

Teaching Commons: Centre for Excellence and Innovation in Learning



Year in Review 2023



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Empowering Excellence in Teaching and Learning

During the Spring and Summer of 2023, the Teaching Commons team undertook a process of reflection to identify and focus on the central mission, values, and services of the Teaching Commons. We strove to clearly articulate what those are and how they relate to our responsibilities and our support of the Academic Plan. Our 2023 annual report is structured to reflect this work and our commitment to serving the Lakehead University community.

As part of redefining our values and core services, we also undertook a refresh of both our [website](#) and newsletter formats, and we invite the community to provide feedback on both as we strive to continually improve and better serve the university

Our Core Values

We are experienced, approachable, understanding collaborators in your teaching journey who provide practical guidance and support for wise and effective teaching and learning practices. Within the Teaching Commons, we value the following:

- **Faculty First:** Recognizing all instructors as unique teachers and learners
- **Inclusiveness:** Promoting the creation of teaching and learning environments that embrace decolonization, diversity, and equity, where all feel welcomed, accepted, and respected
- **Dignity:** Treating every individual with dignity and respect
- **Pragmatism:** Providing practical, meaningful, and immediately relevant guidance and assistance
- **Collaboration:** Developing relationships and working in partnership with instructors, staff, and others to carry out our mission of empowering excellence
- **Innovation:** Embracing change and creative, forward-looking solutions to enhance teaching and learning practices
- **Research-informed Guidance:** Using current research to support all aspects of teaching and learning

Core Pillars of Support

The following six pillars frame the Teaching Common's key areas of focus and responsibility. The description of each pillar is followed by a summary of our activities over the past year.

Curriculum Development and Design

This pillar involves the creation and enhancement of the university's curriculum. The team supports course development and design, the clarification of learning outcomes, and aligning these outcomes with program goals and objectives. Our team collaborates with faculty members to ensure that courses of study are both meaningful and relevant – and incorporate effective and wise practices of pedagogy as well as Indigegogy.

WORKSHOPS OFFERED:

- OER Workshop - Introduction to OERs and Open Library
- Circle Work: Ensuring You are Doing it in a Good Way

TEMPLATES & RESOURCES DEVELOPED:

- [Accessibility Course Design and Facilitation Checklist](#)
- [Learning Outcomes Guide](#)
- [Learning Outcomes - Face-to-face and Online Activities Ideas](#)
- IQAP Support Documents related to [Program Learning Objectives](#), [Program Learning Outcomes](#), [Modes of Delivery](#).

CONSULTATION SERVICES:

- Private consultations in this area included many one-on-one single meetings, short-term working partnerships, and extended mentoring relationships during which we revised courses and assignments, considered essential requirements, and worked to incorporate innovative and effective pedagogical practices into all aspects of course design and teaching. Some big themes for the past year have focused primarily on accessibility; (inter)active learning; and effective use of generative AI in courses, assessment, and teaching/learning.

Teaching is a relational business, and the Teaching Commons staff spend a great deal of time working one on one with faculty and instructors in support of their teaching goals. Over 1300 such consultations were logged in the past year – these are in addition to the number of consultations specific to D2L.

Pedagogical Support

WORKSHOPS OFFERED:

- Engagement Tools for In-Person and Online Learning
- Supporting Diverse Students I - Students with Accessibility Needs
- Supporting Diverse Students II - International Students
- Teaching Strategies for Teaching Writing I: Assignment Planning and Making Writing Relevant
- Teaching Strategies for Teaching Writing II: Assessment of Writing -- Rubrics and Grading Strategies
- 5 Quick and Easy Critical-Thinking In-Class Activities

TEMPLATES & RESOURCES DEVELOPED:

- [Instructional Strategies for Group Work](#)
- [Group Work - Roles, Challenges and Solutions](#)

CONSULTATION SERVICES:

- Individual and small-group consultations as well as mentoring relationships of various durations allow us to help faculty engage issues of active learning, community development in the classroom (real or virtual), effective/alternate teaching and learning strategies, class management, conflict resolution, etc. Some big content themes for the past year were open-educational resources, multimedia supplementation, gamification, and effective use of generative AI in course design, content, and delivery as well as in assessment.

