

BUILDING A SHARED FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING QUALITY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN



Phase One: Alignment and Comparison

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Project Overview

As institutional values change around teaching and learning, these values must be transposed into how teaching quality is understood, assessed, and rewarded. An intentional alignment between institutional policies and documentation describing teaching quality, teaching reward criteria, and how teaching is evaluated at the University has not been conducted. The outcomes of this project can be applied to inform further work in examining the evaluation tools, policies, and practices.

The purpose of this project was to develop an emerging teaching quality framework for the University of Saskatchewan as a common point of reference for processes that relate to quality teaching across the institution.



This report is intended to be the starting place for conversation and consultation with various stakeholders in this process, such as VPFR, VPTL, TLARC, URC, etc., so that collective feedback and input can be used to revise the framework going forward.

Project Methodology

Project methodology was based on *prospective quality assurance* (Biggs, 2001). Rather than offering a retrospective analysis that critiques the University of Saskatchewan against external standards, prospective quality assurance analysis focuses on analyzing teaching and learning in a way that promotes continued improvements to educational quality, as well as alignment and institutional fit.

While it is important to ensure institutional teaching practices meet expected standards, the tone of this project is rather to promote continued innovation and engagement in teaching and learning at the University of Saskatchewan. Quality teaching is developed when an institution “has high level aim that it intends to meet, that teaches accordingly, and that continually upgrades its practices in order to adapt to changing conditions within resource limitations” (Biggs, 2001, p. 223). Therefore, quality assurance must be guided by clear definitions of the desired qualities associated with an institution’s educational practice, the development of learning environments that support desired processes and outcomes associated with student learning, and teaching assessment strategies that align with overall teaching and learning objectives for the institution (University of Windsor, 2014).

Stakeholder Consultation Process

March 2016	• VP Faculty Relations
April 2016	• VPTL
April 2016	• Associate Deans Academic
May 2016	• TLARC Working Group
May 2016	• TLARC
May 2016	• Faculty & Sessional Group
May 2016	• Gwenna Moss Centre team
August 2016	• University Review Committee
September 2016	• TLARC Working Group
October 2016	• TLARC



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Data Collection

Externally, documents describing how teaching quality is defined and evaluated were collected from scholarly and practitioner literature, as well as selected U15 universities to review practices from peer institutions. Internally, we focused on collecting documents that would show how teaching quality is understood across institutional levels and academic units within the University of Saskatchewan. The U of S material included (1) institutional-level conceptual, priority, and policy documents (e.g., Learning Charter, IP3); (2) Committee reports related to teaching quality and evaluation, and (3) tenure/promotion requirements, peer assessments of teaching quality, and student course evaluations from a diverse cross-section of colleges, schools, and departments. Documents were content analyzed using NVivo 11. Highlights of the literature, and the external comparisons are available in the full report.

Internal Review of Teaching Quality Concept

The main aspects highlighted in our institutional Standards include:

1. Mastery of subject area(s) or disciplines
2. Thorough preparation of classes
3. Effective communication with students
4. Willingness to respond to students' questions and concerns
5. Exhibit fairness in student evaluation
6. Continued commitment to improving/enhancing their teaching performance and to remedy problems identified with their teaching
7. Continued extension of knowledge in their field(s) or discipline(s), with respect to classes, currency of the material and new teaching methods

The University of Saskatchewan's Third Integrated Plan (2012-2016), *Promise and Potential*, emphasizes the need for community-based experiential learning opportunities, and highlights Aboriginal engagement as an important institutional priority extending into curriculum.

There are notable gaps in alignment between aspects emphasized in the Learning Charter versus what is measured and assessed for tenure and promotion and on course evaluations. For instance:

- ❖ Our institutional rhetoric shows priorities around teaching and learning include **Indigenization, experiential learning, and community-based activities and engagement, etc.**
- ❖ The Learning Charter emphasizes the importance of **active learning, broad thinking, ethics, and respect.**
- ❖ These attributes are underrepresented in reward and evaluation methods for instructors.

Key Takeaways: Snapshot

Alignment in our Understanding	Alignment in our Evaluation Processes	Evaluation Methods	Evaluation Philosophy
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need greater alignment (e.g., espoused values like community outreach, experiential learning, Indigenization)• Reflected in Learning Charter, but not further	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Values and priorities should guide practice (e.g., ethics, citizenship, embracing multiple ways of knowing, connection to local community)• Should this guide our sources and metrics for evaluation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SEEQ is not well aligned with institution-level priorities and values• Somewhat aligned with Standards (but which is driving?)• Focused much more on delivery than design• Options: Modular approach? Different tool?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Heavy emphasis on SRIs• Student satisfaction vs. learning• Peer review, mentorship, self-evaluation?

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Key Takeaways: Description

Alignment in our Understanding: There is a need for further discussion to achieve greater alignment between our foundational institutional documents, reward structures, and evaluation processes in terms of how we conceptualize teaching quality. In particular, aspects such as community outreach, experiential learning, and Indigenization are espoused values and priorities at the institution level that are not reflected in the standards for reward and evaluation process (either at the institution- or academic unit-level). There appears to be a stronger connection between the institutional priority documents / values with the learning goals articulated in the Learning Charter. However, beyond that point, some of the values and priorities are only weakly manifested.

