

Report of the Provost's Task Force for Online Education

June 2020

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Executive Summary

In August 2019, the Provost initiated a Task Force to examine Online Education at Western. It's mandate was to:

- review the broader national and international contexts of online education (undergraduate, graduate, continuing education, and lifelong learning);
- identify any potential benefits of expanding online programs at Western; and
- suggest potential priorities, directions, and approaches for such an expansion.

The Task Force was also asked to address specific questions related to developing high-quality, sustainable online programs and to place this within the context of comparator institutions and Western's current practices, policies, and programs when making recommendations.

The report is structured to provide its response to the mandate in the main body, while the environmental scan and examination of the detailed questions are included in the Appendices. The committee completed most of its work by January 2020, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. An Addendum to the report, written in June 2020, discusses how the report's findings can be implemented in light of the significant disruption caused by the pandemic.

The report recommends that Western should expand its online program offerings. The high-level recommendations, in brief, are that Western (i) will need to develop a vision and strategic plan for the institution, (ii) should consider expanding first into professional and course-based graduate programs and continuing education, but will (iii) need to develop institutional capacity to cover all aspects on the online program life cycle and (iv) resource these developments sufficiently to ensure success. Detailed recommendations can be found in the body of the report.

While the pandemic has changed the expectations of students to some extent, the longer-term rationale for increasing our online program offerings still hold. In particular, development of an online program life cycle approach at Western will (i) help drive organizational and curricular renewal, (ii) increase access to educational opportunities, and (iii) meet the needs for life-long learners in an environment where the nature of work is changing. Western has many strengths to build on including its reputation as a research-intensive university with high admission standards and an excellent student experience.

Details of the current online programs, courses, and enrolments at Western are highlighted in Appendix 1. Appendix 2, examines who the learners for online and blended programs are, along with the potential markets. Appendix 3 examines the current resources that Western has to build on, while Appendix 4 discusses the key institutional supports that are required for success. Of significant importance in the current environment, Appendix 5 provides an

overview of best practices for developing high quality programs. Appendices 6 and 7 describe how online instructors and learners should be supported. Appendix 8 examines current Western policies and practices that support and hinder the development of online programs. Finally, Appendix 9 discuss Business Models which will support the Online Program Life Cycle.

In light of the pandemic, the Addendum addresses potential changes to student expectations along with both the opportunities and threats to Western. Steps for Implementation also included.

COVID-19 Response

This section provides an update to the initial Provost's Task Force for Online Education report by focusing on three critical areas that are changing rapidly as a result of COVID-19:

- student expectations
- organizational opportunities
- organizational threats

The initial Provost Task Force Report for Online Learning underscored the urgency of continuing to innovate and pivot toward online learning at Western, providing new opportunities, and meeting changes in students' preferences. Given the significant impact of COVID-19, this addendum provides an update to that report. Within the post-secondary educational landscape, seismic changes are in motion as a result of this deep and broad crisis. It would be unwise, and probably impossible, to ignore the momentum of moving instruction online that has come as a result of Covid-19. By adopting a prospective rather than retrospective view of the rapid and ongoing shift to online learning, Western has an opportunity to renew its commitment to high quality programming and refocus itself by capitalizing on the opportunities rooted within this historic upheaval. This includes expediting its move to online learning as part of its current response to COVID-19 while still planning for a post-pandemic future.

This perspective is inherently optimistic, which is critical to gaining stakeholder buy-in when creating structures to support online learning. Organizational members have no reason to be inspired if they cannot see a positive outcome. In focusing on renewal while also meeting pressing current organizational needs, organizational leaders can motivate campus members to build on institutional momentum and retool programming to a level that surpasses pre-crisis status. In so doing, Western's leadership communicates a sense of optimism and commitment, inspiring others to embrace the view that with upheaval, comes opportunity (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2007).

Student Expectations

Arguably, higher education is at an inflection point regarding students' new expectations and online learning. Andreas Schleicher, head of education at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), argues that some of the multiple aftereffects of COVID-19 will be students taking more ownership over their learning. They will have a greater understanding about how they learn, what they like, and what support they need, and they will want to personalize their learning. Students have crossed the threshold into learning online, experiencing the flexibility and accessibility that online learning affords them. There seems to be nothing to indicate that this will not remain as a new normal aspect of student experience.

While it may not be universal, students will place a greater emphasis on the benefits afforded to them via online programs (Lau, Yang, & Dasgupta, 2020).

Joseph Aoun, President of Northeastern University, asserts that the institutions that thrive post-pandemic will be those that understand how humans are crossing the boundaries between the physical and digital — and back again (Wong, 2020). Recent data from the USA suggests that COVID-19 applicants are now more focused on online programming and relatively less interested in traditional offline education opportunities. Furthermore, many adult learners are willing to enroll in unaccredited online programs that are faster and cheaper and are tied to a field of potential employment (Horn, 04/30/20). In terms of university offerings, students are looking more favourably at institutions with good track records of online programming as opposed to universities that do not have as much experience with online learning (DePietro, 2020). As these experiences take root and improve, some institutions offering novel approaches to post secondary learning will become more attractive.