This pillar focuses on providing pedagogical support to faculty members. Our team assists in instructional design, helps in the development of effective teaching strategies and techniques, and promotes innovative teaching practices. We offer support through workshops, training sessions, and/or individual consultations to enhance teaching skills and foster student engagement.

Assessment and Evaluation

WORKSHOPS OFFERED AS PART OF THE 2023 SUMMER TEACHING INSTITUTE:

- Tips, Tools, and Techniques for Alternate Assessment
- Group Work and Collaborative Assessment: Effective Strategies and Practices
- Indigegogy: Adapting and Co-creating Assessments
- Team-Based Learning I
- Team-Based Learning II
- Integrating Technology into Course Design: Building Teaching with a Technology Toolbox
- Exploring AI in Higher Education
- Indigenous Perspectives and Social Assessment
- Using Google for Collaboration, Presentation, Communication, and Organization
- Blended Learning and the Use of Videos

TEMPLATES & RESOURCES DEVELOPED:

- [IQAP CPR Support Documents related to Assessment of Teaching and Learning](#)
- [Alternative & Authentic Assessments - Sample Assessment Methods](#)

CONSULTATION SERVICES:

- Here too, private consultations have proven essential as we have worked with instructors to consider their current assessment, sometimes exploring ways to reinvigorate existing assignments and other times helping them create new, innovative, and more engaging forms of assessment – often ones that consider the realities and possibilities of Generative AI in the process. Our focus in these meetings is on helping instructors develop fresh, engaging, relevant, and authentic modes of assessment – both formative and summative. Some big themes for the past year were the effective and ethical use of generative AI in learning & assessment, more effective test-writing skills, alternate assessments, and rubrics.

This pillar involves the development and implementation of effective assessment strategies to evaluate student learning outcomes. Our team provides support to faculty members as they design valid and reliable assessments, such as exams, projects, presentations, and a variety of alternate and authentic assessments. We also support the use of assessment results as feedback for continuous improvement.

Educational Technology Integration

WORKSHOPS OFFERED:

- mycourselink/D2L Essential Skills Workshop
- mycourselink/D2L Advanced Skills Workshop
- mycourselink/D2L Quizzes Workshop
- Student Engagement Using mycourselink/D2L Intelligent Agents
- ChatGPT, AI, and the Future of Teaching (A Panel)
- Student-Focused Chat GPT Panel
- D2L Online Course Design Exemplar and How-to
- mycourselink/D2L Orientation for Grad students
- mycourselink/D2L Orientation for the Indigenous Access Program students
- Teaching with Zoom (Indigenous Languages Department)
- D2L Learning Object Repository (Student Affairs)

TEMPLATES & RESOURCES:

- [Teaching with Technology Database](#)
- [Engagement Tools Collection](#)
- [Accessible Course Design Checklist for mycourselink/D2L](#)
- [Improvements to mycourselink 2023](#)
- [Crosslinked Courses](#)
- [mycourselink & Google Drive](#)
- [Pinning Courses in mycourselink](#)
- [Transfer Content Between Course Sites](#)

CONSULTATION SERVICES:

- Consultations in this area included numerous sessions focused on using educational technology to revise teaching, learning, assignments, and assessments to take best advantage of all the new possibilities and options – as well as strategies to co-opt/pre-empt (illicit) use of educational technology by students. Some big edtech themes for the past year were the effective use of generative AI, gamification, teaching with Zoom, finding and incorporating multimedia and OER for teaching, incorporating Google tools in instruction and active learning, and leveraging D2L’s tools to move beyond static course formats and offerings.

With the growing importance of technology in education, this pillar focuses on integrating educational technology into teaching and learning processes. Our team explores and recommends appropriate tools, platforms, and software applications to enhance the learning experience. We support faculty members in effectively utilizing technology for online learning, in-class learning, blended learning, and other instructional delivery modes.

Educational Technology cont'd

over 4200
credit & non-
credit course
sites

4000+ D2L
support
requests

48 new non-
academic
sites

- A core function of the Teaching Commons is to support mycourselink/D2L. Course sites in D2L are a key component for both instructors and students; there were over 4200 (2400 last year stat) course sites created this past year, an increase of 50% from the prior year.
- With site creation comes the need for help, and over 4000 requests were made for assistance.
- Besides faculty, many academic and administrative units make requests for and require assistance in the development of non-academic course sites. These D2L sites provide academic support, training initiatives, and professional development, and the Teaching Commons provides technical support for them as well.

