# OUSA

Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance is a non-partisan advocacy organization that represents the interests of over 160,000 undergraduate and professional, full-time and part-time university students at nine student associations across Ontario.

TEACHING AND ASSESMENT

The education that undergraduate students receive is a fundamental aspect of their post-secondary experience. Given the constantly evolving landscape of technology and the requisite skills and competencies necessary for success in the 21st century, institutions must adapt to provide meaningful learning experiences to students. Despite being key stakeholders, students bring forth issues of accessibility and inclusion within learning spaces. These issues relate to the quality of teaching and learning, limited high-impact learning opportunities and inadequate inclusive learning experiences. Given that these issues have a direct impact on student's learning experiences and growth, it is crucial that sector stakeholders work collaboratively to promote high-quality, inclusive, and abundant learning opportunities.
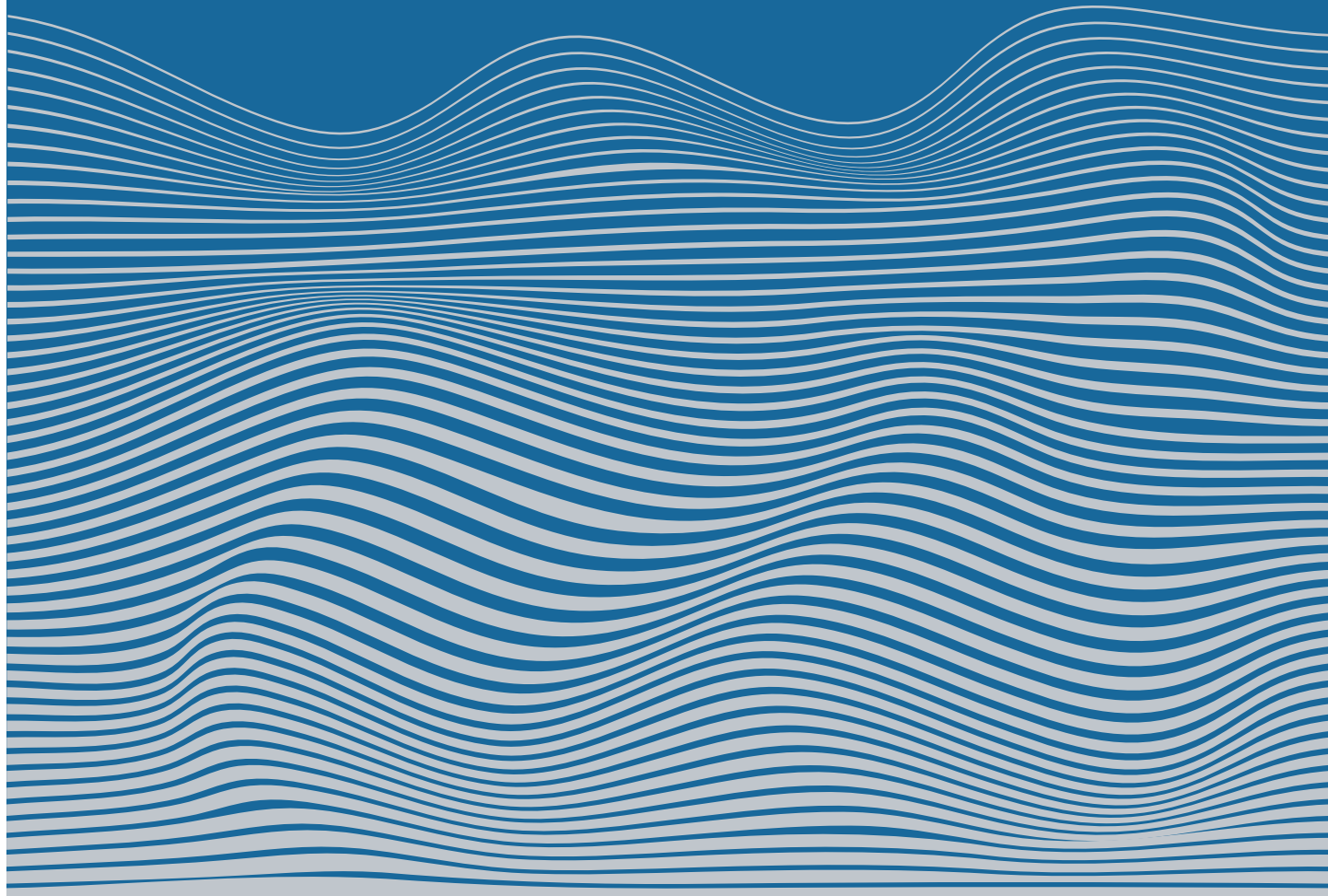
THE PROBLEM

