Task Force on the Future of Pedagogy

FINAL REPORT

BACKGROUND

Under an overarching theme of enhancing engagement, the Task Force on the Future of Pedagogy seeks to energize both faculty and students around the UAP priority of 21st century learning, by providing forward-looking guidance on what it sees as 'the multiple futures of pedagogy.' While technology-enhanced learning accelerated at the University during the COVID pandemic as a pivoting, emergency response to an unprecedented crisis, we are committed to shaping how the university can thoughtfully and meaningfully *plan* more intentional, carefully designed learning experiences in multiple modalities (in-person, online, blended), with diverse pedagogical approaches, and across various teaching and learning contexts.

Having reviewed various predictions about the future of higher education, including sector-wide trends (see Appendix A), we do not believe that the future will be monolithic, and it will certainly not be experienced in a homogeneous way by all our community members. As such, our recommendations are shared with the intention of preparing the university, with its increasingly diverse students and faculty members, for multiple futures. These futures emerge from an understanding that what got us here today may not equip us well for teaching the current and next generation(s) of students.

Over the summer, the Task Force formed five Working Groups (WGs). In alignment with the Task Force's mandate, each Working Group was tasked with envisioning pedagogical futures in a particular area of teaching and learning: in-person teaching and learning (WG1); technology-enhanced teaching and learning (WG2); experiential and work-integrated learning (WG3); scaling and sustaining pedagogical innovations (WG4); and rethinking assessments (WG5). The members of each WG (Working Group) represent a cross-section of York University's teaching community, including both professorial, teaching-stream and contract faculty, students, and administrative staff with expertise in teaching and learning. Each Working Group's preliminary recommendations and thought processes can be found in Appendix C. For a big-picture view of the Task Force's themes and preliminary recommendations, please see Appendix B.

THEMES

Emerging out of a strategic commitment to facilitate 21st century learning at York University, the future(s) of pedagogy will:

- Be accessible and learner-centred[1];
- Centre on values, knowledge and skills that prepare learners to respond to 21st century challenges;
- Be transformative[2]; and
- Focus on connections.

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISCUSSION & CONSULTATION

Following from the above themes, the Task Force identified five preliminary recommendations for discussion across multiple consultation sessions, including at the 2023 APPRC Forum (see Appendix D for the full list of consultation opportunities). Together, the preliminary recommendations aimed to enable 21st century learning among diverse learners at York University. To achieve that outcome, the Task Force invited the York community to consider some necessary transformations in how the university currently approached teaching and learning.

1. Expand and enhance blended learning at the University.

In recognition of changing student expectations, and what it would mean to make university operations more sustainable (e.g., by minimizing the carbon footprint of commuting students and instructors, future-proofing the university against future pandemic-like disruptions, etc.), especially in light of increasing financial constraints, consider expanding and enhancing blended learning at York so that it becomes a more common mode of delivery.[3] To enhance

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[1] 'Learner-centred' refers to all learners, including students, instructors, staff members and external partners (e.g., community and industry partners), that make up our university. It does not single out any specific group, but rather asks us to focus on the process of lifelong learning in a larger, more inclusive learning/pedagogical ecosystem.

[2] WG4's note on the notion of innovation:

> *We have concerns that the notion of innovation can be deployed without a critical framework for thinking about its colonial and capitalist implications, which are particularly important to consider in the context of the university. For example, the idea of innovation is often used to promote ideas that in fact have long histories in other cultural contexts, leading to the idea that the colonial institution is inventing or innovating ideas that in fact have long legacies in communities historically kept out of the university. In addition, the working group is concerned that innovation is often equated with "efficiency" or "technologization" and that this can obscure that much of our most transformative pedagogical work will at times be in moments that resist the demands for both of these outcomes. The working group recognizes innovation as defined by the qualities of risk-taking, openness to failure, human-centredness, creativity, social and pedagogical transformation, diversification, and decolonization.*

[3] Please note that York's Academic Technology Advisory Group recommended that the university strategically consider eLearning integration in 2012. To enhance student learning and flexibility, the Group had hoped that, by 2017, the university would adopt blended learning as 'a common and accepted approach to course delivery' (*A Case for Change: eLearning Integration at York University – Summary and Recommended Actions*, p. 3). Had York enacted the Group's vision, the university would have been in a stronger position to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

student learning and their connections to each other, instructors and various campus supports, the Task Force recommends that blended learning be meaningfully integrated into courses and programs with the following suggestions: the first-year experience should be primarily delivered in-person, so that both student-centred and active learning strategies can be used to increase student engagement, collaboration, interactivity, and sense of belonging. Greater flexibility, in the form of blended learning, should be offered to students in their later years of study, as they increasingly engage in experiential education (EE) and work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities.

