



Centre for Learning and Teaching

# focus

on university teaching and learning



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## From the Director

Perhaps to no one's surprise, research demonstrates that engagement – the degree to which we involve ourselves in our own learning, the learning and thinking of others, and in the world around us – has a significant effect on our persistence and success in university-level learning. In this issue of Focus, contributors highlight a number of existing and emerging Dalhousie learning experiences that genuinely foster student engagement.



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**DALHOUSIE**  
**UNIVERSITY**  
*Inspiring Minds*

## Forum on Student Engagement Enriching the First-year Experience at Dalhousie

*Louise Spiteri, Patricia Laws, and members of the Senate Committee on Learning and Teaching (SCOLT)\**

On October 30, 2008, the Senate Committee on Learning and Teaching (SCOLT) hosted more than 70 students, faculty, librarians, student services professionals, and academic administrators for an animated discussion of how the Dalhousie University community might collaborate to optimize the engagement – and the success – of first-year students. Our discussions were based on the premise that “What students do during college counts more for what they learn and whether they will persist in college than who they are and even where they go to college” (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2005, p. 8). In the opening plenary for the Forum, Lynn Taylor, Director of the Centre for Learning and Teaching, emphasized that student success is a complex phenomenon that involves a

dynamic interaction among academic development (specialized knowledge and skills in the disciplines), social development (the ability to learn and solve problems with diverse people and as a member of a community), and personal development (an awareness of our beliefs and values, and the confidence and motivation to make informed personal choices).

The research literature suggests that one of the most powerful levers in supporting students in this complex learning task is to optimize their engagement in learning experiences. Because engagement can be expressed in many different ways, definitions tend to be characterized by their lack of definition. Dr. Taylor suggested that for the purposes of our discussion, we define engagement as “the synergy created when we become actively involved in our own learning and thinking;

\*With appreciation and thanks to the members of SCOLT: Grant MacDonald (Chair), Catherine Venart, Louise Spiteri, Timothy Little, Roberta Sharp, Yannick Tremblay, Patricia Laws, Fran Nowakowski, Susan Spence Wach, Graham Reynolds, Christine Dipchand, Srinivas Sampalli, Robin Howell, Peter Schotch, and Lynn Taylor.

in the experiences, learning, and thinking of others; and in the world around us.” This self-other-community synergy creates the kinds of learning experiences that contribute to student learning, intellectual development, persistence, and success.

Effective engagement is the product of the effort that students put into their learning experiences and the institutional resources and activities that optimize student participation and success (Kuh et al., 2005). Consequently, Forum participants turned their attention to how, as a university community, we can create the conditions that favour enhanced engagement in the first-year experience at Dalhousie. Participants formed small groups to generate recommendations in one of the following areas:

1. Creative curriculum options
2. Academic advising and mentoring
3. Social integration and networking
4. Fostering connections to local communities and the world
5. Support for student success
6. Teaching and learning strategies for engagement

The groups focused on their respective themes by considering current initiatives at Dalhousie, analyzing the successes and challenges associated with these initiatives, and making one or two high-impact recommendations for strengthening the first-year learning experience, in particular.

Their primary recommendations and discussion points are described below.

## 1. Creative Curriculum Options

### Recommendation:

- Develop student communities based on common course groupings.

Discussion Points: Significant numbers of first-year students frequently select at least several courses and time slots in common. It would be helpful to group students who register for the same clusters of courses so that they will be placed in different classes with at least some members in common. This strategy lays the foundation for creating student communities that can be enhanced further by collaboration among faculty who may wish to link common topics or projects across courses. Another suggestion was to invite students to indicate their interest in one or more broad topics (e.g., the environment, community service) and match students with shared interests through timetabling of



Srinivas Sampalli addresses the Forum  
photo by Zita Hildebrandt

selected courses or by providing opportunities to participate in freshman interest groups. It was also suggested that curriculum committees remember to “keep it real” in planning first year courses by ensuring that real-world experiences come through in our classrooms and are reflected in interactions with faculty and other students.

## 2. Academic Advising and Mentoring

### Recommendation:

- Create structured mentoring programs (at the Faculty level) involving first-year students, senior students, and faculty members.

Discussion Points: Currently there are a number of different approaches to mentoring first-year students that have been implemented at departmental levels across the various Faculties at Dalhousie. Each program is structured differently. Mentor/mentee relationships include advanced student/first-year student or professor/first-year student pairings and coordination structures range from programs primarily coordinated by student organizations, professors, or a combination of both.

Participants identified specific challenges for current and future mentoring programs such as the sheer number of students entering their first year, funding, information overload during orientation, putting “a face” to the resources, and the question of how to encourage all students to seek the advice of an academic advisor. Concerns were also raised regarding privacy and confidentiality.

If Dalhousie developed a first-year mentoring program, fourth-year students could mentor first-year students using semi-structured themes such as “reality check” or exam preparation. Mentors would benefit from opportunities to develop communication and leadership skills.

Some of the features of a more robust mentoring approach would

include increased resources and a more systematic approach. For instance, during orientation, each first-year student could receive a brochure outlining various resources offered, including mentoring. Because students often experience information overload during orientation, one option is to deploy mentors to follow-up after two weeks to provide students with “just in time” information and to identify students who may need assistance. A more comprehensive mentoring program would require the support of the Faculties and the University, including funding to develop sustainable administrative infrastructure and resources.