Over the past year, there have been significant improvements to mycourselink, enhancing its functionality and user experience.

- **Real-time integration** for mycourselink was implemented in March 2023. This automates the creation of online course sites and synchronizes enrolments in real time for an improved student and instructor experience.
- **Gmail** - In Spring 2023, the email tool in mycourselink was integrated with Lakehead's Gmail system. This means that messages composed in mycourselink are now delivered directly to the intended recipient's main Lakehead email address.
- **Setting extra time accommodations** for quizzes through the classlist - Accommodations for students can now be set on the class list, which will automatically adjust quiz times for all quizzes on a course site. This was enabled in October 2023.
- **Synchronous quiz timing option** allows instructors to set up a quiz where all learners begin and end the quiz at the same time. This was enabled in October 2023.
- **Quick Eval** was enabled in mycourselink in November 2023 and offers a centralized location where instructors can view and evaluate ungraded submissions for discussions, assignments, and quizzes across all their courses.

Indigenous Approaches to Teaching and Learning

This pillar addresses Indigenous Curriculum Support and Development. In accordance with the release of the Truth and Reconciliation 94 Calls to Action in 2015 and Lakehead's commitment to reconciliation, we recognize that education is a key part of reconciliation. Through workshops and one-on-one or group consultations, we support faculty and staff in relation to both Indigenous content and the Indigenization of the curriculum. We also work with faculty and staff to help create learning environments in which Indigenous students feel safe to contribute their input to help ensure the curriculum is in keeping with Indigenous worldviews.

An important part of working towards decolonization, Indigenization, and reconciliation at Lakehead is working in community, within Lakehead University and in Thunder Bay (and, eventually, in Orillia). This involves participating in, sometimes leading, and often being a part of various events, activities, and workshops that support the work of the ICS. It allows us time to hear what is happening in the community and to build a support network to enhance the work that Lakehead is doing. Indigenization is collaboration: this is an integral part of the work.

WORKSHOPS OFFERED:

- Pulling Together Workshops (for Student Affairs): Understanding Decolonization, Indigenization and Reconciliation, Who are Indigenous students?, Understanding Indigenous Worldview Values to Better Support Indigenous Students, Toward an Indigenized Student Services
- Pulling Together Workshops for Academic Leaders (for Deans Council): Understanding Decolonization, Indigenization and Reconciliation, Understanding Indigenous Worldviews, Indigenization as Inclusion, Reconciliation and Decolonization - Where are We at Lakehead?, Lakehead Universities Strategies - Self-Assessment - Where are we Now?, Elder Teachings from Elder Gene Nowegejick.
- Circle Work: Ensuring You Are Doing it in a Good Way

CONSULTATION SERVICES:

- One-on-one, in-person, and Zoom meetings in this area have included course syllabi reviews, course and activity ideas and suggestions, and Indigenous content reviews. Tailored workshops have also been provided to a number of teaching units. Supporting faculty, staff, and instructors in the implementation of Indigegogy practices and principles through such one-on-one sessions and workshops for specific units and leaders in the Lakehead University community have become a core component of our support for and commitment to reconciliation.

Indigenous Approaches cont'd

15+

workshops supporting
Indigenous
approaches to
teaching and learning

17

Lakehead events and
academic unit
invitations

18

events for external
agencies

LAKEHEAD EVENTS

- Indigenous Initiatives Community Breakfast
- Fall Harvest (ISSC)
- Tipi Talk (ISSC)
- Maadaadizi at Marina Park
- Sustaining Collaborative Indigenous Research
- Pipe Ceremony and Winter Feast (ISSC)
- Indigenous Graduate Student Speaker Series (ISSC)

