SUBJECT	Lessons Learned For Teaching and Learning From The Pandemic
SUBMITTED TO	Learning & Research
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SESSION CLASSIFICATION	Recommended session criteria from Board Meetings Policy: OPEN
REQUEST	For information only - No action requested
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Context and the 'Beyond COVID' project

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 support the continuity of learning and teaching for our students and faculty. The last 18 months have required remarkable and sustained individual and collective efforts, commitment and resilience on the part of faculty, staff and students. In April this year, whilst there remained still many questions about the return to campus for the fall, we took the opportunity to begin a conversation with our academic community about how we might imagine teaching and learning will be different in a beyond-COVID environment.

Rather than settle back into whatever versions of 'a new normal' might emerge entirely organically, we have engaged a group of nearly 100 faculty, staff and students in a conversation about what post-COVID learning and teaching *could* and *should* look like. What have we learned? What has worked, even perhaps better than we might have thought possible in pre-COVID times? What has not? And what might work better, if we enact it under different conditions or with adjustments? Thoughtful answers to these questions represent a significant opportunity for pedagogical enhancement and innovation. One of the advantages a large scale move online has brought has been flexibility: but how much of this flexibility do students want to retain in their learning in a new normal? Does this align with, or is it at odds with, the wishes of faculty and the needs of programs? What are the implications for the modes of faculty and student work? And, for all of these questions, what are the implications for our spaces (both physical and digital), our academic processes (scheduling, degree requirements etc.), and the supporting staff members involved throughout?

Some of this thinking was already underway through scenario planning, at a high level, across a range of functions, including teaching, research, and university operations. This 'Beyond COVID' project represented a deeper dive into the realm of teaching and learning that can take emerging ideas from the different scenarios and test their viability with stakeholders. The work for this project started in May with a call for chairs and

membership of one of six thematic Working Groups (WGs) by reaching out through academic networks, student leadership and associate deans.

In addition to the WGs, we convened a small project planning team with cross campus and student leadership membership. During July and August, the WGs each met between 4 - 6 times. The general terms of reference of these groups is included Appendix 1. The WGs contained representation from many different faculty ranks, roles and disciplines, as well as student perspectives, enabling diverse perspectives and discussions relevant to all who teach and learn at UBC.

2. Work in progress and timeline

WGs met several times over June, July and early part of Aug using their experiences over the last year, how this impacted their teaching and informed their understanding of what would continue to benefit students and faculty going forward. Over several of the meetings group members and guest speakers provided additional information on topics both University wide and focused in specific areas.

Prior to the commencement of the WGs, we had assembled a significant amount of data to inform their work: UBC surveys across both campuses, literature and other commentary on the effect of the pandemic on PSE. This was supplemented with significant data gathering and analysis that has continued over the summer. Additional data sources have included:

- (UBCV) Faculty of Arts student survey (Conducted in April 2021, >3000 responses);
- (UBCV) Faculty of Science Faculty survey (June 2021 and >250 faulty responses);
- AMS / GSS student surveys (July 2021, 8000+ responses);
- Survey of new / returning international students in direct-entry programs (Aug 2021, N=7000).

WGs were tasked with formulating recommendations for their particular thematic areas, paying attention to alignment with institutional priorities, identifying key stakeholder on campus that would need to be engaged as the recommendations were developed and to consider some low-resource 'easy wins'. These are being finalized at the time of writing and will be synthesized into a first-phase project report by the end of September.

This report will serve as the basis for further consultation, prioritization and refinement of recommendations over the fall and an engagement plan for faculty, academic leaders, Senate committees, student leaders is in development. The project will wrap up in Dec 2021, with a phase-two project report that highlights priority recommendations for implementation.

3. Preliminary and emerging themes

The synthesis of the WG recommendations is still very much a work in progress, but there are common themes that are beginning to emerge, that echo a number of the original 'Guiding Principles for remote instruction' developed early in the response to the pandemic in April 2020 (including a continued commitment to flexibility and compassion, rethinking assessment, the role of technology etc). Other themes emerging include:

- **A genuine appetite and interest to rethink, redesign and enhance the post-COVID learning and teaching future,** in the light of very hard-earned experiences over the past 18 months. Many faculty have said they are keen to retain some elements of the experience of teaching online through COVID and believe that their courses and curricula can be enhanced. This has strong implications for modes of working for both students and faculty.