This recommendation is supported by the following data insights about course delivery mode from the Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis (OIPA):

- Enrolment: While course delivery mode appears to have no significant effect on students' academic performance in a course, in-person courses have lower average enrolments per section when compared to blended and online (including remote) courses. This trend, however, was apparent prior to COVID. Overall, average post-COVID enrolments in in-person courses are down four fewer students per section when compared to COVID patterns, and seven fewer students when compared to pre-COVID patterns.
- Course retention: In-person courses have lower drop percentages per section when compared to remote/online courses, but these drop percentages are not significantly different from blended courses. Online courses have higher drop percentages per section when compared to blended or remote courses. This suggests that both campus presence and the presence of synchronous components may have a positive impact on student retention, engagement and learning in a course.

This recommendation also comes with the following key actions and implications:

- Pause investments into Hyflex teaching and learning, so meaningful consultations can be had with key stakeholders on how specific classrooms can be optimized with Hyflex technologies. Although there are examples of instructors who have been able to make Hyflex teaching work with great success, more instructors have reported some level of dissatisfaction or disappointment with their current experiences of Hyflex teaching and learning.
- Investigate how course planning, scheduling, room bookings and teaching assignments can be made more flexible, to encompass non-traditional modes of learning and course delivery, as well as take into account space needs aligned with course delivery design (e.g., Lassonde is experimenting with a block model of delivery for first-year Engineering students this fall). To make flexible learning work, currently rigid systems need to be made flexible.
- Invest in (re)designing and reconfiguring in-person classrooms to facilitate active learning. Active learning can enhance students' learning experiences, improve learning outcomes, and narrow achievement gaps, especially for students in equity-deserving groups.

2. Acknowledge that York's instructors engage in lifelong learning of pedagogy, which requires ongoing professional development and dedicated supports.

Transform York's teaching and learning culture by first acknowledging that instructors are themselves engaged in lifelong learning, not only in terms of acquiring disciplinary-specific knowledge but also when it comes to their own teaching practices. As such, instructors require both time and space to prepare their courses, especially if they involve active learning strategies, and engage in ongoing professional development (e.g., as it relates to assessment (re)design, AI literacy, partnering with students to co-create courses, try new pedagogical approaches, etc.). This recommendation comes with the following key actions and implications:

- Consider the appointment of Teaching Fellows or Teaching Chairs as Faculty-specific pedagogical leaders.
- Create a more robust incentive structure for generating and implementing high-impact pedagogical transformations and innovations.

3. Establish formal linkages between assessments of students and learning outcomes at the course and program levels.

Assessments play a critical but often underappreciated role in higher education by supporting learning, accreditation, and accountability. To optimize the utility of assessments, these functions demand equitable attention and adequate resourcing. Further development of faculty and institutional competence pertaining to assessments will be a critical first step. So, too, will be highlighting the purposes of assessments in course outlines, and during curriculum development and review. To foreground learning for all students, assessments should be explicitly linked to learning outcomes at both the course and program levels. While there is a continued need to ensure the validity and reliability of assessments, especially for accreditation purposes, the University should consider a fundamental shift from prioritizing traditional assessments *of* learning to emphasizing authentic assessments *for* learning. Engaging students in the assessment process can also positively impact their well-being and make their learning more meaningful.

4. Accelerate the expansion of community-based EE and WIL opportunities.

Classroom-focused experiential education (EE) remains important for student learning, especially in specific programs. While the university has been able to successfully expand classroom-focused EE, and we recommend that these opportunities be maintained and enhanced, it is equally important that the university build more community-based and work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities for students. When embedded in the design of a program, WIL or community-based learning can offer students both practical experiences and occasions for important interdisciplinary collaborations. These experiences help students, especially equity-deserving ones, feel more connected (e.g., to each other, their program, and to a community), as well as help them succeed at higher rates.