Mentoring programs were proposed as a priority by other working groups as well. The Social Integration and Networking group identified mentoring programs as a way to connect students to the University community and engage discussions outside of the classroom. The Support for Student Success group proposed that Dalhousie implement a mentoring programme with mentorship training embedded.

The discussion of mentoring extended to the integration of increased advising resources, more generally. Bringing advising services into the classroom would raise the profile and accessibility of academic advising for every student. As an example, a first-year class project in which students are sent on a “treasure hunt” for advising resources would help students put a face to campus resources. Alternatively, assigning each student an advisor or requiring students to see an advisor before registration may be considered.

### 3. Social Integration and Networking

#### Recommendations

- Encourage social integration through the development of mentoring programs that link students, faculty, and staff with common interests (both curricular and extracurricular).
- Facilitate social integration by providing more physical spaces outside of the classroom for students, faculty, and staff to meet.

Discussion Points:

Many first-year students arrive at Dalhousie with a high level of social networking, which is facilitated through online websites such as Facebook and is expanded to include more personal interactions (such as student societies, residence life, academic collaborations) once they arrive. Social interaction between and among students serves to create new connections to the Dalhousie community as well as giving rise to engagement in learning. Students should therefore be encouraged to sign up for intramurals, clubs, and societies. Once active, they can continue in leadership and organizational roles to get others involved and connected. In the classroom, tutorials are effective tools to encourage interaction, as their smaller size brings students in larger classes together, often through group work, to increase engagement and integration.

A major challenge for social interaction is getting everyone involved. With over 100 societies on campus, many students do not

appear to have enough information about how to join. While some students are local and already have a network of friends, others come from out of town and need to build their network. There are also differences between on and off-campus students’ ability to make connections. To address these concerns, students should have places to go in between classes. The provision of lockers

in these spaces was identified as strong advantage. Although some areas of campus are well equipped with study and group-work spaces, a more equitable distribution of such spaces is required.

In addition to providing physical spaces for students to meet and interact, it is also important to find ways for students to learn about other programs, disciplines, professions, and, ultimately, different ways of thinking.

*“Forum participants turned their attention to how, as a university community, we can create the conditions that favour enhanced engagement in the first-year experience...”*

### 4. Fostering Connections to Local Communities and the World

#### Recommendation:

- Foster the involvement of students in the broader community through service learning (through a centralized program for volunteering, and the incorporation of community-based discussions in the classroom).

Discussion Points: Participants identified different strategies that are currently in place at Dalhousie to foster connections to local

communities and the world.

These strategies include first-year orientation programs, incorporating real community projects in the classroom, and fostering positive interactions with communities through extracurricular activities and volunteer networks. While some of these initiatives are currently operating in individual programs, it is important to develop a model that would be relevant to the different programs across Dalhousie.

A challenge in this area is that first-year students have difficulty knowing what opportunities are available and how to access them. More information could be made available to faculty to raise their awareness about opportunities available to students. For those students who commit to volunteer work, participation should be rewarded. One suggestion was to institute a co-curricular transcript that would show service learning, volunteer work, and affiliations. The first year of studies is critical and volunteering can provide relevance to a student's chosen degree programme and help clarify decisions about majors and career direction. If a program to ease access to a volunteer experience is set up, students will be more likely to volunteer. Currently, there is no central infrastructure to support volunteerism, but some possibilities include Career Services, online coordination or at volunteer fairs, or through a mentoring program.

The Teaching and Learning Strategies for Engagement working group also reinforced the value of connections with the broader community by inviting alumni and graduate students to be guest lecturers and mentors.

## 5. Support for Student Success

### Recommendation:

- Develop a program to inform both students and faculty about the resources and services that are available to students on campus.

Discussion Points: There is already a good network of services in place to support student success. The next step is to insure that students are informed about the services. This would require further promotion and marketing and information resources for faculty members. The top priorities identified for student success are a "Dal 101" programme to increase knowledge of services available to students, to have a safe place for students to voice their concerns and needs, and to have a mentoring program. To provide more specific support for student success, it was suggested that system for referring students to faculty members could be developed.

The interconnections between these initiatives were illustrated again, as the Fostering Connections to Local Communities and the World working group also proposed enhanced mechanisms at the classroom level to inform students about student success resources and to refer students to specific services where needed. A formal tutoring program on "how to thrive at Dal" could be modelled, including topics on how to navigate the library and how to write an essay. One concern was that student success instruction runs the risk of being de-contextualized and would benefit from more widespread efforts to make it relevant to each individual program to avoid repetition.

## 6. Teaching and Learning Strategies for Engagement

### Recommendation:

- Diversify learning experiences by fostering faculty-student interactions (through mentoring programs or alternatives to "office hours"), integrating other resources into classroom experience (senior students, teaching assistants, librarians, student services), and providing a common space for faculty to interact with students in a less formal environment.

