Learning and Teaching at UBC, Looking Forward Beyond COVID

Summary

As we have navigated the changes, challenges and disruption brought on by COVID-19, we have initiated a conversation as to what the future of teaching and learning at UBC could and should look like. During this period of disruption, our faculty, staff and students have seen massive changes and challenges and have responded with creativity and resilience, but this has come with both individual and collective costs, burdens and lost opportunities.

To understand what went well during this period, what we should keep, and how we might improve for the future[1], we began a conversation in May 2021 with approximately 100 faculty, students and staff from both campuses and across all levels of seniority, resulting in the creation of our Phase 1 report for consultation. Recognising the limited timeframe and scope of the work of the original group, we undertook consultations through discussions with a wide range of UBC communities across both campuses from October 2021 to April 2022.

The Phase 1 report used for these discussions provided a summary of the origins and process of the project; recommendations grouped into four thematic areas; and details of the consultation phase of the project. Consultation offered opportunities to ensure the wider UBC community were engaged and could provide input to the future of teaching and learning at UBC. A full list of consultations undertaken is presented in Appendix 1. We acknowledge and thank all of those individuals who provided feedback through this consultation phase, your input has been invaluable in advancing this work, and making it more representative of the full range of UBC community members.

With respect to how teaching and learning might evolve, there are many things we could do; the initial phase of this work outlined many recommendations for action. Whilst not wanting to lose sight of these ideas, we have to be cognizant of the human and financial constraints. After more than two full years of navigating the challenges of the pandemic, the overwhelming sentiment we have heard repeatedly is one of fatigue and burnout. We must, therefore, be selective in what we choose to advance, build on existing work and ensure alignment with current and emerging priorities. Similarly, the current financial realities are such that we must start from a position to rely on what we have, rather than seeking yet more. In this spirit, what follows is a re-encapsulation of the thematic areas of focus, with input as to how the consultations have refined and reinforced these, together with a limited number of priority action areas for each theme.

Context for consultations

The scale of the changes to our teaching and learning activities since March 2020, in response to the challenges of COVID-19, have been immense. As an institution, we have been through multiple cycles of having to rethink and redesign how we maintain the continuity of learning for our students, how we

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[1] This initial discussion and recommendation that emerged were the collaborative effort of a group of faculty, staff and students from June-Oct 2021, with further discussions through consultations October 2021 - January 2022.

support our faculty to do so, all against a backdrop of uncertainty, heightened concerns and near-constant change. This has required remarkable and sustained individual and collective efforts, commitment, and resilience on the part of faculty, staff, and students.

Rather than settle back into whatever versions of 'a new normal' might emerge entirely organically, we engaged faculty, staff and students from both campuses, in a short timeline and focused conversation about what learning and teaching could and should look like moving forward. Explicitly asking the question: 'What are the lessons learned from our experiences during COVID that might shape teaching and learning at UBC moving forward?' And implicitly 'What mix of what type of course offerings should we have; in-person, hybrid and online?'

Although these conversations were generative, not all voices and perspectives were included in this first phase of work. Partly, this was as a result of who was able to volunteer to work on the initial discussions in June through August 2021. Also, significant work was already underway on a number of key institutional strategies and priorities, including ([ISP](), [IAP](), [Task Force on Anti-Racism (ARIE)](), [UBC Climate Action Plan 2030 (CAP2030)]()). Other initiatives took shape during the first phase of the work (e.g. [Digital UBC]()). We made the purposeful choice to engage with these (and other) groups in a second phase of the project, using the emergent themes and recommendations as a starting point for discussions, seeking feedback and input.

Through this broader consultation and engagement across the University community we asked what resonated, what was missing and whose perspectives and experiences were we missing in our consultations. Thoughtful answers to these questions represent a significant opportunity for (re-)shaping the future of teaching and learning at UBC that is fully aligned with institution-wide imperatives and priorities.

Many other organizations and institutions have been engaged in similar activities and as they publish and report their findings, strong resonances with our own themes are emerging. Research undertaken by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO)[2] highlighted the impact, specifically on first year students, of the switch to fully online learning. The recommendations made by the Council closely mirror the recommendations here and specifically relate to integrating UDL principles in all courses, and ensuring there is deliberate flexibility built into course offerings, where feasible. The BC Ministry for Advanced Education and Skills Training (MAEST) has formed a Digital Learning Advisory Committee, which as of June 2022 has just published its Digital Learning Strategy, with guidelines for technology enhanced learning and a framework for digital literacy for citizens, learners and educators.