5. Support AI literacy among instructors, students and staff.

In alignment with universities that have positioned themselves as leading the conversation on generative artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education (e.g., UK universities that are part of the Russell Group, University of Hong Kong, etc.), we recommend that York, as a first step, support AI literacy among instructors, staff and students. To teach students to critically think about and use generative AI in discipline-specific ways, our instructors and staff need to also be AI literate. While six in ten Canadian students consider the use of generative AI on assessments to be cheating, they are looking for more guidelines on how to use generative AI 'properly.' The term 'properly' came up repeatedly during conversations with York students about their perceptions on generative AI use. Because students see the use of generative AI as a critical and necessary skill to develop, especially if they are to be successful in their future professional and personal lives, they are seeking guidance from their instructors about how to use it ethically and responsibly. In the absence of such guidance, they are turning to (mis)information provided by content creators on social media platforms (e.g., TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, and Instagram).

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Across multiple consultation sessions, there was broad support and consensus for the Task Force's five preliminary recommendations, even as specific questions about implementation were raised. Because the Task Force was not set up to provide guidance on practical implementation, its final recommendations remain high-level recommendations that prioritize actions that the university ought to take, in both the short and long term, 'in order to scale up successful pedagogical adaptations that enhance the quality of learning experiences for York's diverse students as technology becomes ubiquitous in higher education.'

Based on feedback from consultation sessions with students, instructors and staff, the Task Force calls upon the university to build and sustain an inclusive and accessible culture of teaching and learning. In the enactment of the university's educational mission, lifelong learning and pedagogy are as important as research-intensive activities, and should receive the same level of dedicated support and recognition. To institutionalize pedagogical transformation and innovation, the university needs to genuinely transform its own structures and processes to put pedagogy first. Given changing student expectations, rapidly evolving technologies, and evidence-based pedagogical innovations elsewhere, there is some urgency to transform teaching and learning at York, so that the university can better serve its learners and respond to 21st century challenges.

To guide the university in setting priorities for enhancing teaching and learning in our post-pandemic environment, the Task Force makes the following recommendations:

1. **Actively encourage lifelong learning of pedagogy among instructors, by offering meaningful onboarding opportunities, ongoing professional development and dedicated supports.**

To develop an inclusive culture of teaching and learning, the university needs to first build a robust support structure to facilitate lifelong learning of pedagogy among all instructors. While

ongoing professional development will help instructors develop core competencies in different pedagogical approaches, and enable them to incorporate instructional strategies related to DEDI, sustainability, accessibility, student well-being and authentic assessment among others, instructors need to be both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to engage in a continual process of pedagogical improvement. In order to think about improvement, it is imperative that the university first offer parameters or criteria for defining 'teaching excellence' at York across a range of professional contexts (e.g., tenure and promotion, hiring, quality assurance and cyclical program reviews, etc.).

This recommendation comes with the following key actions:

- Consider the appointment of Teaching Fellows or Teaching Chairs as Faculty-specific pedagogical leaders that can offer peer mentoring and disciplinary-specific guidance.
- Break down the silos that make it challenging to learn about successful pedagogical transformations and best practices within and across programs, disciplines and Faculties.
- Consider how cross-Faculty conversations and team-teaching opportunities can be fostered.
- Create a meaningful support structure for generating and implementing high-impact pedagogical transformations and innovations. Such a support structure needs to take into account the amount of time, energy and work that instructors dedicate to developing and implementing pedagogical transformations.

2. Prioritize and support program-level design and planning, in order to ensure that diverse students are able to access impactful learning opportunities and experiences.

At York, curricular and pedagogical innovations tend to occur incrementally at the course level; however, course-by-course enhancements may not always add up to a coherent program experience for students. To offer students a cohesive program experience, programs need to intentionally plan learning experiences and opportunities for diverse students that belong to specific cohorts. In contrast to treating York's students as a homogenous group, programs could consider student needs and learning styles in relation to specific cohorts. For example, direct-entry high school students, especially those who have experienced emergency online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, will have different expectations for learning than working professionals who are returning to complete a degree, certificate or micro-credential. While working professionals are able to appreciate and adapt to fully online learning (e.g., in courses for specific skill development), direct-entry undergraduate students are not simply seeking upskilling and reskilling opportunities. They are seeking a campus experience that will not only facilitate 21st century learning, but also offer them opportunities for personal growth and transformation, professional and social networking, and a sense of community and belonging. Compared to domestic students, some international students will need time to adjust their approach to learning because some learning activities (e.g., tutorial discussions, writing original essays, etc.), although typical in Canadian higher education, will deeply challenge how they have previously engaged with instructors and course material.