Discussion Points: By including librarians, senior students, and Teaching Assistants (TAs) in first-year courses, Dalhousie could create an integrated learning experience that would likely improve student engagement. Further specific strategies included the integration of guest speakers to make connections outside the University and to provide links to potential careers; systematic efforts to meet students and know them by name; and increasing the use of technology-enhanced "office hours." Alternatively, TAs could be housed in a resource centre to provide "communal" office hours that could benefit a broader cross-section of students.

A number of beneficial practices were identified, prompting a suggestion that Dalhousie provide guidelines for departmental-level policies and practices to enhance student engagement and to ease the transition to university-level studies. Particular emphasis should be placed on first- and second-year students, especially in larger classes where there is potentially less interaction with professors. In this respect, two major suggestions were that there needs

to be dedicated space available in each department for students to meet with each other and their professors, and that TAs can act both as a learning resource and as a bridge to encourage students to interact directly with their professors.

The Support for Student Success working group also recommended using more diverse methods of teaching and learning and offering different types of courses to increase student engagement. In addition, using informal “midterm course assessments” (using print or technology-based tools) that provide students with opportunities to give feedback on courses before the course is finished, would create a climate of inclusiveness.

### Moving Forward

The SCOLT Forum coincided with the appointment of Dr. Deborah Kiceniuk as the CLT Associate Director (Institutional Initiatives). Deborah has already begun to meet with Faculties interested in initiatives recommended by participants in the Forum such as mentoring and the use of multi-course cohorts, and she looks forward to collaborating on additional multi-Faculty projects designed to enhance student engagement, success, and retention. For more information, you can reach Deborah at 3808 or by email at [Deborah.Kiceniuk@dal.ca](mailto:Deborah.Kiceniuk@dal.ca).

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## CLT Welcomes Deborah Kiceniuk

Dr. Kiceniuk received a PhD in Educational Foundations from Dalhousie University and also holds a Master of Medical Education degree from the University of Dundee, Scotland. Her PhD thesis was entitled “A Study of Change in the Medical Education Curriculum at Dalhousie Medical School from 1947-1967” in which she examined the social, political, and economic forces surrounding curriculum and institutional change. She has taught at the undergraduate and graduate levels in sociology and education. Dr. Kiceniuk has published and presented academic papers at national and international conferences on research methods in education, needs assessment in physician education, women in medicine, and unpaid caregiving. She currently holds research grants at the national level. In her spare time she is an avid kayaker, studies martial arts, and teaches women’s self-defense courses.



photo by Spencer Cantley

Dr. Kiceniuk joined the Centre for Learning and Teaching as the Associate Director (Institutional Initiatives) in October 2008. In this position she is responsible to develop student learning activities in collaboration with the university community that will promote student engagement, retention and success. Since October there have been many developments in these areas. Dr. Kiceniuk reports that “there is a lot of goodwill at this university and that faculty, staff, and students have been enthused and supportive of promoting student engagement at Dalhousie.” This is becoming more evident as the number of interested people contacting the Centre is increasing. Recently, funding has become available from the Vice-President Academic and Provost to support development and assessment of first year program initiatives that are aimed at promoting student engagement throughout the university at the faculty level.

These programs include:

1. Tri-Faculty Mentorship Program: The Faculties of Computer Science, Engineering, and Management, the Office of the Registrar, Student Academic Success Services, the Centre for Learning and Teaching, and student representatives are collaborating to develop a student peer mentorship program.
2. Science in the Community: In collaboration with the Faculty of Computer Science there is a plan being developed to implement a first year course in computer science that integrates practical activities and academic skill-building with learning scientific concepts.
3. First Year Student Cohorts: This program is aimed to group together students that select the same patterns of courses so that they are in multiple courses together thereby creating a learning community for incoming students.
4. The Centre for Learning and Teaching and Student Academic Success Services are discussing ways in which to implement first year seminars that develop knowledge in a field of study as well as academic/life skills for first year students. These skills would be available online for faculty members who teach in first year.

# A Whole New Green Day for Dalhousie

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by Tarah Wright  
Associate Director  
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Sustainability

Over the past three decades humanity has become increasingly aware of the growing number of problems that threaten human and ecosystem health. The ramifications of environmental degradation have led many governments and international agencies to highlight the need for human development to be based on principles of sustainability.

A sustainable society is “one that can persist over generations, one that is far-seeing enough, flexible enough, and wise enough not to undermine either its physical or social systems of support” (Meadows et al.). While a sustainable future cannot be achieved through changes and actions in one sector alone, education is a key component in working towards this goal. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, “the goal of (higher) education is to make people wiser, more knowledgeable, better informed, ethical, responsible, critical and capable of continuing to learn. Education, in short, is humanity’s best hope and most effective means in the quest to achieve sustainable development” (UNESCO, 1997).

Yet universities have been criticized for their unsustainable behaviour. David Orr (1995) argues that environmental problems are

not the work of ignorant people, but “largely the result of work by people with BA’s, B.Sc.’s, LLB’s, MBA’s and PhD’s”. Ecological footprint models show us that it is the well educated people of industrialized countries who use the majority of the earth’s natural resources and who contribute the most to the world’s sustainability problems. In fact, many scholars criticize higher education for producing disciplinary leaders incapable of addressing critical sustainability problems, because they are blindly contributing to them. Why is this? It seems that the academy is very good at fragmenting and sectoralizing information so that one discipline has no understanding of its impact on the other. For example, a student graduating from a business degree might understand the financial benefits of oil extraction, but not the full environmental, political, and social ramifications and costs (and vice versa for a student in political science or biology).