Opportunities

In the future, every president, provost, dean, and trustee will understand that online education is not only a potential source for new revenues. Instead, online education will be recognized as core to every school's plan for institutional resilience and academic continuity (Kim, 2020).

Hepburn (2020) argues that after years of slow drift toward online learning, a sudden leap forward has just occurred - with no return. COVID-19 constitutes a new order for higher education where institutions that are most ready to fully embrace online programming will have an early advantage, with others needing to playing catch up. Institutions with already built robust online learning programs will stand to gain ground in this quickly emerging context as online learning grows from where it was pre-COVID-19. In the American context, universities that offer large

online programs, such as Western Governors University and Southern New Hampshire University, will grow. Institutions such as Arizona State University, that offer robust online programs as well as in-person ones and can offer the potential for seamless transfer between the two, are also able to capitalize on this rapidly changed context (Horn, 2020). While the above examples may not fit the Canadian context exactly, it is reasonable to conclude that the universities that continue to embrace online learning post-COVID-19 are in a better position to seize on the opportunities that have come with this massive shift to online learning.

Organizational Threats

When analyzing this quickly emerging situation from a threat perspective, an organizational imperative emerges. After having crossed the threshold into fully online delivery models, organizations might now be envisioning strategic plans with vigour and determination

to implement these hastily launched initiatives (What Is Next for Online Learning, 2020). Regardless of the amount of time that physical distancing is an imperative, colleges and universities that did not have robust disaster preparedness plans will almost certainly have to put stronger measures in place. Online learning will be a big part of those plans. It will cause institutions to invest in improving their offerings, which will seep into traditional offerings (Horn, 2020). Some of the examples indicative of emergent trends as a result of this massive shift online are:

- Jo Johnson, a British member of parliament, has suggested that the rapid pivot to virtual learning in the United Kingdom, universities would “stand us in good stead” and allow UK higher education to grow its presence in global markets that had not yet been properly explored (Grove, 2020).
- Northeastern University is focused on maintaining its famed coop programs in which students work virtually with businesses and non-profits around the globe (Horn, 2020).
- A global survey of over 700 educational leaders reported that one quarter of the respondents say that investing in new technologies is their main plan for growth post COVID-19. (COVID-19. Global Education Outlook, 2020).
- In light of significant budgetary constraint, The University of Alberta announced an ambitious plan to launch new revenue generation programs by investing in and becoming a global leader in technology-enhanced teaching and learning (U of A Tomorrow, 2020).

If COVID-19 is more pernicious than anticipated and physical distancing continues, then more online learning will be required and leveraged by institutions. Studies of the mere exposure effect show that experience with an item leads to increased liking, known as the familiarity preference (Hsin-I, Su-Ling, & Shinsuke, 2011). Even where students and faculty initially have had bad experiences, institutions, students and faculty members will learn and online learning will improve (Lederman, 2020).

A Changing Education Imperative

This pandemic has utterly disrupted the entire education system. The move to online learning might prove to be the catalyst to creating a new, more effective pedagogy of educating students. While some may be concerned that the hasty nature of the transition online may have hindered a slower more gradual shift online, there are others who plan to make eLearning part of their new normal after experiencing the benefits first-hand.

Implementation

With the consultation process nearing an end, the next logical step toward helping Western University embrace these emerging opportunities and realities is to consider how this vision can be implemented. We do not want to bypass opportunities for a good implementation process; however, given the urgency of the situation and practical working conditions, a 'distributed' approach to the implementation phase might be a way forward and build on the institutional response already in place for assisting Western to transition some of its large-enrolment courses online for Fall 2020. In reality, some of this work has already begun: The Centre for Teaching and Learning has recently hired 11 instructional designers and is collaborating with Western Technology Services and Western Libraries to implement the online course design model suggested in Appendix 5 of the original Provost's Task Force Report for Online Education in order to support moving these courses online for the Fall term. There will be opportunity to leverage these online course and program design structures and capacity as we move forward to implementing this reports recommendations.

Recommended Next Steps for existing units, e.g., CTL, WTRC, Library Services, are to do the following:

1. Compile a list of units involved in supporting online programming
2. Relevant units develop implementation plans based on criteria provided by senior leadership
3. A plan is assembled and presented to an advisory committee that has broad representation
4. The plan is adopted by senior leadership
5. Project launch

Recommended Steps for new Professional Services unit to be created:

1. A plan is assembled and presented to an advisory committee that has broad representation
2. The plan is adopted by senior leadership
3. Project launch

Mandate of the Provost's Task Force for Online Education

The Provost's Online Task Force mandate was to:

- review the broader national and international contexts of online education (undergraduate, graduate, continuing education, and lifelong learning);
- identify any potential benefits of expanding online programs at Western; and
- suggest potential priorities, directions, and approaches for such an expansion.