The following key actions are recommended in relation to program-level design and planning:

a. Expand experiential learning by building more community-based and work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities for students.

Compared to other Canadian comprehensive universities, York offers fewer experiential learning opportunities to students (Figure 19 on p. 35 of the Auditor General's Report on York University Operations and Capital, 2023). To meet the UAP goal of offering every student, regardless of program, a meaningful EE experience, and improve its performance on this measure of the Strategic Mandate Agreement, the university will need to carefully scale up and across experiential learning opportunities. While the university has been able to successfully expand classroom-focused EE, and we recommend that these opportunities be maintained and enhanced, it is equally important that the university build more community-based and work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities for students. When embedded in the design of a program, WIL (e.g., co-op, internship, course placement) or community-based learning can offer students both practical, hands-on experiences, and occasions for important interdisciplinary collaborations. By applying classroom learning to real-world contexts and scenarios, these experiences help students, especially equity-deserving ones, feel more connected, academically succeed at higher rates, and prepare for different career trajectories.

In recognition that community-based EE and WIL can be experienced as labour-intensive and resource-heavy endeavours by instructors, we offer the following suggestions for implementation:

- Offer more centralized and coordinated support for EE across the university. Identification, recruitment and engagement with suitable external partners and employers ought to be led by a central EE office. Strategic coordination between a central EE Office and program- or Faculty-specific offices and EE coordinators will be crucial for scaling up and sustaining EE, as well as for providing ongoing oversight over various EE activities.

- Central supports, with program-specific or disciplinary-specific adaptations, would be helpful to prepare various stakeholders for community-based EE and WIL experiences. For example, students could be prepared for WIL experiences through a Faculty-wide or pan-university preparatory course or module. Students, employers and community partners have reported a desire for more robust training to develop skills related to career readiness, professionalism and effective workplace communication. Instructors could be offered training in the area of developing meaningful assessments in EE courses (e.g., assessments that evaluate the quality of student reflections on their EE experiences). External partners need to be prepared to take on our students in their workplaces, which can include workshops on how to manage the changing values and expectations of Generation Z.

b. Expand and enhance blended learning.

In general, blended learning refers to a combination of online and in-person learning components. At York, a blended mode of delivery is defined as a 'Combination of Virtual and In-person, Instructor will define whether virtual components are synchronous or

asynchronous' (*Common Language for Modes of Delivery at York – Final Report*, Spring 2023: p. 4). When reviewing the impacts of different modes of delivery on learners, blended learning emerges as a mode of course and program delivery that includes the 'best of both worlds' (see Table 1 below). At York, pandemic and post-pandemic experiments with blended learning have been successful in large, first year courses which optimally blend asynchronous, online lectures with in-person tutorials (e.g., ECON 1000/1010) or labs (e.g., BIOL 1001).

Table 1: York student perceptions on the value of in-person and online learning[4]

What is valued in online learning	What is valued in in-person learning
• Flexibility enables students to work while studying. • Online learning offers some cohorts of students greater accessibility to higher education. • Convenience of learning at one's own pace, so long as the eClass site is clearly designed, easy to navigate, and includes all course material. • Online asynchronous resources, such as recorded lectures, are available to (re)watch later and review before tests and exams. • Easy access to online materials for learning and studying. • Can facilitate independent study, so long as students have the self-discipline and motivation to complete an online course or program. Students worry about becoming distracted (or less focused) when learning online, especially if they find the learning experience to be boring. • May be most effective in courses that prioritize content delivery.	• More opportunities for student-instructor engagement. Compared to online learning, students perceive that they receive more in-person support from instructors (e.g., students can more easily find their instructors before, during and after an in-person class to ask questions and seek advice). • More opportunities to interact and engage with peers in discussion, reflection and collaboration. Compared to online learning, students find it easier to develop rapport with peers in-person, which can be especially important for group work. • To make the commute to campus worthwhile, students are looking to learn through experiences that are not easily reproducible online. Often, these experiences combine knowledge acquisition with practices that involve the senses and the body in physical learning spaces (e.g., science and engineering labs, dance and music studios, sculpture areas, nursing simulation centre, etc.).