So what role can the university play in creating a sustainable future? Einstein once observed that “the significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.” This is why Dalhousie University has launched the Environment, Sustainability

and Society (ESS) program to be offered through the College of Sustainability (the first of its kind in Canada) and is the most significant and far-reaching change to the way Dalhousie educates its students in recent memory.

Educating for a sustainable future requires a different approach

*“Educating for a sustainable future requires a different approach from traditional delivery methods of teaching...”*

from traditional delivery methods of teaching to promote a full understanding or appreciation of sustainability issues as a whole and so that students learn how to translate knowledge into positive action.

In the ESS program, we are not only changing some of the content that we teach, but also challenging traditional notions of how to teach. Professors in the program are drawn from six faculties and dozens of academic disciplines. Each core class in the ESS program will be team taught so that students are exposed to multiple ways of approaching sustainability.

ESS students, while sharing a common passion for the planet, will also come to the program from a wide variety of backgrounds. Instead of creating a stand-alone program (which could be interpreted as another silo), the ESS program requires students to combine their studies with another discipline. Depending on their specialty, students work towards a Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Management,

Bachelor of Community Design, Bachelor of Computer Science or Bachelor of Informatics. The program brings students from different disciplines together to work on solving common problems and to infuse them with a new eco-conscious way of thinking. It also allows students to pursue their passions in different areas (theatre, computer science, planning, business, etc.) and enables them to make a difference in any profession they chose.

Classes in ESS will emphasize teamwork, problem-based, and experiential learning. Experiential learning is a student-centered approach that focuses on process and the development of independent thought. It has been described as “a process

through which a learner constructs knowledge, skills, and value from direct experiences” (Luckmann 1996). Dewey believed that for learning to be effective it should shift from the memorization of a body of knowledge to a process of inquisition, knowing, and understanding (Dewey 1960). Kolb (1984) contributes by introducing the cycle of learning. For Kolb, complete learning begins with a concrete experience upon which a learner reflects to find meaning (reflective observation). The learner draws conclusions (abstract conceptualization) through reflection and discourse and finally enters a phase of active experimentation where ideas and conclusions are tested. This process ultimately leads to new experiences

and the cycle continues. The Kolb model will inform instructors in the ESS program. Concrete experiences will involve field work, academic readings, laboratory experiments, and games. Reflective observation will be achieved through the writing of journals or group discussion. Abstract conceptualization will occur when students apply and test ideas in papers, projects, and model building. Finally, active experimentation is facilitated through case study, more field and laboratory work, and simulations. This ultimately will lead to the introduction of new experiences and the cycle will continue.

The introduction of experiential learning into the ESS classroom will have implications for



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instructors, learners, and the planet. First, introducing experiential learning into the classroom fundamentally changes the traditional role of the professor from knowledge expert to facilitator of experiences. ESS professors will shed their didactic cloaks and become participants in the learning process. Their role will be to ask questions that encourage students along individual learning paths, offer advice and information, and provide relevant experiences for learning. While ESS instructors will maintain a sense of connection and continuity within and between courses through curriculum design they will nevertheless enter the classroom with the realization and understanding that students have previous experiences that affect who they are and that can contribute to the learning of others.

Bringing experiential learning into the classroom means that

both students and teachers become active learners. Research into the use of experiential learning in the university classroom has shown that student motivation and satisfaction is increased through active participation in learning (Acosta 1991; Cranton 1989; Baslow and Byrne 1993). Another benefit of using experience in the classroom is the increased ability of students to transfer salient learning to other settings and situations. Students who are involved in their learning through experiential techniques are better able to make connections between their education and their daily lives than those who learn in the context of traditional pedagogies. (Cantor 1995; Cranton 1989; Knowles 1977).

Perhaps the planet as a whole will benefit most from bringing experiential learning into the ESS classroom. Research shows that

university students who learn through active and experiential learning are more likely to translate their learning into action. It is very easy for students to keep a scholarly distance from changes in global temperature, the disappearance of species, or the effects of poverty on the lives of fellow human beings. Experiential learning opportunities will help students to develop a sense of empathy for society, the natural environment, and an understanding of how to solve sustainability problems through hands-on learning. After four years, students can expect to graduate as critical thinkers, communicators, researchers, and effective team members. They will be leaders who will approach all they do with an understanding of sustainability and will contribute to a new generation of leaders.

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# Teaching Seminar Using the “Master Class” Experience

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by Joan Conrod and Laura Cumming  
School of Business Administration

In the School of Business, we recently hosted a teaching seminar to foster enhanced student learning. The seminar allowed participants to observe other faculty members in live class settings. Our intention was to spark debate about classroom activities that enhance learning. We called this experience the “Master Class” in teaching. Five faculty members, each with a reputation for teaching excellence, agreed to open one class session to participant instructors. At the end of the week, an informal session was held to debrief the experience and explore insights. Participants were encouraged to make voluntary commitments to try teaching techniques in their own classrooms.

