress was sent to first-year students.
- Test Centre services transitioned to online, facilitating and/or invigilating more than 1,200 online tests in 2020-21.

New systems were introduced to enhance supports and services for students:

- a new Student Success Portal was implemented to provide students with a central platform to book college service appointments and enable staff to work interdepartmentally, allowing service providers to support a student's journey through various advising and learning services
- a case management software was launched for student conduct and concerns. The implementation of a new Electronic Medical Record (EMR) enabled Conestoga primary care practitioners and allied health professionals to work in a circle of care and develop holistic care plans for students. 2020-21 Achievements We will support student success and satisfaction through a comprehensive range of services that address the academic, cultural, and social needs of learners from diverse backgrounds.

To meet new remote delivery requirements and encourage community connection, ONE Card and Bookstore Services:

- increased digital offerings and introduced instant access to digital materials on the Bookstore webpage
- transitioned Bookstore inventory to an eCommerce platform
- shipped more than 17,000 orders to Conestoga students and community with enhanced shipping services.

In the Fall of 2020, Condors e-sports was launched to offer new forms of student engagement with three competitive e-sports teams that competed against other colleges and universities in the new OPSE e-sports league.

To assist academic integrity initiatives at the college, Library Services enhanced resources and introduced processes such as proactive student consultations and supports for faculty on ThirdParty File sharing sites.

A wide range of initiatives were also delivered in 2020-21 to support the development of a high performing employee team:

- The college developed and operationalized work from home and equipment approval processes to support the transition from on-campus to remote work and teaching.
- Teaching and Learning delivered 135 workshops, conducted more than 220 classroom observations, and made 176 posts on teaching and learning topics to support faculty in their efforts to pivot to remote teaching.
- Funding for employee development continued with financial support for degrees (32 employees), and priority training and development opportunities (106 employees).
- To aid the use of eConestoga, the Online Learning Centre provided faculty with instructional guides and videos, support via phone, email, online chat, and web conferencing and 60 learning management system workshops attended by more than 1,200 participants.
- Workshops on the use of cloud-based meeting and work technology – including Zoom, Teams and Microsoft-Office 365 – provided support for employees working remotely.
- Curriculum development was supported through the delivery of more than 200 consultations with individual and faculty teams for course outline review and creation

Specific activities related to recommendations

Faculty training

To support faculty in the challenges they found with the increased diversity and the specific challenges they identified (both academic and behavioural) in the classroom with international students, Conestoga invested heavily in the offerings from the Teaching & Learning department.

The department exists solely to support faculty and all requests for support are responded to within two days.

Response to the recommendations:

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.

a) From 2018 on when growth of international started increasing, the mandatory training for all new faculty included a session called “Teaching in a Culturally Diverse Classroom - What to Expect and How to Shine.” A special series was offered in the evenings, daytime and Saturdays called “Intercultural Teaching Practices” and more than 500 faculty attended. The series was led by two long-time consultants who are TESL qualified teacher trainers and experienced Conestoga faculty. Responses from the training, which included how acculturative stress impacts both faculty and students, led to many faculty trying new strategies to manage delivery and student success.

b) Winter 2020 – The college hired three full-time faculty consultants with expertise in the following

- a) Consultant 1: Former international student in Canada with a PhD in social psychology. Experienced in helping faculty manage the stress of new learning. BIPOC individual with lived experience and theoretical and practical knowledge.

- b) Consultant 2: Former international student in Canada with PhD from Queens in Curriculum focussed on assessment of international student learning. BIPOC individual with lived experience and theoretical and practical knowledge.
- c) Consultant 3: Ed tech expert with extensive work in supporting diverse students and faculty.
- c) Five new and previous consultants were trained in being Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) administrators and this self-analysis was offered free to faculty, and still is.
- d) Numerous workshops and courses were and are offered (see Appendix 1 and 2). The college paid part-time faculty \$20 an hour to attend any workshops of their choosing as well as the mandatory sessions for new faculty. In 2022, this was raised to \$40 per hour. The workshops have been offered and updated throughout the years -- even during the pandemic. Find the workshops at <https://tlconestoga.ca/workshops-on-effective-teaching/> and free six-hour courses at <https://tlconestoga.ca/micro-credentials-certificate-in-pse-teaching-and-learning/>
- e) Onboarding and orienting new faculty: There is a mandatory program for all new full- and part-time faculty which includes training that incorporates the special needs of international students. Part-time faculty are paid to attend.

