

Teaching quality a growing focus in university but research still more valued

Despite increased emphasis on the quality of teaching in postsecondary education, a survey of professors at six Ontario universities finds that research continues to be more highly valued and have a bigger payoff in status and reputation.

Conducted by a team of researchers led by the University of Guelph and commissioned by the **Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO)**, the study found that more than 70 per cent of professors surveyed believe research has a bigger payoff than teaching in enhancing reputation, respect of peers, and access to funds. Nonetheless, they believe quality teaching is important to their professional practice and that universities should continue to support teaching development.

Project Description

The study, *University Faculty Engagement in Teaching Development Activities Phase II*, is the second of a two-part HEQCO analysis of faculty engagement in teaching. The first phase, a review of current research, suggested that universities need to develop programs to promote faculty development and support student learning. Similar points are made in a book commissioned by HEQCO and published last spring – *Taking Stock: Research on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. In it the authors argue that postsecondary institutions need to ensure that teaching practices address the diverse learning needs of students.

For the second phase of this study, university faculty at Lakehead, Laurentian, Queen's, Ryerson, Western, and Guelph participated in an on-line survey and focus groups. Approximately 21 per cent of tenured professors responded to the survey, while the focus groups were conducted with past recipients of teaching awards. The report reflects broad trends within the faculty population in the six institutions studied.

Findings

While respondents acknowledge the supremacy of research, **almost 96 per cent say teaching is important or very important to their professional practice**. However, **fewer (61 per cent) believe that teaching is important or very important to their institution** in judging their accomplishments.

The study shows that **faculty use both formal and informal methods to improve their teaching**. More than half have **discussed teaching with their colleagues**, and over 40 per cent have **invited colleagues to provide feedback on their teaching**. Half of the respondents have **visited their institution's teaching/learning resource centres** at least once and satisfaction with these centres was generally high.

For many faculty, **little formal support was available when they began their careers**, although the survey indicates that **teaching support is considered especially critical in the early professional years**. Most said they learned about teaching through practice as a graduate student and continue to learn about postsecondary teaching through practice and peer consultation.

A growing number of faculty acknowledge that they need to take **a more student/learner-centered** approach to their teaching. More than 85 per cent of respondents said they assess their own teaching, in

part, through the lens of their students (based on their students' experiences) as well as through their own experience as teachers and learners.

Next Steps

To examine specific strategies that institutions are using to support the development of effective teaching and learning, HEQCO is supporting 13 research projects designed to assess and highlight innovative and valuable teaching/learning practices at Ontario's colleges and universities.

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