We chose the second week of the winter term for this exercise, because we felt that the participants would be thinking about their own learning environments and teaching objectives for the term at that point, and would be in a position to implement changes in their own developing classes. Thus, the seminar might have some immediate impact on the student learning experience. We also felt that there would be more conflicts later in the term with deadlines for major deliverables, both for the host instructors and the participants. We designated a 30-minute window from an 80-

minute class for observation, both to avoid interfering with a learning environment for the host students and the host instructor, and to make the observation obligation manageable for the participants.

The instructors asked to host these sessions were all teaching award winners, known for their excellence in the classroom and beyond. We ensured that a variety of disciplines were covered, and that classroom times meshed over the course of a week. The sessions were announced via e-mail late in the fall term, with the invitation repeated in the first week of the winter term. Participants were asked to commit to at least three of the five sessions, to provide some cross-section and basis for comparison, but also recognizing that timetables, class and committee obligations would make 100% attendance impossible.

We used the scheduling web site doodle.com to keep track of the registrations for each class; this is an effective scheduling web site with many uses.

This initiative was characterized as a ‘grassroots’ exercise – attendance was not mandated by the Dean’s/Director’s office, and announcements did not emanate from that source, although an enthusiastic endorsement was issued. Essentially, if individuals wished to participate, they were welcome to do so. The participation level was encouraging, with

approximately 14 participants from a pool of over 40 faculty members in the School of Business. Some of these participants were early career faculty and several were faculty members moving into new teaching challenges, so were especially interested in contemplating their teaching styles and philosophies. The participants were enthusiastic and receptive.

The participants’ feedback was very positive. The general consensus was that the “Master Class” presented a valuable opportunity to think about the student learning environment. There was an opportunity to learn from, and discuss ideas with, other faculty members. Participants attended an average of three sessions each, and most indicated that this was an appropriate commitment. To attend more than

three sessions within one week would not fit the busy schedules of most participants. However, a few participants suggested that thirty minutes was not enough time to develop a “feel” for an instructor’s style or approach, a suggestion that one host instructor echoed.

Participants also provided useful suggestions for future workshops, to enhance the student learning experience. For example, two individuals requested a workshop dedicated solely to uses of technology in the classroom. Another participant offered an idea to have a workshop where

*“The general consensus was that the “Master Class” presented a valuable opportunity to think about the student learning environment.”*

instructors could discuss and share evaluation methods.

The host instructors indicated that having observers in their classrooms has not interrupted their pedagogy, and thus did not detract from the students' learning experience. All said that they were pleased to participate for the benefit of their colleagues and their students. One instructor commented that being observed made her reflect on her own teaching style that fostered her own professional development in the area of student engagement.

Suggestions for future offerings focused on the length of the individual sessions and the time of year in which such a seminar would be most beneficial. Several host instructors felt that holding the event later in the term would allow observation after more rapport was built with their classes, thereby providing a greater opportunity to demonstrate certain techniques that they felt were effective in fostering student learning.

Teaching can be a lonely exercise, even though instructors are surrounded by a wealth of experience and expertise. Many of us are curious about how others conduct their classes, and the activities that are especially effective for student learning. Observing other faculty members, especially those who are recognized for teaching effectiveness, can boost confidence, provide living models, and open communication about teaching and learning approaches. Our experience with this process in the School of Business has been extremely positive, and we hope to make it a regular event.

## **Insights from the “Master Class”**

Instructors and faculty participants identified various aspects of teaching and learning for discussion as a result of the ‘Master Class’ observations:

### **Student engagement**

Students tended to participate actively in the observed classes, whether they were debriefing a solution to a quantitative question, fleshing out a PowerPoint mini-lecture on technical content, or exploring an issue in case analysis. The participants were able to identify various questioning/probing techniques that the host instructors used, acknowledging that, while they were related to personal styles and disciplines, they could be adapted to their own teaching and learning environments.

### **Establish objectives for students**

Participants noted that several instructors provided structure through identifying learning objectives, themes, or take-aways at the beginning and end of class – this solidified student understanding, especially valuable where the material was unstructured.

### **Confidence**

Participants agreed that all the host instructors were ‘comfortable in their own skins’ in class. Students seemed to connect well to confident and comfortable personalities, even early in the term.

### **Use of technology**

An obvious “wow” factor was some of the technology routinely used by the host instructors – everything from the document cameras, simultaneous use of different screens, use of tablet computers to “write” on PowerPoint, and so on. The participants agreed that this active technology helped engage students.

### **Organization**

Students and instructors operate in the classroom setting as part of a group dynamic. Participants were interested in the organization protocols, while acknowledging that these were idiosyncratic and many approaches could work. Participants commented on the use of name cards, the way that class members were assigned to groups, how presentation topics were assigned, plus ways to handle late-comers, cell phones, and assignment submissions. These are the “details” that can enhance or interfere with the character of a course.

# Experiential Engagement in Africa

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by Owen Willis  
*International  
Development  
Studies*

In the midst of a cold and snowy winter, thoughts easily turn to warmer climes, especially to teaching in warmer climes – say, under a mango tree on the banks of the Nile. Students are just as enthusiastic in trading in the Life Sciences Centre for the savannah. In such environments, student engagement often becomes an easier task.