Theme 1 - Innovation and flexibility

Context. Experiences over the last two years have brought hard-earned lessons on how online courses can lead to both innovations in pedagogical practice and enhanced flexibility for learners. Many learners appreciated the flexibility of 'not everything synchronous and in person' (even if some elements of exactly that were also, simultaneously, keenly missed). Through this time, we relied on technology more than ever before for academic continuity, through wider use of existing applications and adoption of new tools. This brought to the fore considerations of how we support students / faculty in this space, as

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[2] https://heqco.ca/pub/ontario-learning-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-experiences-of-ontario-first-year-postsecondary-students-in-2020-21/

well as concerns around academic integrity and the ethical implications of increased technology use beyond regulatory compliance. Looking at our policies and processes – the things that guide how we do what we do -- these were designed for an almost exclusively in-person UBC that existed pre-COVID.

What we heard. Our consultations and the feedback from them suggest that the post-COVID future at UBC looks to build on the in-person value proposition for student learning. At the same time, we might expect an expansion of offerings that are fully online, where program needs, learner contexts and pedagogical approaches support this. Likewise, we expect some deliberately-designed hybrid and multi-access courses, where there is a clear rationale for doing so. (By 'hybrid' here, we mean a deliberate mix of in-person and online experiences across courses, programs and student support activities, with all students following the same mix of modalities. In contrast, 'multi-access' permits either in-person or online activities for students, as designed by the instructor.)

The concept of 'place', for both of UBC's main campuses, remains a solid anchor for the educational value proposition across many disciplines, with fully online as a modality where it makes sense, or where particular learner constraints (geography, time etc.) require it. Hybrid, as used here, opens the possibility to replace some in-person activities with online.

Priority actions. It is clear that determining what flexibility might look like in different disciplines and programs requires a period of reflection and experimentation to better understand affordances and constraints of a potentially revised educational offering; what works well in a particular disciplinary or pedagogical context may be impractical and indeed undesirable in another. Additionally, we are breaking new ground here, once again. We need to understand what 'works well' in a hybrid context, given that much of our prior experience was at either end of an instructional spectrum (in-person, pre-COVID and chiefly online, during COVID).

To advance opportunities for such experimentation, at UBC-V, we will reserve a portion of the 2023 annual call for large TLEF[3] projects for strategic re-design of elements of programs for hybrid or multi-access delivery. We would anticipate funding a number of projects (up to $200K each) for two years, and repeat the call in June 2023. The scale and scope of projects would be greater than one or two courses, but not necessarily as ambitious as full-programs, with a preference towards high-enrolment courses to maximize potential benefits to students.

In addition, we will further consider flexible program options to reach new learners, beyond full-time degree-seeking students. This will build on recent interest (including that stimulated by MAEST micro-credential funding calls) for the development flexible and modular offerings for career and lifelong learners. Input from industry-focused advisors, to better understand needs amongst BC employers, to enable targeted development of offerings, will be critical.

Theme 2 - Inclusion and wellbeing

Context. Pre-COVID, there was already considerable institution-wide momentum and progress towards core priorities of inclusion and wellbeing in our academic operations. COVID brought obvious challenges to the sense of connection, community and belonging that UBC students, faculty and staff felt during the disruption of regular teaching and learning activities, with consequences for well-being

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[3] https://tlef.ubc.ca/application/special-call/hybrid-and-multi-access-course-redesign-projects/

and mental health. These stressors were also distributed unevenly across members of our community, with some of the most vulnerable faced with the most challenging combination of circumstances. At the same time as these obvious challenges, some (learners and staff) felt more productive and connected, with an improved work-life balance. Balancing the impact of the past two years with the desire to move forward with changes will require careful planning and time allowed first for recovery.

What we heard. It is crucial to recognize those areas amplified during the pandemic, such as systemic racism, and understanding the systems of oppression that determine access to wellness and learning support. This also includes consideration of how to decolonise our systems and processes to distribute power and resources to more equitably support the teaching and learning of marginalized students, faculty, and staff. Frameworks for course design can enhance teaching and learning for all learners whilst at the same time explicitly considering approaches to address barriers to access. Through discussions with students, faculty and equity-seeking groups, the need to provide place and space for marginalized groups to share in discussions, develop guidance and learning resources to support change across the institution.