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.

- a) a number of faculty from IT programs and health care programs went to India to experience the educational system there prior to the pandemic and shared back at various meetings.

Provide role-playing workshops to aid both faculty and students new to Canada and/or Conestoga with classroom and learning performance.

A new Teaching & learning Consultant with a PhD in education, experience with trauma and education and a past career as an actor in experiential theatre was hired and offers the following free micro-credential to faculty: [Roleplay: an Active Learning Tool](#) and incorporates role play practice into workshop deliveries and special events such as our February 2024 “1st Annual Symposium on Human Trafficking”.

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.

Any faculty is able to request a consultant to sit in on their class for support. The department observed and coached over 300 faculty in each of the past seven years. Much of the coaching involved managing international student success. All Teaching and Learning Consultants have at least nine years of teaching experience.

International students were hired for a work study position “International Faculty Development Assistant” in 2020, 2021, and 2023. As part of their work, they co-facilitated workshops for faculty, including international student panels, to explain the international student experience and respond to questions from faculty about the international student experience

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 per cent of assessment. Aim is a willingness to integrate vs. being manipulated integration. (Example: M. Raza’s map icebreaker, LinkedIn).

Specific workshop and Faculty Learning Hub posts have been provided to faculty so they could manage this “getting-to-know-you” phase and learn to interact with students from backgrounds differing from their own. The workshops included:

- Icebreakers for New Students and Energizers for Returning Students
- Using Content-Based Icebreakers and Bridge-ins
- How to Welcome New International Students to Your Course Content
- Teaching In-Person: Setting Up the Room, Welcoming Students and Designing the First Class.

See the following Hub posts:

- [The First Two Weeks: Icebreakers in Online Learning Environments](#)
- [Icebreaker for your Zoom Classrooms](#)
- [What to do in the First Weeks of Class](#)
- [Creating a Sense of Belonging: From an International Student's Perspective](#)

For Hub posts on intercultural awareness and teaching international students see the [Faculty Learning Hub: Teaching International Students](#)

Appendix 1:

This appendix lists workshops offered since 2020 specific to teaching international. It is important to note that since 2018, all workshops include a sensitivity to teaching international students as a lens through which the educational development is offered.

- Engaging International Students in your Synchronous Sessions
- Communicating with Students from Different Cultures
- Masalas for the First Three Weeks: Getting International Students Off to a Good Start
- How to Support New International Students from India and Other Countries
- An Introduction to Inclusive Educational Spaces
- How to Welcome New International Students to Your Course Content
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) & International Students
- Teaching International Students from Nigeria
- Responding to Racism and Hate in Teaching
- Supporting International Students from Africa: Perspective of a Student from Africa
- Accents and Discourse: Building Skills in Intercultural Listening
- What a Brand New Faculty at Conestoga Needs to Know about Teaching South Asian International Students
- Supporting International Students through Intercultural Teaching Strategies
- Supporting International Students with Effective Classroom Management Techniques
- Supporting International Students with Inclusive Assessment Practices
- Supporting International Students with the Use of Technology
- Building Trust across Cultures: Preparing for Effective Cooperative Learning
- Understanding and Mitigating Hidden Bias in Teaching
- Avoiding Assumptions and Bias When Grading
- Considering Student Identity
- Creating a Sense of Belonging while Teaching South Asian Students
- Using Active Learning Techniques to Support South Asian Students

- Written Work Marking Dilemma: Supporting Language Development While Managing Time
- Developing Intercultural Competence in Teaching South Asian Students
- Helping International Students Understand Assessment Practices at Conestoga
- An Introduction to Teaching International Students

Appendix 2:

This appendix provides links to two micro-credentials, each containing 5 6-hour courses which are available free of charge to all college employees.