Study abroad programmes are an integral feature of universities, and particularly of international development programmes, across Canada. The media also regularly focus on young Canadians engaged in humanitarian and development work around the world. The assumption is that such experiential engagement abroad is a beneficial experience for all concerned.

Following on from the successful Dalhousie International Development Studies programme in Cuba, Rebecca Tiessen introduced a Field Studies programme in Africa in 2001. After initial ventures in Kenya and Malawi, I took over the programme in 2003 and located it primarily in Uganda, in association with Mbarara University of Science and Technology. In the last few years, I have allowed the programme to morph into more of a moveable feast of teaching – allowing for travel in Uganda, Kenya,

Rwanda, and Ethiopia. At a time when most Canadian universities see the need for experiential learning abroad, I believe that this Dalhousie programme represents one of the most interesting and intensive study tours on offer across Canada, considering the scope of its geographic breadth and thematic variety over the space of just six weeks. For those who may wish to remain in Africa once the programme is over in order to gain some volunteering experience, either at some of the organizations we have visited or through previously arranged placements, the one credit on offer from the trip can be augmented by an extra half credit from the Experiential Learning Abroad course offered in IDS.

Engagement is not the biggest challenge on such a trip. Where better to discuss religion than in the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, conservation policy amongst the elephants of the Ugandan forest, or corruption amongst those other kinds of elephants – the white varieties – elsewhere? In fact, it is impossible

not to be engaged when listening to a genocide survivor in Rwanda embrace her would-be murderer. Such experience concentrates the mind wonderfully. When traveling in Africa, it is hard not to be

engaged with the bigger questions of global inequality. Questions of privilege cannot be avoided when you realize that your backpack may contain more of value than the average person's home. While it may be easy to compartmentalize the theory of development in the classroom, the practice of development is everywhere in Africa. Together with the more conventional assignments of research paper, book report, and tests, students are asked to grapple daily with the challenges of development in the pages of a journal.

Engagement may go even deeper – I have had a number of students tell me that these are life-changing experiences. Students may soon be disabused of their notions of “saving Africa” – as they realize that Africans are far more capable,

resilient, and optimistic than they are often portrayed in North America – and that may lead to greater personal introspection. Fundamental conceptions of lifestyle, wellbeing, and values may be incisively challenged. Some students may treat the experience as an expansive

field trip, for others it may be confirmation that this will not be their career path, but for others still the experience may change the whole trajectory of their lives.

While the benefits of such

*“Study abroad programmes are an integral feature of universities, and particularly of international development programmes, across Canada.”*

experiential learning programs appear so obvious, a more critical analysis is essential. Do Study Abroad programmes live up to the hype

surrounding them? Barbara Heron and Rebecca Tiessen are currently involved in a major study here in Canada: “Creating Global Citizens? The Impact of Learning/Volunteer Abroad Programs.”

The researchers are looking at the effect that volunteer placements overseas have on young Canadians and the communities that host them.

While student engagement may prove relatively easy, ethical engagement may be more



problematic. Are enough ethical safeguards in place? Marc Epprecht discusses the ethical implications of such programmes in an excellent

article entitled, “Work-Study Abroad Courses in International Development Studies: Some Ethical and Pedagogical Issues.” He challenges

the notion that study abroad programmes should be seen as an uncontested good and concludes:

“In sum, work-study courses represent an opportunity within international development studies to not just provide an enriched education for North American students or for the achievement of small

development projects and goodwill in the host countries: they also provide us with a means to keep a close watch on ourselves and, in particular, to guard against becoming too comfortable or too smug in our commitment to social justice. To the extent that the latter happens, we in development studies become a part of the problem of inequitable and unsustainable development rather than a part of the solution.”<sup>1</sup>

Many other challenges abound, but the following questions cannot be ignored:

1. How to manage risk? Issues of risk are paramount – anyone leading such a trip realizes they can become more of a risk manager than a pedagogue. I attempt to engage all students in risk management, as expressed in the Programme

## Dalhousie University Awards of Excellence for Teaching



Tracy Taylor-Helmick  
Department of Psychology  
2009 Dalhousie Alumni Association Award of Excellence for Teaching

*“...her involvement in the academic success of her students exceeds all expectations of an instructor, academic advisor or supervisor...”*



Danièle Allard  
Department of French

2009 Dalhousie Sessional and Part-Time Instructor Award of Excellence for Teaching

*“Dr. Allard’s willingness to go above and beyond her duties as a professor has made her classes extremely enjoyable to attend as a student.”*



John Anthony Ross  
Department of Emergency Medicine  
2009 Dalhousie Educational Leadership Award

*“...he is without question a leader in medical education at Dalhousie University and beyond...I hope to someday emulate some of his great qualities.”*

All photos used with permission

Handbook: “I consider the personal safety of every student as my highest priority. We can’t eliminate all risk (even staying at home can have its risks!), but we must minimize it. I’d like this to be a partnership, where you too do all you can to minimize risk.” I am grateful that students have generally shown great responsibility in this area.