ACADEMIC UNIT INVITATIONS

- Guest Lecture: Indigenous Peoples and Natural Resources (INDI/NRMT)
- Guest Lecture: Indigenous Nursing Entry Program presentation
- Guest Lecture: Qualitative Methods (PhD Health Sciences course)
- Guest Lecture: International English Language Centre
- Decolonization Circle (ORPT)
- KAIROS Blanket Exercise:
 - Native and Newcomer Literatures in Canada (ENGL/INDI)
 - Faculty of Law-First Year Students
 - First-year Nursing class, Indigenous Pedagogies in Education (EDUC)
- Indigenous Content Reviews:
 - Indigenous Tourism Ontario Modules (Community Zone)
 - Funding applications - (CHIR Grant Psychology)
 - International's Multicultural and Anti-Racism Program Grant (CELL Lakehead International)

Indigenous Approaches cont'd

EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES

- KAIROS Blanket Exercise
 - Gawendum Gakina Awaya Reconciliation Training (Thunder Bay Police Service) (and mask making exercise)
 - Keewaytinook Internet High School
 - Leadership Thunder Bay
 - Children's Aid Society
 - Northern Ontario School of Medicine University
- Matawa Anti-Indigenous Symposium
- Resurgent Foundations Research Gathering (Universities of Ottawa and Alberta, Seven Generations Education Institute)
- Gawendum Gakina Awaya Reconciliation Training (Thunder Bay Police Service) Feast & Celebration
- Decolonizing Journeys Grand Finale (Six Nations of the Grand River) - Centre for Indigegogy, Wilfrid Laurier University
- Walking Together: Implementing Indigenous Pedagogies into the Environmental Sciences (University of Toronto, Lakehead Orillia).
- TBCDSB St. Ignatius High School - PD Session for Teachers
- ICSN Inaugural Gathering-Kitigan Zibi First Nation, Quebec and University of Ottawa.
- HEQCO Conference: Access Reboot - Indigenous Content
- Introduction to Indigenous Ways of Knowing - Scholars-in-Residence Program (University of Toronto)
- Indigenous Research Approaches - Scholars-in-Residence Program (University of Toronto)
- Confederation College Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan External Focus Group Consultation
- National Day for Truth and Reconciliation - Genome Canada
- National Indigenous Peoples Day Committee



Professional Development

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES FOR FACULTY AND INSTRUCTORS

- Internally, the events offered through the Teaching Commons range from workshops, presentations, and self-directed or facilitated micro courses to various panels and keynote speaker events. The content, format, and priority of these offerings is guided by the Academic and Strategic plan, SEM recruitment drivers, and, most importantly, feedback and requests from faculty and academic units. These offerings reach a significant number of faculty and instructors at Lakehead from all faculties and from both campuses.
- In addition to events offered throughout the year, the Teaching Commons, since its inception, has been running the **Summer Teaching Institute**, with each year having a particular theme. The focus this year was on Theme: Tips, Tools, and Techniques for Alternate Assessment.
- Since 2019, in collaboration with the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee, the Teaching Commons has been hosting **Teaching and Learning Week**, giving the university community an opportunity to celebrate our award-winning instructors and engage in professional development activities provided by experts in the field - experts often includes Lakehead University faculty and staff. This year's event was focused on Generative AI: Responsible Uses of AI for Teaching and Learning.

334

registrants in 19 events hosted by the Teaching Commons in 2023

40+

attended the Summer Teaching Institute and participated in 10 events held over 3 days

114

participants registered for Teaching & Learning Week and took part in 10 events held over 5 days.

This pillar centers around the professional growth and development of faculty members and teaching staff. Our team offers professional development opportunities, including workshops, seminars, conferences, and communities of practice. We promote ongoing learning, encourage reflective teaching practices, facilitate the sharing of best practices among faculty members, and help with the assembly and presentation of teaching dossiers, awards applications, etc.

Professional Development cont'd

- The Teaching Commons offers a wide range of **micro courses**, which include both facilitated and self-guided courses. Two new micro-courses have been developed and offered recently: "Course Design Exemplar" to support faculty development, "Contract Lecturer Orientation" to support those new to Lakehead University.
- The Lakehead University Connecting Google Group supported by the Teaching Commons provides a platform for faculty and instructors to connect virtually on topics of relevance to teaching and learning. This informal, open, and self-supporting community has over 100 members including faculty and instructors, librarians, graduate students, and staff.
- While the primary work of the Teaching Commons is to support faculty, the **Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Certificate Program** is available for all graduate students. There has been increasing interest in this program, with 100 registrants in 2022-2023 offering, versus 73 in 2021-2022.
- Externally, there are many sources for professional development offered through a variety of reputable organizations, and the Teaching Commons works to ensure that the Lakehead University community is aware of the opportunities available. This past year, for instance, we promoted over 23 external events on behalf of organizations such as Contact North and eCampus Ontario.