Priority actions. Intentional promotion and encouraged use of the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework can to be used to support innovation in inclusive course design activities that re-assess options for course modalities. This can help build a strong sense of community in courses and facilitate student-to-student interaction. Working through existing partnerships between CTLT, the Equity and Inclusion Office and the Centre for Accessibility (UBC-V), UDL has strong potential as a framework to improve and enhance teaching and learning for all learners.

At UBC-V, we will initiate a 'UDL Fellows cohort' of ~10-15 faculty representatives from academic units, to engage in a semester-long cohort-based learning model to understand how to apply UDL principles in their own discipline and courses, utilizing a capacity building approach. Faculty will receive a course buy-out to provide time to engage, and will have the subsequent opportunity to apply for small project grants to undertake collaborative UDL-inspired transformation projects in their own Departments. This initiative will be funded from TLEF funds, and run for the next 3 TLEF cycles.

Theme 3 - Technology and support for faculty and student success

Context. Technological tools to support teaching and learning have been a feature of the learning landscape for decades, but the reliance on learning applications through 2020-21, in a rapidly-changing digital environment, have given us new insights to review and reimagine the role and use of technology. Support resources were greatly expanded, both centrally and locally within units and Faculties, with TAs and GAAs taking on new activities within their roles, and more widespread uptake of undergraduate students as TAs compared to pre-COVID.

A challenge moving forward is how to maintain some of these benefits in a sustainable manner, and the actual technologies and applications themselves are intertwined with the support needs to be able to utilize them most effectively. Adequate resourcing and support are key underpinning enablers for innovation to thrive; without it we fail to deliver the transformative learning our students deserve, and fail to equip faculty with 'best of breed' tools and applications to realize their teaching and learning goals.

What we heard. Based on COVID experiences, and reinforced by feedback from those involved in Academic Integrity work and input from the Anti-Racism Task Force, we need to consider the ethical implications of increased technology use beyond regulatory compliance, with a particular focus on how

technology use can specifically impact equity deserving students, faculty, and staff. Creation of enhanced guidance and support for well-designed, innovative and effective assessment practices for faculty members creating and deploying these kinds of assessments would support this change.

Keeping the opportunity for the innovation potential of using new technologies should be strongly balanced against a focus on the use of only a select number: choice is good, but too much choice leads to duplication and a fragmented / confusing experience for students, not to mention additional costs to license and maintain a multiplicity of tools that serve similar (or, worse, identical) functions. Most critically, we must recognize the need for appropriate teaching and educational support in this context. This includes longer-term professional development opportunities for faculty, staff and students who will provide support for and deliver these proposed changes.

Priority actions. Considerable work is already underway in this thematic area, amplified by the ongoing conversations as part of the initiative to develop a 'Digital Framework for UBC'. Several areas of work are underway reflecting on the need for equity of access. A refresh of principles to guide how learning technologies are adopted, supported and funded in the ecosystem of tools and applications is underway. Guidance for faculty and students on the implications of classroom recordings have been developed, along with a discussion paper of some of the affordances and limitations of such recordings. An Enterprise Video Project has been initiated, to consolidate the various multiple systems currently in use at UBC to support video creation, streaming and classroom recordings. Alongside this, there is guidance to support the ethical and inclusive use of learning technologies in development, going beyond merely privacy and security compliance.

Support across two years of remote learning at the UBC-V campus included block funding provisioned to Faculties. There is a current evaluation underway of how Faculties used the allocations, including a faculty survey of what benefits (and gaps) they found from the support provided, to inform future priorities. Finally, at UBC-V, we are initiating a review of how central support for TA training is provisioned, including the allocation of funding to Departments to support TA training and development. (The current model is 10+ years' old, and not all departments are able to take advantage of the resources).

Theme 4 - Processes and policies

Context. A period of several cycles of rapid redevelopment and change has placed enormous pressures on faculty, staff and students operating in process and policy frameworks designed for principally in-person instruction. Faculty have had to redesign effectively all courses (often more than once) to accommodate the changing circumstances of the pandemic; support staff have been dealing with both increased volumes and complexity of urgent support requests; students have been the recipients of just-built, untested course designs in challenging contexts. Arrangements for assessments have been brought into particularly sharp focus, along with heightened concerns and increasing volume and complexity of instances of academic misconduct, including the rise of 'contract cheating' third party services.