2. How to avoid elitism? While some students suggest that this is an engaging educational experience like no other, for others it may be a reinforcement of the benefits of wealth and privilege. After all, only students with resources can afford to participate in such expensive programmes. Considering that universities unabashedly use such programmes in their marketing, could they provide more

financial support to ensure greater accessibility to learning abroad experiences?

3. Is the experience all “one-way?” What reciprocal features are built into the programme? In our case, we have tried to provide benefits for students at Mbarara University – most recently we were able to bring a Master’s student on full scholarship to Dalhousie. Our programme also functions as a small-scale development initiative in its own right, helping some deserving organizations along the way. Schools, orphanages, health centres and grassroots development organizations have all been helped, albeit in a small way.
4. How to avoid the “Canadian cocoon” while traveling in Africa? I enjoy sharing

some sentiments from earlier evaluations:

*What was the best thing about the trip?*

Traveling around Africa with a bunch of Dalhousie students.

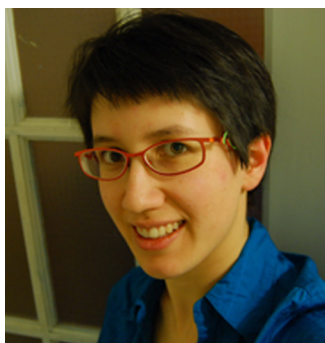
*What was the worst thing about the trip?*

Traveling around Africa with a bunch of Dalhousie students.

While questions abound of one thing I am sure: students who expect to find all the answers to development will be sadly disappointed. But hopefully they will be better equipped to ask the right questions, as they engage with the issues and negotiate their place in the world. And that is surely what education is all about.

1. Marc Epprecht, “Work-Study Abroad Courses in International Development Studies: Some Ethical and Pedagogical Issues,” *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, XXV, 4, 2004, page 704.

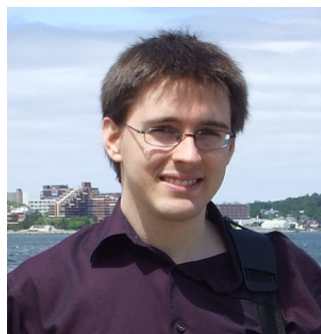
## Dalhousie University Awards of Excellence for Teaching



Yuen-ying Carpenter  
Department of Chemistry

2009 Dalhousie President’s  
Graduate Teaching Assistant  
Award

*“The quality of Yuen-ying’s teaching that makes her stand out is her ability to consistently elicit **thinking** in the laboratory.”*



Jonathan Fawcett  
Department of Psychology

2009 Dalhousie President’s  
Graduate Teaching Assistant  
Award

*“His ability demonstrated his desire to help the students grasp the material and succeed in the class.”*



Cheryl Saunders  
Department of Chemistry

2009 Dalhousie President’s  
Graduate Teaching Assistant  
Award

*“Cheryl’s passion for teaching is demonstrated not only by her commitment to students in the laboratory but also by her efforts as a resource to all undergraduate students.”*

# Building on Success: The Redesigned Bachelor of Management Program

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by Vivian Howard  
School of  
Information  
Management

## What is the Bachelor of Management?

Dalhousie's Bachelor of Management program is one-of-a-kind. Unlike other universities' management programs, our Bachelor of Management draws upon the unique configuration of Dalhousie's Faculty of Management which offers programs in distinct yet related domains: Business Administration, Information Management, Public Administration, and Resource and Environmental Management. Thus, this innovative multidisciplinary program encourages undergraduate students to explore management in its broadest context and to understand the complex social, economic, ecological, political and technological forces shaping 21st century leadership in the public, private and non-profit sectors.

Since its launch in 1999, the Bachelor of Management program has become a highly successful four-year undergraduate degree. With almost 500 students this year, it is the fastest growing undergraduate program at Dalhousie. Notably, the fall of 2009 will mark both the 10th anniversary of the program and the launch of the redesigned Bachelor of Management, which promises to make a successful program even more appealing to a wider range of students.

## Why Change a Successful Program?

Although the "classic" Bachelor of Management program has clearly proven popular, consultations with faculty, staff and students revealed three key aspects of the degree where improvements could be made:

### Choice versus Focus

The Bachelor of Management was originally designed to be a very flexible degree, in which 40% of classes are open electives. Students take most of their core courses in their first two years, leaving them free to take a wide range of electives in their third and fourth years. This freedom is not without its problems as students struggle to select meaningful elective classes and create a coherent program of study in their senior years. Too often, students feel their senior years are unfocused just at the time when they have the preparation and maturity to concentrate their studies on a particular aspect of management.

### Program Identity

The sense of identity and belonging that was fostered in the first two years of core study is dissipated, as students only enrol in one core management class per term for their final two years. As a result, many graduates leave the program feeling disconnected, without a strong identity as Bachelor of Management alumni.

## Program Differentiation

The Faculty of Management offers two undergraduate programs: the Bachelor of Commerce and the Bachelor of Management. The Commerce degree, of course, is well-established and very well known. Many Management students do not understand the difference between the two degrees and see themselves as "business students" like their Commerce counterparts. The Bachelor of Management program was always intended to introduce students to broad-based management principles that apply to the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors, but students often do not appreciate the multi-sectoral approach and the intellectual fit of their required courses in public administration, information management, and environmental management.

