

Online Preparedness Task Force

Faculty Readiness Working Group

Recommendation 2 – Review and Evaluate the Task Force Experience: What did we Learn?

The Online Preparedness Task Force was created in response to the real possibility that the university will need to offer its courses through remote delivery in the Fall. The work of the Task Force will result in recommendations that need to be implemented to ensure a smooth and successful transition to remote teaching and learning. At the same time, preparations for online delivery resulted in an unprecedented exchange of ideas about teaching and learning in general. This exchange involved representatives from the whole spectrum of teaching and learning at StFX including students, professors, and several units such as the Tramble Centre, IT Services, etc. Through the leadership of the Task Force, as well as other groups including the Teaching & Learning Centre (TLC), the Faculty Development Committee (FDC), Faculty of Education, Continuing & Distance Education (CDE), and Information Technology Services (ITS), the campus community engaged in discussions, planning, and workshops to enable professional development in teaching and learning. Given this remarkable exchange of ideas, there may be lessons learned that transcend the Task Force's mandate of crisis preparation that should be reviewed and shared with the campus community (and potentially the wider academic community).

Rationale:

Saint Francis Xavier University is primarily an undergraduate and liberal arts university known for its teaching excellence; teaching and learning are central to its purpose. The process of learning about and developing teaching has often been completed individually, in isolation, and within disciplinary boundaries. Some support for this process has been available from the volunteer Faculty Development Committee (e.g. New Faculty Orientation, Brown Bag lunches, annual teaching retreats, the FDC teaching website) as well as external or online professional development. It could be argued that these supports have been underutilized. In 2019, a part-time position with the TLC was formalized by the University to provide active and ongoing support to the campus community, which was a step forward in terms of formalizing support for enhancing teaching and learning.

The Covid-19 crisis resulted in a widespread focus on pedagogical discussion and reflection, as well as an inter-disciplinary, coordinated response to ensure the health and safety of our campus, and an effective, efficient teaching and learning experience. There has been an unprecedented exchange of ideas about teaching and learning, involving general topics ranging from course design, synchronous and asynchronous learning, formative and summative

assessment, creating engaging learning experiences, and supporting students' needs, to more discipline-specific topics such as modifying approaches to teaching science labs, language courses, presenting handwritten formulas, etc. There have been few exchanges in the history of the institution that span these topics, disciplines, and stakeholders, and few opportunities to capitalize, in a coordinated follow-up, on the diversity and magnitude of this shared experience. **To capture the benefits of this process, and to learn from our experiences, it is recommended that a special sitting of the Task Force meet to discuss how this process might inform ongoing support for teaching and learning at StFX.**

What's Next:

1. The AVP, with the Co-Chairs of the Task Force, should convene a meeting of the Task Force in January 2021 to reflect on the Task Force experience. Specifically, this special meeting of the Task Force should:
 - a. Review the results of the faculty and student surveys (resulting from the Faculty Readiness Working Group Recommendation #1) and identify actionable items.
 - b. Share our experience of teaching and learning in the aftermath of the Task Force process from our various perspectives (e.g. ITS, student leaders, academic support, faculty, library, etc.). To share perspectives, and to capture the ideas of all task force members, we suggest engaging in a carousel activity (similar to the activity that we used early on in the task force to generate a list of task force items); task force members would work within small groups to address predefined questions aimed at capturing TF insights.
 - c. Develop high-level recommendations around teaching and learning Professional Development on an ongoing and widespread basis:
 - i. *Supporting Professional Development Offerings:* Find ways to ensure that high quality PD can continued to be offered through continued collaboration between TLC, C&DE, FoE, and IT.
 - ii. *Promoting Professional Development Opportunities:* Find ways to continue to promote and communicate available professional development opportunities (e.g., support a PD calendar, communication strategy).
 - iii. *Recognizing Engagement in Professional Development:* Explore ways to recognize that faculty and staff engagement in PD is an investment in teaching excellence (e.g., support the development of a Teaching Certificate; explore badges for participation in PD; Listing PD in Dossier and recognizing this in Rank and Tenure; human resources is tracking participation in PD focused on EDI).
 - d. Identify ways to continue to support and strengthen the collaborations and communications that have developed among the various academic and operational units on campus

2. The work of task force has highlighted the need for a well-staffed Centre for Teaching and Learning (TLC). The university should commit to continuous funding for the TLC so that it can continue to do the work it is currently doing, and expand its capacity to provide support and training for teaching excellence.

3. The switch to a form of online teaching and learning last March was abrupt, incomplete, and wrenching. It is highly probable that in the future online education will become a more substantial part of the university's academic mission. The resources created by the Task Force's work can serve as a foundation for both the institution as a whole and for the individual who wishes to begin teaching online. The recommendations that are provided by the Online Readiness Task Force should serve as a basis for designing online courses in the future.