

**Advocacy Paper: Teaching Quality at Western University
Draft #1**

The University Students' Council
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Western University
University Community Centre Room 340

Introduction

The University Students' Council (USC) is committed to providing Western students with the highest quality of post-secondary education. This policy paper identifies strategies that university administration and faculty can use to enhance Western's educational experience. Much of the research used in this policy paper was taken from the 2013 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey (OPSSS)—a biennial survey conducted by the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA). The survey received 9,000 responses from students across Ontario, and gives insight into the challenges and priorities of Ontario post-secondary students.

The University Students' Council proposes the following recommendations in effort to improve the educational experience at Western:

1. Introduce a system to provide university instructors with mid-term feedback from students.
2. Allocate more university resources to fund high-impact learning experiences that may include but are not limited to curricular, extra-, and co-curricular learning opportunities.
3. Allocate university resources to fund the Certificate in University Teaching and Learning—a teaching assistant educational program offered by the Western Teaching Support Centre—for all teaching assistants. The program should be a mandatory requirement for teaching assistants at Western.
4. Increase the number of active and participatory classrooms on campus.

Recommendation 1: Introduce a system to provide university instructors with mid-term feedback from students

Constructive feedback is crucial to the continuous development of a person's skills. University instructors, just like students, deserve to receive updates on their performance throughout the duration of a course. The current Western University Instructor & Course Evaluation system provides instructors with feedback only after the term has concluded. Because feedback is not given to instructors during the term, the instructor is not able to use student responses in a formative manner.

The USC compels Western University to introduce a system aimed at providing instructors with student feedback during the middle of the term. Mid-term feedback will give instructors time to alter their teaching practices to fit better with the needs of students. It will also provide students with the opportunity to recognize outstanding aspects of their instructor's teaching style.

The mid-term feedback should be:

- Confidential;
- Administered by Western University;
- Mandatory for all instructors teaching at least 10 hours in a course; and,
- Made immediately available to instructors.

Recommendation 2: Allocate more university resources to fund high-impact learning experiences.

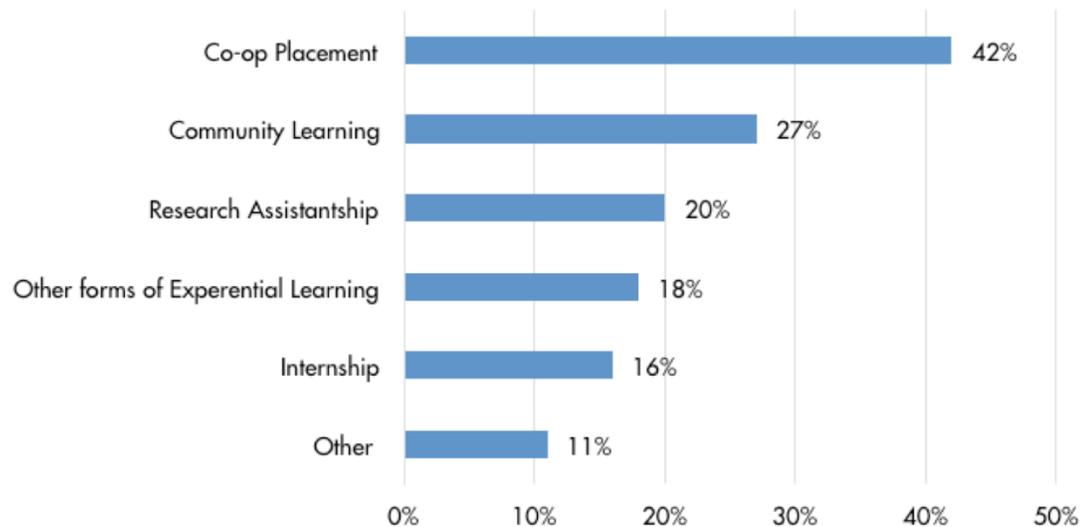
Private and public sector employers are seeking university graduates with tangible, hands-on skills that are directly applicable to the job market. High impact learning experiences, wherein students are forced to learn by doing, give students the opportunity to apply their in-class learning to solve a real-world problems or issue. Western University currently participates in some high-impact learning experiences, such as the Ontario Universities Program in Field Biology¹; however, these field courses are expensive and are out of reach for most undergraduate students. The USC recommends that Western allocate more resources to fund high-impact learning experiences, which can include capstone research projects, research assistantships, and community service learning projects. This also includes less costly but equally formative co- and extra-curricular experiences such as Alternative Spring Break.