- [Teaching International Students](#)
- [Intercultural Teaching Skills for Post-Secondary Courses](#)

Academic Integrity

Conestoga has become an international leader for our work in academic integrity. In addition to our Manager of Academic integrity hired in 2018, an additional five staff have been added over the past five years to support faculty and students. Our manager and director have been invited to speak about their work at the International Centre for Academic Integrity Conference as well as the Canadian Conference to share our approach which is uniquely centralized and includes an online reporting and tracking system developed by our ITS department.

Conestoga has an Academic Integrity Committee. Faculty feedback is gathered ongoing and used to inform changes to reporting, systems, education and outcomes. We have continued to develop modules and our website for students. Faculty are offered workshops, appointments as well as a micro-credential. Academic Integrity content is provided to students in Conestoga 101 (mandatory orientation course).

Orientation

Conestoga delivers a mandatory orientation online course called Conestoga 101. It is uploaded into our course management system for all students to complete and is noted on their transcript. This course was offered in a pilot format in 2018 and comprehensively since 2019. Conestoga 101 is online interactive course that provides all incoming students with a comprehensive orientation to student rights and responsibilities, academic integrity, key academic resources, and student services. It has a 94 per cent completion rate. This course is updated semesterly for quality assurance and to ensure content is always up to date and reflects any important changes at the college.

We provide 200-300 unique academic program sessions each term (number varies by term based on programs being delivered) in addition to in-person orientation and welcome programming at every campus.

Conestoga's orientation model has received a consistent rating of Excellent by between 80 per cent and 90 per cent of students as assessed through our annual student feedback survey.

Program Quality

Conestoga strives for excellence in the development and delivery of programs and services and has developed formalized processes to support the college's ongoing commitment to quality and continuous improvement to ensure programs meet the needs of students and the workplace. Annual program reviews, along with major program reviews every five years, are vital to ensuring quality at Conestoga. In 2023, Conestoga's director of Institutional Quality Management was honoured by the Curriculum Developers Affinity Group with an award recognizing excellence in the ongoing development and sustainability of curriculum/quality assurance/teaching and learning expertise in Ontario's colleges.

According to the most recent provincial key performance indicator data, 86.2 per cent of Conestoga graduates obtained employment within six months of graduation, compared to the provincial average of 83.4. Nearly 80 per cent of Conestoga students indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied that their program was providing skills and knowledge that would help them achieve their career goals. This is higher than the provincial average of 75 per cent.

Almost 93 per cent of employers confirmed they were satisfied with the skills and knowledge of new employees that Conestoga trained, slightly higher than the provincial average of 91 per cent. Importantly, these strong outcomes represent the full spectrum of program offerings across Conestoga's growing network of campuses. In the community, our graduates own more than 5,200 local businesses and more than 53 per cent of local adults have participated in Conestoga education and training activities. Our alumni network is 195,000 strong.

During the pandemic, and despite the challenges it presented, Conestoga continued to focus on quality improvement across a wide range of areas. The college was awarded the highest possible rating in the College Quality Assurance Audit Process (CQAAP), assessed by an independent panel of auditors as meeting all quality standards required for Ontario's public colleges. The November 2020 site visit for the audit involved the participation of approximately 160 Conestoga stakeholders, including students, recent graduates, Program Advisory Committee members, Board of Governors members, faculty, support staff and administrative employees. **The audit report, issued in April 2021, commends Conestoga for its commitment and significant investments in a quality culture.**

Standards for international programs

In 2023, Ontario's colleges created a new set of common [sector-wide standards](#) to strengthen the programs and supports for international students. Conestoga was among the college's that signed on to support the standards.

Students who do plan to attend the college work directly with Conestoga's transition coordinators in Canada who host a broad series of webinars to share information and field questions about living abroad.

A team of housing coordinators, transition coordinators and international student advisors keep students and parents informed about the range of support and services available through the college and share practical information about topics like housing and health insurance as well as what to expect from our campuses, facilities, student supports and the community itself.