Alignment in our Evaluation Processes: The literature states the importance of incorporating contextualized institutional values and norms into how teaching quality is evaluated. U of S foundational documents highlight a number of priorities that should guide instructor attributes and teaching practices, including ethics and citizenship, embracing multiple perspectives and ways of knowing, increasing connections with the local community, indigenization of the curriculum, and improved experiential learning opportunities. The question arises as to whether these *should* be contextualized metrics for teaching evaluation. We assert that this is an important consideration insofar as the U of S desires greater alignment. Course and peer evaluations could be modified to reflect/promote certain classroom environments and learning outcomes. Aligning course evaluations with broader institutional priorities enables departments and the institution to gather uniform feedback and measure success. That said, not all of the pedagogies described in the institutional priority documents will be appropriate as ‘mandatory’ at the course or instructor level, and perhaps some program-level analysis is warranted. Program-level analysis may serve to effectively bridge the gap between institutional-level priorities and values, with implementation and evaluation. There is also a need to review institutional supports with regard to the stated priorities—in other words, resources should be made available to individual instructors and/or programs in order to enable the fulfillment of institutional goals.

Evaluation Methods: The SEEQ could be modified to better align with institutional priorities, but we should also consider the validity of new or different instruments. Some U15 institutions have developed their own questions, but this strategy has been critiqued for not having well-thought out or valid questions. Another approach would be a ‘modular’ evaluation instrument whereby instructors or departments could customize some aspects to certain courses (e.g., experiential component, online delivery), added to a common core of questions. The SEEQ is fairly well aligned with several aspects of teaching quality found in the literature, but is not representative of some of our institutional values. Feedback from stakeholders throughout this project suggested that greater consistency between units in terms of evaluation, as well as the pursuit of a greater number of sources of evidence (i.e., not only the SEEQ), would be desirable.

Evaluation Philosophy: U of S continues to rely on primarily on student course evaluations as the tool to assess teaching quality, but it is unclear whether these capture “student learning” or simply “student satisfaction.” Given the critiques associated with having student feedback (particularly ‘satisfaction’) as the majority of the strategy to assess teaching quality, it may be worthwhile to develop a better standard for peer review, mentorship, and self-evaluation/reflection. These can be more effectively tailored to institutional priorities. Peer evaluations are currently used, but implementation differs greatly across units and the guidelines for peer evaluation may be too general to ensure quality (and comparable) information is gathered. Further, a number of other techniques to assess teaching quality, including teaching portfolios, assessment of teaching materials, and other methods of personal reflection are not widely communicated, and there is little evidence that these are used across campus.

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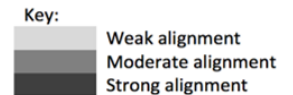
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A Well Aligned Teaching Evaluation Program

	Third Integrated Plan	Learning Charter	Standards for Tenure & Promotion	SEQ: Student Course Evaluations
DESIGN (Curriculum & Assessment)				
Institutional Initiatives	Strong alignment			
Course and Assessment Design		Moderate alignment		Weak alignment
Knowledge of Subject (currency of curriculum)		Moderate alignment	Moderate alignment	
DELIVERY (Instruction & Implementation)				
Knowledge of Subject (conveyed)			Moderate alignment	Strong alignment
Active & Group Learning		Strong alignment		
Inspire & Motivate		Strong alignment		
Respect & Care for Students				Moderate alignment
Engagement in Assessment & Feedback		Moderate alignment		Moderate alignment
EVALUATION & REFLECTION				
Evaluation & Reflection		Strong alignment		

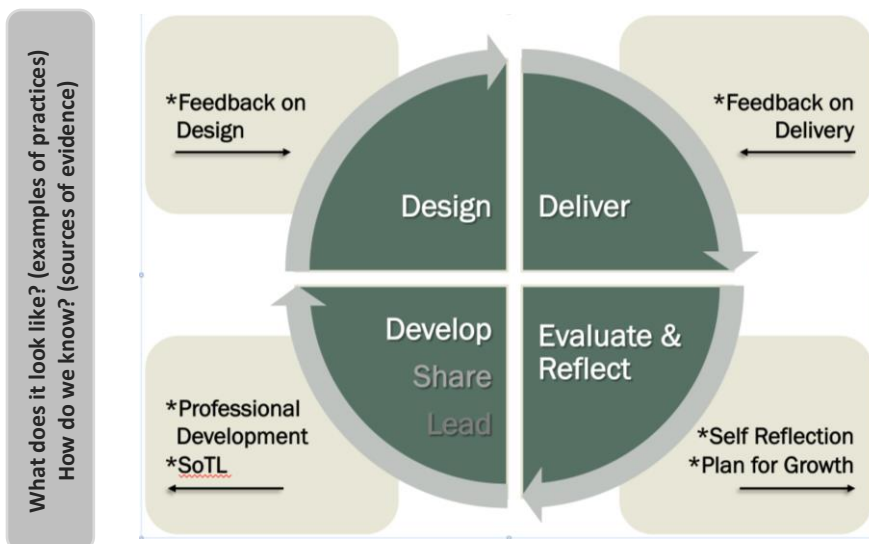
This graph shows areas of (mis)alignment between various institution- and unit-level sources of information about teaching quality, and highlights areas for further discussion. The categories were derived from the literature and from the themes emerging from our institutional documents. We recognize that some elements would benefit from greater alignment, but it may not be appropriate for all aspects. Consultations with stakeholders revealed that clarity is important, but not losing sight of the need for flexibility and “local” customization.

“clarity without conformity”



The University of Saskatchewan will benefit from collaboratively creating a cohesive framework for teaching quality, which could help us achieve greater clarity of purpose for our overall teaching evaluation process, and possibly for each element (student, peer, self-evaluation), develop more effective and consistent feedback cycles, and achieve greater alignment in processes to review courses and programs.

Toward a Framework for Teaching Quality



The process of building a cohesive framework can help to identify recommendations for how we describe, reward, and collect evidence for teaching quality in ways that are aligned with our institutional values and priorities. We will also be able to inform ongoing review of teaching quality to ensure this alignment remains strong as the institution continues to evolve.

Ultimately, the framework and the processes built around it will allow us to fairly assess, reward, and, of paramount importance, enable continuous enhancement of teaching practice.