According to the OPSSS, roughly half of all students indicated they had participated in at least one high-impact learning experience during their studies. Respondents in the "other" category identified exchange programs, field studies, clinical placements, residence

¹ <http://www.oupfb.ca>

supervisory experiences, teaching assistantships, thesis programs, and volunteer work as their high-impact learning experience.²

Figure 1: Percentage of students who have participated in active learning experiences³



Recommendation 3: Allocate university resources to fund the Certificate in University Teaching and Learning—a teaching assistant educational program offered by the Western Teaching Support Centre—for all teaching assistants. The program should be a mandatory requirement for teaching assistants at Western.

Teaching Assistants play an important role in the education of undergraduate students. By the end of their university career, almost every student has experienced being taught by a graduate teaching assistant; therefore, it is crucial that all teaching assistants are equipped with the skills necessary to fulfill the obligations of their job. It is Western’s responsibility to equip their teaching assistants with the relevant teaching skills that are necessary when performing classroom instruction. Currently, the Teaching Support Centre at Western offers a number of high-quality courses aimed to educate teaching assistants on the art of teaching; however, these courses are voluntary and participants receive no payment for their time. The University Students’ Council compels Western to work with PSAC Local 610 and the Teaching Support Centre to provide mandatory, high-quality training to teaching assistants in the area of classroom instruction.

Recommendation 4: Increase the number of active and participatory classrooms on campus.

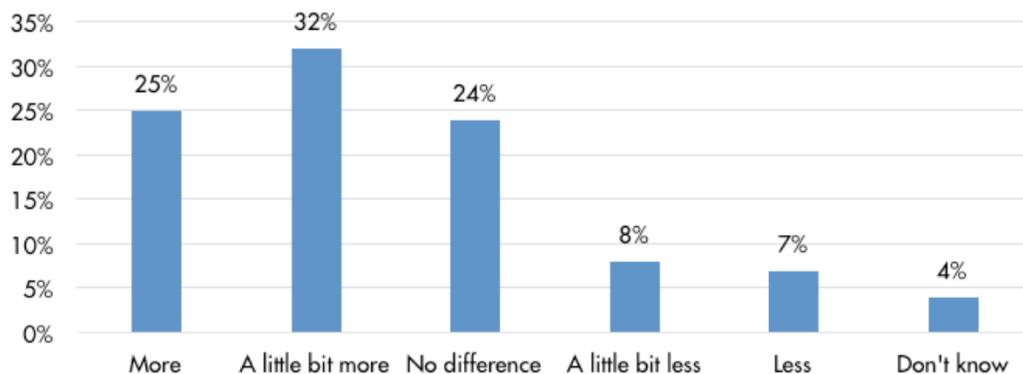
² Madden, S. (2014). *Beyond the Traditional Classroom: Teaching and Learning in Contemporary Higher Education*. Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance.

³ Ibid.

Active or participatory learning techniques are activities such as discussion-based learning, seminars, problem-based learning, and inquiry-based learning.⁴ Such techniques are generally recognized as being effective ways of delivering content and learning, but only about half of graduates participate in any form of active-participatory learning.⁵ Research has found that those who undertake an active or participatory learning experience not only come away with better retention and application of the material, but those students who interact in a structured way with peers will have higher levels of academic development, problem solving skills, and persistence and completion.⁶ The USC recommends that Western University put an emphasis on developing curriculum focused around active and participatory classrooms. Furthermore, it should be a mandatory graduation requirement for all students—regardless of discipline—to obtain a 0.5 credit in a class deemed to be a participatory learning course (e.g. seminar-based research class).

According to OPSSS, fifty-seven per cent of students indicated that they would rather have more active learning elements in their studies, while only fifteen per cent of surveyed students felt that they would rather have less or slightly less.⁷

Figure 2: Proportion of students who would have their courses use more or less active or participatory-based learning techniques.