To enhance student learning and their connections to each other, instructors and various campus supports, the Task Force recommends that blended learning be meaningfully integrated into programs with the following suggestions: the first-year experience should be primarily delivered in-person at both the undergraduate and graduate level, so that both

[4] York student perceptions align with those identified in McKinsey's global survey, which surveyed 7000 students on the value of online learning in higher education across 17 countries in the Americas, Europe, Asia and the Middle East (Child et al., 2023). Their survey results did not vary significantly across students from different age groups, fields of study and educational level.

student-centred and active learning strategies can be used to increase student engagement, collaboration, interactivity, and sense of belonging. In-person experiences can enable students to more easily integrate into an academic learning community. Greater flexibility, in the form of blended learning, could be offered to students in their later years of study, as they prepare to engage in experiential education (EE) and work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities.

This recommendation comes with the following key actions:

- Pause investments into Hyflex teaching and learning,[5] so meaningful consultations can be had with key stakeholders on how specific classrooms should be optimized with Hyflex technologies. Although there are examples of instructors who have been able to make Hyflex teaching work with great success, more instructors have reported some level of dissatisfaction or disappointment with their current experiences of Hyflex teaching and learning (e.g., experiences of cognitive overload, technological difficulties, oddly positioned camera angles, and dwindling in-person student attendance). Optimizing Hyflex classrooms will be important for maximizing future opportunities related to globally networked learning, teaching collaborations with other institutions, and delivery of French-language programming.
- Investigate how course planning, scheduling, room bookings and teaching assignments can be made more flexible, to encompass non-traditional modes of learning and course delivery, as well as take into account space needs aligned with course delivery design (e.g., Lassonde is experimenting with a block model of delivery for first-year Engineering students this fall). To make flexible learning work, currently rigid systems need to be made flexible.
- Ensure coordination and coherence at the program level when scheduling individual blended courses, by taking into consideration, to the extent possible, the scheduling of other required in-person, or blended courses. Commuting students appreciate a schedule that will clearly allow them to minimize the number of days on campus, as well as optimize their use of time on campus.
- Invest in (re)designing and reconfiguring in-person classrooms to facilitate active learning. Active learning can enhance students' learning experiences, improve learning outcomes, and narrow achievement gaps, especially for students in equity-deserving groups.

3. Immediately support AI literacy among instructors, students and staff.

Currently, the university presumes that student use of generative AI is prohibited, unless an instructor explicitly gives students permission to use it in their specific course. With this implicit prohibition in place, student use of generative AI can be construed as a violation of the *Senate Policy on Academic Honesty*. As a first step towards thinking about how generative AI can be incorporated in teaching and learning, and in alignment with the spirit of

[5] A Hyflex mode of delivery is currently defined at York as '[c]oncurrent synchronous in-person and livestreaming – all course components are available in virtual and in-person modes' (*Common Language for Modes of Delivery at York – Final Report*, Spring 2023: p. 4).

recommendations made by York's Task Force on AI & Society, the Task Force recommends that AI literacy be immediately supported among instructors, staff and students. To help our students think critically about generative AI inputs, outputs and effects, our instructors and staff need to understand the different AI tools on the market, and their ethical and legal implications. When speaking to students, it becomes apparent that they are hoping for clear guidelines and best practices on how to use generative AI tools responsibly in disciplinary-specific contexts. They are looking for answers to these kinds of questions: What generative AI tool can be used, and in what context and for what purpose? How should they use the tool, and how might this use be connected to future workplace practices? Despite the patchwork approach to addressing generative AI across the university, some students are currently using generative AI tools because they feel underserved by campus services and supports. They treat the AI tools as personalized learning coaches that allow them to find mistakes in their work, and fill in skill or knowledge gaps that have not been filled in by instructors, TAs or campus support staff.

Because what counts as AI literacy may be different depending on the audience, here are some suggestions for implementation:

- For instructors, workshops on AI literacy should include an identification of useful AI tools for teaching and learning, highlighting those that will be supported by the university (e.g., through proprietary software or licensing). Instructors are interested in understanding the implications of using particular generative AI tools (e.g., intellectual property, privacy, copyright, etc.).
- For students, AI literacy entails thinking critically not only about generative AI outputs (e.g., critical reflection of ChatGPT outputs), but also about their inputs (e.g., sociopolitical and ethical implications of creating and maintaining generative AI tools in relation to labour exploitation, climate impacts, plagiarism, etc.).