

Questions from Senator Fachinger:

As a member of the Academic Planning Task Force (2011) and one of three colleagues involved with Pillar I of the Plan, I would like to submit the following questions for the Provost regarding the “Teaching and Learning Action Plan” (TLAP). Although the TLAP claims that it “builds upon” the Academic Plan (2011), I see little of it reflected in this document. Instead, it puts an emphasis on quantifiable learning outcomes and on centralizing teaching and learning initiatives at Queen’s (see, for example, the underrepresentation of faculty members on the proposed University Teaching and Learning Committee and its mandate).

**Question 1:** Why does “experiential learning” (section 7) receive more attention than “inquiry-based learning” in the TLAP? While the promotion of inquiry-based learning and critical thinking should be one of the major objectives of a research-intensive university, a strong emphasis on experiential learning might be more relevant to universities with a mission to advance applied knowledge and research. Please note that Ryerson prides itself of being “the leader in experiential learning.” While experiential learning plays an important role in community service, practica, internships, exchange programs, field trips, and special courses developed for this purpose, it should not replace the teaching and learning of historical, interpretive, and analytical methods. Moreover, as the Academic Planning Task Force learned during the many hours it consulted with different constituencies of the Queen’s community, students are often academically unprepared for experiential learning opportunities.

**Response:** The Action Plan recommends that Queen’s create systems that will support instructors in adopting teaching approaches, including inquiry-based learning. The teaching enhancement program (Recommendation 3) was designed specifically to support instructor and departmental initiatives to adopt new active learning approaches, including inquiry-based learning. We feel that the adoption of inquiry-based learning practices is one that needs to be led by instructors, and that the university’s role is to provide supporting structures.

The term experiential learning, as used in the Action Plan is “learning by doing”; a situation where the learner constructs knowledge, skill and value from direct experience. This comprises several types of learning including co-op, internship and community-service learning that involve collaboration with groups including local non-profits, on-campus groups, or companies. The development of partnerships requires people to build and manage relationships with these groups, which poses logistical challenges for course instructors. The intent here is similar to that of supporting inquiry-based learning using the teaching enhancement program.

The Plan does not consider experiential learning as a replacement for academic learning. In fact, it recommends that foundational skills, such as communication and critical thinking be purposefully developed in courses and programs. The 2013 Exit Poll reveals that Queen’s students value experiential learning opportunities and would like more of these to be available, particularly in the Faculty of Arts and Science.

**Question 2:** Pillar I of the Academic Plan (2011) recommends that Queen's give "discipline specific communication skills priority, monitor them, foster their early enhancement, and be prepared to remediate them where necessary." The Academic Plan reminds us that in an open letter the Queen's Department of English emphasizes that "proper teaching of writing is well known to be central to safeguarding academic integrity." How will the TLAP facilitate the effective integration of discipline-specific teaching of writing in curricula across campus?

**Response:** The Student Learning Experience Task Force recognized the importance of the Academic Plan's emphasis on fundamental academic skills, and endorses these recommendations. In response to the Academic Plan's recommendations, Queen's has begun a 3-year HEQCO-funded pilot project to assess fundamental academic skills, including communication, critical thinking, problem solving and lifelong learning. In phase one, the project is working with instructors in five departments across two faculties, including Drama, Physics, Psychology, Chemical Engineering and Geological Engineering to align the purposeful development of these skills through curriculum design, learning activities and assessments. The results of this pilot project will serve to inform the ways in which academic writing and other forms of communication can be purposefully integrated into instruction in courses and programs.

**Question 3:** Pillar I of the Academic Plan (2011) recommends that Queen's "should foster a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration in teaching and research by removing administrative, financial, and structural barriers to cross-listing of courses and team-teaching." Interdisciplinarity is not addressed by the TLAP. How will the TLAP foster interdisciplinarity at Queen's?

**Response:** The goal of the Task Force was to put in place specific measures that would support a range of initiatives. One of the core elements of the teaching enhancement program (Recommendation 3) are to provide educational developers, librarians, and other teaching and learning professionals to support, among other things, "multi-departmental collaborations". In the future we hope that this will encourage more interdisciplinary collaboration. We are seeing broader interest in these collaborations, including, for example, the reintroduction of dual degree options in the Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science and the new collaborative program in Music and Digital Media between Queen's and St. Lawrence College.

**Question 4:** Promotion of intercultural literacy and the representation of Indigenous perspectives in curricula across the disciplines receive no attention in the TLAP. Please be reminded of the SEEC's recommendation, endorsed by the Academic Plan, that Queen's define a clear set of "core educational competencies" for all undergraduate students around "the interplay of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, ability, and class in a changing society and economy" and the Academic Plan's recommendation to indigenize curricula across campus, i.e., integrate teaching and learning about Indigenous histories, cultures, and politics as well as Indigenous methodologies. How will the TLAP put these recommendations "into action"?

**Response:** The Teaching and Learning Action Plan recommends the development of Queen's-specific learning outcomes, some of which will address the "core educational competencies" mentioned in the Report of the Senate Educational Equity Committee. This is one of the issues that the Task Force felt needs to be addressed by another group since it will take significant time to develop and requires collaboration across the university.