What we heard. Remote learning raised concerns regarding academic misconduct and the need to carefully consider new policies and approaches from an Academic Integrity perspective. UBC (both UBCO and UBCV) has a surprisingly large number of formal academic regulations which discuss, limit, prohibit, or otherwise interact with the assessment of students. Faculty in particular expressed the need to (re-)assess if and how these might need to be reconsidered in a post-COVID teaching and learning

environment. Consideration of the policies and processes in place and how we ensure that they are implemented consistently across UBC are key to taking changes forward.

Priority actions. Increased attention on cheating during the pandemic has made longstanding issues more visible around how academic integrity is taught and promoted and around how academic misconduct cases are managed and experienced by various stakeholder groups. A project was started to in early 2021 to look at academic integrity at UBC and it provided a starting point to considering what academic integrity supports should be available and how those supports should be delivered. Work at UBC across both campuses has been exploring ways to enrich and optimize the academic integrity cycle, from education and awareness to dealing with academic misconduct with an increasingly educative and restorative approach. The focus of the project will continue through an Academic Integrity Hub for the Vancouver campus. The purpose will be to centralise resources around academic integrity and academic misconduct as well as develop new resources to support faculty and students.

The priority actions across the 4 thematic areas are collated in Appendix 2. This will serve as the dashboard for progress updates on these actions over the coming 2022-23 Winter session.

Appendix 1 – Consultation on Phase 1 report

The second phase of the project sought input and feedback on the themes and recommendations, with a goal of refining, developing and prioritizing the recommendations into clear actions. The facilitated open discussions allowed for reflection on the actions across the campus community.

Alignment with institutional priorities, as articulated by the President, was a key element at the start of our consultation and engagement process. This includes open, ongoing and honest dialogues to ensure we are reflecting appropriately the priorities within the Indigenous Strategic Plan, the Anti-Racism and Inclusive Excellence Report, the Inclusion Action Plan and the priorities within the Academic Integrity project report among others.

The following stakeholder groups were part of the engagement and consultation process between October 2021 and February 2022 and across both campuses.

Strategic
- Equity & Inclusion Office / Inclusion Action Plan
- Digital UBC Strategy
- Task Force on Anti-Racism
- Indigenous Strategic Plan
- Indigenous Strategic Plan Implementation Committee (ISPIC) - UBCV

Faculty
- Faculty Association / Faculty Relations
- Deans & Associate Deans
- Heads & Directors

Students
- Student elected leadership
- Student senate caucus

Administrative
- Senate sub-committees – Teaching and Learning UBCV, Learning and Research UBCO
- Ombuds office
- CTL/T on both campuses
- Academic Integrity
- Staff roles that support teaching and learning activities
- Centre for Accessibility / Disability Resource Centre
- VP Students team

Appendix 2 - Summary of each of the actions, owner and timeline

Action	Owner	Timeline
Theme 1 - Innovation and flexibility		
TLEF projects (https://tlef.ubc.ca/application/special-call/hybrid-and-multi-access-course-redesign-projects/) for strategic re-design of elements of programs for hybrid or multi-access delivery. We would anticipate funding a number of projects (up to $200K each) for two years, and repeat the call in June 2023.	CTLT	2022-23
Flexible program options to reach new learners, beyond full-time degree-seeking students.	ExL	2022 ongoing
Theme 2 - Inclusion and wellbeing		
Intentional promotion and encouraged use of the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework to be used to support innovation in inclusive course design activities that re-assess options for course modalities. 'UDL Fellows cohort' of 10-15 faculty representatives from academic units, to engage in a semester-long cohort-based learning model to understand how to apply UDL principles in their own discipline and courses, utilizing a capacity building approach.	CTLT	3 TLEF cycles (2022-23)
Theme 3 - Technology and support for faculty and student success		
A refresh of principles to guide how learning technologies are adopted, supported and funded in the ecosystem of tools and applications.	CTLT	
Guidance for faculty and students on the implications of classroom recordings, along with a discussion paper of some of the affordances and limitations of such recordings.	CTLT	
Enterprise Video Project, to consolidate the various multiple systems currently in use at UBC to support video creation and classroom recordings.	CTLT	
Guidance to support the ethical and inclusive use of learning technologies in development, going beyond merely privacy and security compliance.	CTLT	
To support equity across departments a review of how central support for TA training is provisioned, including the allocation of funding to Departments to support TA training and development.	CTLT/VPAO	

Action	Owner	Timeline
Theme 4 - Processes and policies		
Academic Integrity Hub – Vancouver campus Centralise resources around academic integrity and academic misconduct to support faculty and students; institutional awareness and commitment, academic integrity education and academic misconduct Develop new resources to support faculty and students.		