- **The future looks more blended, rather than fully online or hybrid.** A need to reassess the balance of synchronous vs asynchronous learning activities, that balance the desire for in-person learning with the flexibility of recorded videos, classroom recordings etc. This raises questions of how to meet scheduling needs and what additional supports are needed within the teaching and learning community (including addressing accessibility challenges for both students and faculty).
- **A deeper understanding of barriers to engagement.** The effects of the pandemic placed many and varied barriers and challenges before faculty and students in ways they had never previously faced, whilst simultaneously removing barriers for others. There is a strong desire to create genuinely accessible, inclusive and welcoming learning spaces for all learners.
- **Pedagogical goals before technology tools.** A desire to ensure that pedagogical objectives are served by the tools and applications that we use to achieve them, and that we can go beyond merely 'privacy compliance' as an essential threshold. Widespread (complete) reliance on online assessment in high stakes assessment has raised significant ethical and academic integrity issues.
- **New ways to create community and support students.** The expansion in provision of TAs and GAAs to support student learning in new ways and through new or expanded roles has firmly established the ethos of teaching as a team enterprise. Online office hours emerged as a surprisingly effective solution to an age-old problem of low engagement and attendance. Many courses, out of necessity, utilized undergraduate TAs for the first time and are keen to keep the 'proximity support' that they can provide in classes. As these roles become more established new and expanded training and support models will need to be developed.

APPENDICES

1. Working Group Terms of Reference - General

Purpose:

Across the working groups, we will be sharing and building on our collective experiences in the working group (WG) thematic area, drawing on background materials (surveys, reports etc.) gathered during the past year. Our outputs at the end of a focussed couple of months of discussions will be a small number of recommendations on what things in the WG thematic area *could* and *should* look like in the future. The outputs of this work will enable further conversations towards being more deliberate about what we might want to retain, do differently or reject, as a result of our collective experience over the last year or so.

Key Terms of Reference:

WGs will:

1. Share group members' own and disciplinary perspectives and experiences over the past year, in relationship to the WG thematic area.

2. Consider a synthesis of student / faculty survey data gathered over the past year, together with summary insights gained from other reports on the post-COVID teaching and learning environment, as it relates to their WG area.

3. Keep front of mind current key UBC priorities and goals (including the Inclusion Action Plan and anti-racism activities, the Indigenous Strategic Plan, Climate Action initiatives etc.), together with the pressure points that have arisen from COVID (e.g. workload and work location issues, for faculty, staff and students).

4. Distil key questions facing UBC in the thematic WG area, focussing on both challenges and opportunities.

5. Propose small number (~ 3) recommendations for action that balance bold aspiration with practical realities and resource constraints.

Working Group Themes:

WG1: Implications for the design of courses – What are the implications for the way courses are designed, in the light of the past 15m of predominantly online teaching during COVID?

WG2: Teaching activities (care and compassion in course delivery, applications of policies, accommodations and concessions) – Care and compassion became a repeated refrain as faculty, staff and students grappled with markedly changed environments for teaching and learning. Aligned with the institution's commitment to EDI, how do we retain this spirit as we move forwards?

WG3: Rethinking approaches to assessment (aligned to work already underway on both campuses on academic integrity) – Building on the wiki document created for last fall, the impact of academic integrity / cheating websites, invigilation requirements and processes and understanding how these pressures impact students and faculty.

WG4: Implications for flexible curriculum and program design – How might the experiences of the past 15m influence the design of curricula; are there new, potentially online or blended possibilities to explore, to build curricular choice and flexibility?

WG5: Learning Technology tools: affordances, limitations and requirements considering the capabilities (and potentially, functional gaps) of the tools we currently have, how can these be used more effectively and what are new opportunities in this space?

WG6: Teaching as a collaborative effort: More than ever over the last 15m, we have seen that teaching is truly a collaborative effort, with GAAs/TAs having been intimately involved with the designing, building and delivery of courses, together with pedagogical and Learning Tech support staff. Thinking across both in-person and virtual classrooms how can we ensure these collaborations endure and are appropriately resourced and recognized.

A complete list of Working Groups and members is available if requested.