Gaps in Teaching and Learning

Students are concerned about the overreliance on traditional pedagogies and assessment styles and their inadequacy in capturing learning outcomes, such as those set by Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (UUDLES). Furthermore, they are concerned that not all teaching assistants are formally trained or have incentives to develop their pedagogical skills, which may lead to the adoption of ineffective teaching strategies. Additionally, there are inconsistencies in how teaching staff accommodate students' short-term absences and the limited options for online learning.

Despite being valuable resources for students and faculty, teaching assistants are not always provided adequate training, resources and supports. The roles and responsibilities of an undergraduate teaching assistant are often not clearly defined and enforced, leaving them vulnerable to taking more workload than they are compensated for. Students have expressed concerns about the limited student feedback mechanisms, the switch to online systems of evaluations, and the unavailability of evaluations before course registration. Lastly, students are concerned about the limited opportunities for professional development for contract staff and the underrepresentation of marginalized groups in teaching positions.

Limited High Impact Learning Opportunities

Students are concerned that some disciplines and programs, such as arts, social sciences, and humanities, provide comparatively fewer opportunities for experiential learning, especially undergraduate research opportunities. Due to costs associated with such opportunities, the inconsistency across programs and the decentralized nature of undergraduate research opportunities, accessing those opportunities

may disproportionately affect students from low socioeconomic status.

Students have identified that they struggle to articulate the skills and learning outcomes after they complete experiential learning and co-op opportunities, often referred to as a "skills awareness gap," and are concerned that few post-secondary institutions have implemented a recognition system to support students in the process of being accredited for experiential learning experiences and co-ops, which can be costly and requires considerable administrative power.

Inadequate Inclusive Learning Experiences

Students are concerned that there is heavy reliance on a narrow group of assessment types, which do not encourage meaningful and comprehensive learning and are less likely to reliance on a narrow group of assessment types, which do not encourage meaningful and comprehensive learning and are less likely to gauge students' understanding of concepts in the course. Furthermore, students note that heavily weighted or cumulative assessments can be a significant source of stress for students and can cause them to underperform. Additionally, as remote assessments are more commonly used in the post-secondary space, students are concerned that AI online proctoring software has inequitable requirements, making it inaccessible for students from racialized, religious groups and those with disabilities. Moreover, such software presents the potential for severe privacy and security concerns for students, including how data is collected, retained, used, and shared.

Cultivating a safe, inclusive and accessible learning environment is integral for student success, and fostering such spaces requires proper training, such as accessibility and disability inclusion training and anti-sexual and gender-based violence for teaching staff. This, however, is limited. Students are also concerned

that mandatory inclusion training may lead to re-traumatization for marginalized students and staff. Additionally, students have expressed concerns about using academic freedom to justify misinformation, omission and abusive language. Such instances may also go unreported and may create unsafe learning environments for some students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving Teaching and Learning

Students recommend that the provincial government support ongoing learning opportunities for faculty through envelope funding, emphasizing the diversification of teaching methodologies to integrated UUDLES principles and providing funding to promote online, hybrid and remote delivery.

In addition, they suggest that the provincial government should work with the Ministry of Colleges & Universities to increase institutional funding and enact policy changes based on the recommendations provided by the Post-secondary Education Standards Development Committee. Moreover, they recommend that the provincial government task the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) to create a framework that assesses the quality of remote teaching.