15
micro
courses

100+
members

90+
grad
students

23+
events
promoted

Professional Development cont'd



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES FOR THE TEACHING COMMONS STAFF

- The Teaching Commons staff participate in the Senate Teaching and Learning committee: not only do we provide our professional expertise to each of the STLC's numerous subcommittees, but one of our staff also provides admin support for the STLC and all 7 of its sub-committees.
- Beyond the main STLC, Teaching Commons staff also are members of 13 other internal committees such as the STLC Writing sub-committee, the Micro-Credential Quality Assurance Committee, the STLC Learning Spaces and Technology sub-committee, and the Student Affairs Decolonization and Reconciliation Committee.
- Teaching Commons staff also belong to many professional organizations (11) related to our positions - for example, the Ontario Council for University Lifelong Learning, the Indigenous Curriculum Specialist Network, and the Canadian Network for Innovation in Education (CNIE). In many cases, they hold executive positions in these organizations.
- Finally, the team works in collaboration with many offices on campus. While each unit has its own area of expertise, there is often limited time to "do it all," so such partnerships create an environment through which more events and supports can be provided for faculty and instructors. For example, Cyber Awareness month is coordinated with TSC, and we promote the efforts by Health and Wellness and Student Accessibility Services to better inform instructors about mental-health resources, accommodations, and instructor supports in each of those units as well.

Professional Development cont'd

- There is a strong culture of professional development and continual learning among the staff, and collectively they have participated in over 200 free professional development activities over the past year. These learning opportunities are revenue-neutral (i.e., zero-cost) webinars, workshops, courses, panels, activities, courses of study, etc. to develop and maintain their knowledge, skillsets, and networks. Such participation keeps them up-to-date and ready to share with and support those that request their assistance. Indeed, the choice of professional development activity is often driven by the needs of those the team serves.
- **Indigegogy:** Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Indigenous Epistemologies, and Indigenous Pedagogical Strategies
- **Technology and PSE:** Teaching with/through Zoom; Generative AI for teaching, learning, research, and assessment; hybrid, hyflex, online, and virtual learning spaces and strategies; digital pedagogy and digital humanities (tools and practices); digital decolonialism; future(s) of edtech; supporting digital transformation; gamification; making the most of the LMS, tech-enabled teaching
- **Curriculum design and development:** Instructional design, instructional development, backwards design (models, methods, and tools), blended/flipped design, outcome-based learning, interleaving in course design, systematic course review, aligning outcomes with learning, (alternate) assessments, design-based instruction, academic integrity
- **Accessibility & DEI:** accessibility, inclusive design & inclusive spaces, DEI, ableism in the classroom & the university; UDL; inclusivity, accessibility, and digital pedagogy; overcoming (implicit) bias in HE; hidden disabilities in the classroom; LGBTQ+ and BIPOC in the classroom; engagement for nontraditional, first-generation, marginalized, & neurodiverse students
- **Pedagogy:** Motivation & (re)engagement of students (in-class, online, and hybrid), (inter)active learning and lectures, participation strategies, collaboration, rubric creation & use, critical literacies, pedagogies of care in the age of GenAI, teaching large-section classes, service- and community-based learning, authentic learning/assessment, STEM pedagogies and teaching/learning practices, grading strategies, responding to student feedback, "contemplative pedagogy," writing better tests and test questions, rigor (perception and realities), creating critical thinkers across the disciplines, "teaching traps," building community in the classroom
- **Resources:** Open Education/Open Educational Resources, copyright and licensing, specific collections and archives for scholars
- **Service to faculty:** Peer teaching evaluation, dossier design, career support, personal and professional support, bullying, microaggressions, work-life balance, ethics of care, empathy & resiliency in the workplace, faculty development, faculty engagement & well-being, mentoring models and practice
- **Other:** Sustainable models of PSE, flexibility in PSE, renewability and environmental costs in the digital sphere, indigenizing higher education, trauma-informed pedagogy, (inter)cultural intelligence for student success, leadership philosophies and styles

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