

## Stakeholder summary

### New study largest to date on impact of Instructional Skills Workshop

More than 100 institutions worldwide have offered the Instructional Skills Workshop (ISW) over the last 30 years to develop more student-centred, reflective instructors, but relatively little research has been conducted on its impact. According to a new study from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, the largest to date on the ISW, workshop participants report an increased focus on student needs, engagement and feedback.

#### Project description

For the study, *The Impact of the Instructional Skills Workshop on Faculty Approaches to Teaching*, faculty enrolled in the ISW at Western University, Ryerson University, Georgian College and the University of Waterloo between February 2011 and August 2012 participated in pre- and post-ISW surveys exploring approaches to teaching and changes in perspectives about teaching. Focus group and individual interviews were also conducted five to twelve months after the workshop. A total of 45 ISW participant surveys and 25 non-ISW (control group) surveys were analyzed.

#### Findings

Workshop participants were significantly less teacher-focused in their instruction four months after the study, while the control group showed no change in teacher focus. In the qualitative analysis, ISW participants frequently described replacing part of their lectures with a variety of active learning methods, reducing the instructional focus on content transmission. “Many comments from the qualitative analysis support a shift towards increased student focus in terms of thinking about what students need, planning experiences to actively engage students and seeking student feedback,” the authors note. Among participant comments:

*“I think before I was mainly focused on me... but now I definitely think of teaching more as a two-way street, so I rely on my students...to get feedback from them so I can figure out how I can teach this better the next time, or what do they need from me in order for them to be successful?”*

While the authors caution that the study’s four-month interval might not have provided sufficient time for instructors to shift towards a more student-centred approach, they note that non-ISW participants became less developmentally oriented over the four months – an approach that supports the development of critical and problem-solving skills. And while quantitative analyses did not find increases in this area, interview and focus group comments described developmental practices, such as thinking about content from a student perspective, bridging knowledge and adapting the learning to the learner’s ways of thinking. ISW participants were also more likely to reflect and act on their own personal teaching beliefs and intentions than non-ISW participants.

*“I transitioned from worrying about (being) an authority at the front of the class... the model introduced in the workshop is very much about the instructor being an enabler... and, I think that helped me let go of this anxiety about authority... after that, I just started teaching, teaching, teaching...”*

“This study represents an important first step in determining how educational development programs, and the ISW in particular, may assist with developing student-centred, reflective practices among faculty. These practices are key components of transformative teaching,” say the authors. “

### **Recommendations /Further research**

The research suggests that without programs such as ISW, instructors may adopt a less student-centred form of teaching, which may have a negative impact on student learning, say the authors, adding that the ISW appears to offer a fairly low-cost opportunity to enhance the teaching skills of college and university faculty.

Additional research could explore the longer-term influence of ISW on instructors' classroom behaviour, including how consistently the changes participants report are actually occurring in the classroom. The influence of specific disciplines on approaches to teaching could be explored, as well as the role that self-confidence plays in increasing the use of productive teaching strategies.

Authors of *The Impact of the Instructional Skills Workshop on Faculty Approaches to Teaching* are Debra Dawson, Ken Meadows, Karyn Olsen and Gayle McIntyre, Western University's Centre for Research on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education; and Paola Borin and Judy Britnell, Ryerson University.