Furthermore, students recommend that the provincial government fund post-secondary institutions to provide training and protections for undergraduate teaching assistants and should work with post-secondary institutions to develop standards defining undergraduate teaching assistants' roles, responsibilities, and limitations.

The students suggest that the provincial government task HEQCO investigate evaluation tools for teaching staff, consult sector partners about developing metrics to account for biases in teaching evaluations, and research best practices to increase accessibility and

involvement in student evaluation of teachings. This should be supplemented by the provincial government mandating post-secondary institutions to use multiple sources of information for the assessment and renewal of faculty. Moreover, they should mandate post-secondary institutions publish quantitative data on teaching staff evaluations before the course registration period. In addition, the students suggest that the provincial government create fund for post-secondary institutions conduct equity audits to help identify equity gaps in institutional hiring and retention practices and mandate post-secondary institutions to utilize those results and enforce equitable hiring and retention practices across Ontario.

Expanding High-Impact Learning Opportunities

The students recommend that sector stakeholders collaborate to develop models that promote experiential learning experiences for all students. This should be supplemented by providing envelop funding to increase experiential learning opportunities. Furthermore, the provincial government should implement a needs-based bursary to increase access to experiential learning opportunities for students with financial needs.

In terms of undergraduate research opportunities, the students recommend that the provincial government should implement

a needs-based bursary to increase access to experiential learning opportunities the students recommend that the provincial government provide funding to increase the number of such opportunities, with a separate stream for non-STEM fields. Moreover, the students suggest that the provincial government provide post-secondary institutions with funding to create bursaries and grants to reduce the financial burden of students who wish to undertake non-credit undergraduate reserach. Finally, students suggest that HEQCO develop compensation models to be implemented as a baseline in undergraduate research opportunities.

To address the concerns around skills awareness, the students recommend that the provincial government task HEQCO to research methods to incorporate learning outcome frameworks and standards for experiential learning and develop a system-wide learning outcomes framework for institutions in Ontario. Moreover, they should create a co-curricular recognition framework that institutions can utilize. To support this, the provincial government should provide envelope funding for developing and implementing co-curricular recognition systems.

Enhancing Inclusive Learning Environments

Students recommend that HEQCO research the effectiveness and fairness of final examinations, establish a best practice framework for final examination pedagogy, and provide envelope funding to institutions to help faculty develop and implement alternative evaluations and assessments. Next, the students recommend that the Ministry of Colleges and Universities mandate institutions to develop a set of standards to ensure that online proctoring software must meet equitable assessment, privacy, accessibility, and data rendition/security practices and that these policies be developed in consultation with students and student government representatives. Moreover, they suggest that the provincial government should prohibit AI online proctoring software until post-secondary institutions have clear standards to ensure that students are not unfairly disadvantaged, that assessments fairly evaluate student learning, and that the related student data is not at risk.

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should work with HEQCO to publish guidelines for post-secondary institutions to create accessible reporting tools which protect student privacy and allow students to report harmful behaviour of teaching staff delivery based on academic freedom. Moreover, the provincial government should create a committee composed of members from the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations and student governments to develop zero-tolerance standards on hate speech and misinformation that institutions must implement in their respective academic freedom policies. The students recommend

that the provincial government provide funding for post-secondary institutions to provide mandatory training, such as accessibility and disability inclusion training; anti-sexual and gender-based violence training. Further, students ask that mandatory training include opt-out options for persons with lived experiences to prevent re-traumatization.

Regarding EDI training, the students recommend that the provincial government identify Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) offices and programming as an essential resource to create EDI training and should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to create and maintain EDI offices. To keep current, the provincial government should mandate universities include a mandatory renewal cycle not greater than five (5) years.

"As the world rapidly evolves, our post-secondary institutions must remain at the forefront of innovation and adaptability. We owe it to our students to ensure that essential learning opportunities are equitable, accessible and tailored to the needs of all students. Sector stakeholders must work collaboratively to address barriers preventing students from accessing a high-quality post-secondary learning experience."

– Jessica Look OUSA President

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