## Analysis and Consultation

Several factors converged to make the time right for a redesign of the Bachelor of Management program. First, in 2005, all four Schools in the Faculty moved into one building, the Kenneth C. Rowe Management Building, fostering increased daily communication and interaction between faculty and students. Second, David Wheeler joined the Faculty as Dean in 2006, and his vision of "Management Without Borders" reinforced a values-based, holistic approach to undergraduate management education. With his encouragement and support, the Bachelor of Management office initiated a consultation process in the fall of 2007 involving students, faculty,

staff, and university administrators. From these consultations, three key program modifications were developed which directly address program focus, program identity, and program differentiation.

### Seven Thematic Majors

Bachelor of Management students expressed a clear desire for more opportunity to explore various aspects of management studies in greater depth, beyond the core of required courses. Thus, six optional majors were developed:

- Entrepreneurship and Innovation
- Knowledge Management
- Leadership and Organizations
- Management and Globalization
- Public Sector Management
- Sustainable Resources and the Environment

In each of these six multidisciplinary majors, students take introductory and capstone classes within the Faculty of Management and select recommended electives from a list of relevant classes offered across the university, in the faculties of Management, Arts and Social Sciences, Science, and Computer Science. These majors also strongly reinforce the multisectoral approach of the Bachelor of Management Program and increase differentiation from the Commerce Program.

The fourth term capstone classes, in particular, will foster a stronger sense of community as students will work with their classmates

to integrate knowledge gained through previous coursework and experience and build on that conceptual foundation through integrative analysis, practical application, and critical thinking, using a combination of case studies, community-based projects, and discussion.

With the launch of the College of Sustainability and the unique new undergraduate program in Environment, Sustainability and Society, the Bachelor of Management was able to add yet a seventh multidisciplinary major: the major in Sustainability.

### Commitment to Writing and Research Across the Curriculum

Both faculty and students recognized that writing and research skills are critical to students' future success. Thus, the Bachelor of Management has strengthened its commitment to reinforcing writing and research skills across the curriculum. A new intensive third-year core class in professional communications skills (MGMT 3602.03) has been developed to hone students' oral and written communications skills at the time when students can best appreciate the critical importance of effective communication: prior to their entry into the job market or an internship.

### Internship Option

Students clearly recognize the value of obtaining relevant work experience as part of their degree. After extensive consultations with students and

with staff in Management Career Services, a specialized support unit in the Faculty, an optional internship opportunity has been introduced as part of the Bachelor of Management redesign. This will be available to Bachelor of Management students in 2012. Students will be able to earn a full academic credit by completing an approved internship between their third and fourth year of study. These paid internships, which may be from 8 to 16 months duration, will provide valuable practical experience that students can integrate into their capstone courses.

### An Exciting Future

We are very enthusiastic about the redesigned Bachelor of Management program, which will be launched in the fall of 2009. Student response has been extremely positive and many current students are already eagerly planning to undertake a major or apply for an internship. At the same time, students who want to complete the Bachelor of Management without taking advantage of these new opportunities will still be able to do so. We believe the redesign process has taken a strong and successful degree program and has made it even better, without imposing any barriers to students who prefer the flexibility of the "classic" version of the program. The success of the Bachelor of Management's redesign process is a testimony to the value of extensive consultation with a variety of stakeholders. The creativity and the insight of students, staff, faculty, and administrators have shaped the redesigned Bachelor of Management from the ground up!

*"We believe the redesign process has taken a strong and successful degree program and has made it even better..."*

# Dalhousie Teaching and Learning with Technology Grants 2008-2009 Recipients

The Teaching and Learning with Technology (TLT) Grants were established in 1999 to support faculty members seeking innovative ways to incorporate technology into their teaching practice. Since then, over 140 grants have been awarded for a wide variety of projects. Over time, the specific objectives and criteria for the grants have changed in response to technological advances and institutional priorities, but the overarching aim continues to be to provide the resources for faculty to use both established and emerging technologies to create high quality learning experiences for Dalhousie students.

Look for the next call for proposals in the fall of 2009. For more information on the TLT Grants, see:  
[http://learningandteaching.dal.ca/grant\\_tlt.html](http://learningandteaching.dal.ca/grant_tlt.html)

Name and Department	Project Title
Marion Brown Carolyn Campbell Trish Farry Cyndi Hall Judy MacDonald <i>School of Social Work</i>	Course Development Team Support Grant for SLWK 21111, SLWK 2222, and SLWK 2333
Joseph Byrne Sandra Drew Saleema Karim <i>School of Health Sciences</i>	Course Development Team Support Grant for Distance Delivery of the Master of Health Administration Program
Yuri Leving <i>Russian Studies</i>	The Gift Project: Concordance, literary, and visual commentary
Benjamin Davis <i>Oral and Maxillofacial Sciences</i> Greta Rasmussen <i>Dentistry</i>	Minor Surgical Procedures in Dentistry
Gillian Gass Tarah Wright <i>Biology</i>	Lecture Capture in a Large Introductory Biology Class
Fran Nowakowski <i>University Libraries</i>	International LibCasts



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