⁴ Madden, S. (2014). *Beyond the Traditional Classroom: Teaching and Learning in Contemporary Higher Education*. Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance.

⁵ The Center for Postsecondary Research: Indiana. 2012. *National Survey of Student Engagement*.

⁶ Kuh, G. Gonyea, R. Shoup, R. & Kinze, J. 2007. "Promoting persistence and success of underrepresented students: lessons for teaching and learning." *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, pg. 21–38.

⁷ Madden, S. (2014). *Beyond the Traditional Classroom: Teaching and Learning in Contemporary Higher Education*. Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance.

International Students at Western University

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Introduction

The University Students' Council (USC) is committed to providing Western students with the highest quality of post-secondary education. This policy paper identifies strategies that university administration and faculty can use to enhance the Western student experience for international students. Much of the research from this paper was taken from the March 2014 Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) policy paper on International Students. While the author of this paper is not an international student himself, research conducted was through consultation at five post-secondary institutions through their respective international student centers. In addition, further information was collected through focus groups conducted at Western University and consultation with Western International.

Currently, the province of Ontario is home to 42% of Canada's international student population. These students contribute significantly to the economy of the province, generating approximately \$2.9 billion and creating nearly 30,000 jobs.⁸ International students also enrich the learning environment of Ontario's Universities, contributing diverse perspectives and experiences.⁹

It is important to acknowledge that there is no one type of "international student", nor one single "international student experience." International students arrive at Western from 173 countries, bringing with them a diverse range of skills, knowledge, cultures, motivations, beliefs, interests and experiences¹⁰. It is important that the services offered on Western's campus recognize the vast diversity of international student populations, and promote culturally sensitive approaches to addressing international students' needs.

The University Students' Council proposes the following recommendations in effort to improve the educational experience for international students at Western:

⁸ Roslyn Kuninn & Associates (2012) *Economic Impact of International Education in Canada – An Update*. Presented to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Western International, 'Western International - Western University', accessed 6 April 2015, <http://international.uwo.ca>.

1. Western University must ensure that the institution remains a welcoming place to study for all types of international students.
2. Post-secondary accessibility for an international student's education should be no different than that of a domestic student.
3. Senior administration at Western University must commit to providing a large variety of student support services, which are properly equipped to meet service demands.
4. During international week, campus stakeholders should aim to include more domestic students to further enhance the awareness and involvement of the entire student body.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Western University must ensure that the institution remains a welcoming and accessible place for all types of international students.

It is important that all students at Western, regardless of backgrounds, are provided with the same educational experience and opportunities as domestic students. Efforts need to be made to include international students in the full range of experiences that Western has to offer. While international students may feel natural discomfort while starting their studies, Western University must aim to provide a welcoming atmosphere to alleviate this discomfort. In order for this to occur, Western University should continue to provide services such as Western International and International Week.

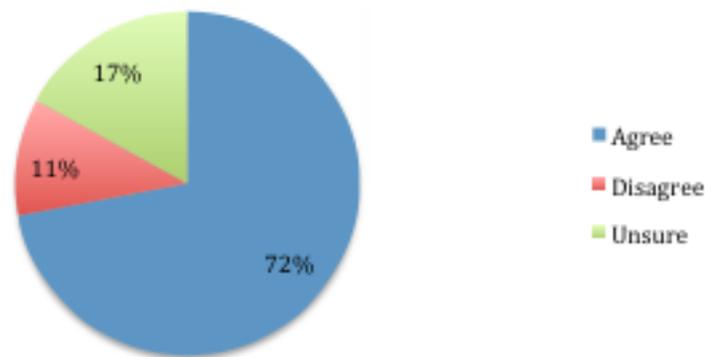
International students have specific needs beyond domestic students, and require specialized support systems and services. Students who are coming from abroad are new to Canada and Western University and may need assistance in adjusting to a new society and culture. Additionally, some of these students may lack proficiency in English, therefore requiring access to language training programs to ensure their post-secondary success. For this to occur, Western University should set aside a proportion of revenue generated from international student tuition. This may then be used toward the support and systems required to allow for the success of international students. These systems might include, but are not limited to:

- Academic/career counseling
- Cultural adjustment assistance/cultural programming
- Financial advice
- Immigration/visa advising
- Mental health services
- English (or French) language supports; and
- Student support services which specifically target the needs of refugees and protected persons

2. Community inclusivity for international students at Western should be no different than that of a domestic student.

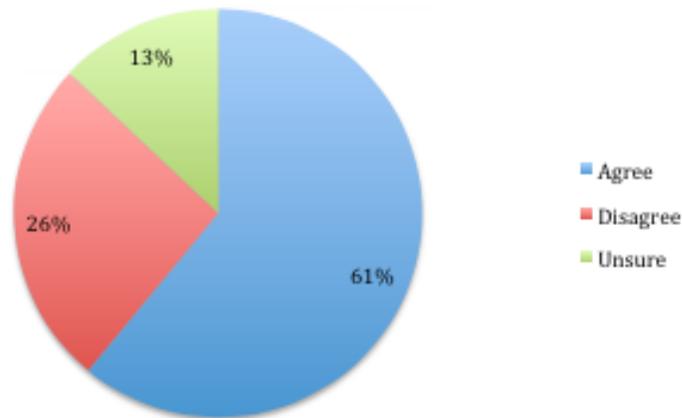
In a 2013 survey of domestic students by the Higher Education Strategy Associates (HESA)¹¹, when asked if international students felt socially included in the student community, 72% responded that they agree (Figure 1). However, when asked if international students kept to themselves within the student community, 61% of students agreed (Figure 2). This then indicates that perhaps more can be done in order to assist international students in building connections with domestic students. These results also suggest that as a result of societal, educational, and cultural barriers, international students may be experiencing a decreased overall University experience at Western in comparison to those who are domestic.

Figure 1. Do international students feel socially included in the student community?



¹¹ Lambert, J & Usher, A (2013) *Internationalization and the Domestic Student Experience*. Toronto: Higher Education Strategy Associates

Figure 2. Do international students keep to themselves in the student community?



All stakeholders here at Western must work together to provide an accepting and encouraging environment for students wishing to study at this institution. International students should be provided with the same high quality education as that of domestic students, and appropriate action must be taken to ensure that any barriers are removed. It must also be taken into consideration as to how international students can feel more included in the campus atmosphere. This means that all students, whether domestic or international, should feel at home here at Western and never like a foreigner or outsider.

3. Senior administration at Western University must commit to providing a large variety of student support services, which are properly equipped to meet service demands.

Western University administration must assume responsibility for providing a range of sound international student support services. These services must meet services demands in order to ensure satisfaction in the desired outcomes of the programs. In order to meet these service demands, Western International, as well as other international student supports, must be adequately staffed. The university should also look to recruiting mental health professionals with expertise in working with diverse communities and who specialize in work with various cultural groups. By ensuring proper staffing requirements, these programs will be allowed to excel and meet desired outcomes of the services. Overall, this will improve the quality and satisfaction of the international student services. Western's administrators should also ensure strong student feedback protocols to ensure proper two-way communication. This will guarantee that the goals of Western University are matched to the needs of its international students.

4. During international week, campus stakeholders should aim to include more domestic students to further enhance the awareness and involvement of the entire student body.

International Week at Western is held annually in November as a campus-wide celebration of all things international. The purpose of the week is to:

- Celebrate Western's international community, diversity and international collaborations
- Learn about international opportunities for students, staff, faculty, and alumni both at home and abroad
- Engage the London and campus communities in global learning and intercultural sharing¹²

Organized and planned by Western International, international week is consistently regarded as a success. In order to continue to encourage a welcoming campus environment for all students, Western International should look into further broadcasting international week programming to all students, both domestic and international. By getting a larger population of students involved in international week, students will see a strengthening in the inclusivity of the campus environment. The USC recognizes that the International Planning Committee has already begun work on this project and advocates for its continuation and growth. This will also see a further recognition of the diversity of students located on campus. Additionally, Western International should utilize domestic students who have experienced an international exchange, creating a strong access point for campus-wide communication.

¹² Western International, 'Western International - Western University', accessed 6 April 2015, <http://international.uwo.ca>.