The Task Force was also asked to address specific questions related to developing high-quality, sustainable online programs and to place this within the context of comparator institutions and Western's current practices, policies, and programs when making recommendations. Those questions were:

1. Which types of online programs are currently offered at Western and select comparator universities?
2. What are the existing primary online learner markets? What are the potential markets for Western?
3. What are the key institutional supports needed for online development?
4. What are the best practice processes for developing an online course or program? How is quality ensured?
5. How are online instructors supported?
6. How are online learners supported through technology, academic support, and student services?
7. Are there current Western policies in place that conflict with best practices for online course/program development and/or delivery?
8. What are the business models for delivering online programs?

The report is structured to provide its response to the mandate in the main body, while the environmental scan and examination of the detailed questions are included in the Appendices. Based on these, the Task Force believes that Western should consider expanding its online program offerings.

The high-level recommendations regarding expanding online programs are included in the report body, while further detailed recommendations and suggested action items can be found in the Appendices. In brief, Western (i) will need to develop a vision and strategic plan for the institution, (ii) should consider expanding first into professional and course-based graduate programs and continuing education, but will (iii) need to develop institutional capacity to cover all aspects on the online program life cycle and (iv) resource these developments sufficiently to ensure success.

Defining Online Education at Western

The Task Force's mandate focuses on the development and delivery of fully online programs. However, it became clear during its work that blended programs can also play an essential role in expanding online education at Western and should be considered as part of this mandate. For this reason, **references to “online programs” in this document and its appendices should be taken to mean “online and blended program,” unless otherwise noted.**

Blended programs offer flexibility to students who may not have the resources or desire to study in a traditional program, while at the same time these programs thoughtfully integrate face-to-face components necessary to achieving the program's learning outcomes. Both online and blended programs expand Western's ability to offer credentials to new audiences and create opportunities for more flexible program pathways for any Western student. The Task Force defines *traditional*, *blended*, and *online* programs as follows:

Program Modality	Description	Current Examples at Western
Traditional	Students are required to be physically on campus to enrol in all courses in the program. Online courses may be available, but not required.	All undergraduate modules and programs at Western
Blended	The module or program thoughtfully blends required online and face-to-face experiences to facilitate student access to the credential with a necessary face-to-face educational component (e.g., practicum, summer residency requirement).	Master of Music Education, Advanced Health Care Practice (Manipulative Therapy field, Wound Healing field), Ivey Accelerated MBA
Online	All content is delivered online. Students are not required to be present in a physical classroom, placement, practicum, etc.	Master of Professional Education, Advanced Health Care Practice (Interprofessional Pain Management field, Applied Health Sciences field), Graduate Diploma in Health Science

Defining the Online Program Life Cycle

Throughout the main report and its appendices, the Task Force has referred to the *online program life cycle*. This term reflects that successful, high-quality online programs are more than well-designed curriculum and courses with excellent instruction. The online program life cycle begins with “the moment a student expresses interest [in a program], through the admission process, through the courses themselves, all the way to graduation” (Bellantuono, 2020, p. 60). At each point in this life cycle, institutional processes are in place to guide and support students, while at the same time ensuring that the entire cycle and its processes are effective, sustainable, and equitable.

Why Should Western Consider Expanding its Online Programs?

Perceptions about online education have changed over the past decade, and online programs have come to be viewed as an attractive and credible option to learners as well as to a growing number of faculty, administrators, and employers. As a result, over the last ten years online program enrollments have grown at rates above that of the total higher education population (McPherson & Bacow, 2015). Simultaneously, the number of online programs available to learners has increased, with more Canadian universities entering the online space as they bring both established and new program options online. In general, Western University has not kept pace with the development of online programs at other universities across Canada (See Appendix 1), but Western should not expand its online learning opportunities simply because of this. These changes in online growth, and perceptions about online learning, create a significant opportunity that Western can build upon by engaging in a strategic organizational commitment to expanding its online program offerings.

Organizational and Curricular Renewal

Christensen and Eyring recognized in 2011 that higher education is ripe for a great disruptive moment. In Canada and internationally, what drives students to post-secondary education, as well as how they can access that education, is changing. This has led to an influx of new types of learners seeking post-secondary credentials alongside more traditional students. Online education has the unique potential to meet these non-traditional students pursuing post-secondary credentials (See Appendix 2). Western has established itself as a centre of excellence for traditional, on-campus, “face-to-face” student experiences. Its reputation and brand will continue to draw students through our physical doors even as these students increasingly integrate digital experiences in their everyday lives. The evidence suggests that institutions of higher education must meet the needs of the current student population while still preparing for the students of the future, and the student population is changing both in traditional and online contexts.

Major disruptions to established processes for facilitating student learning—such as changes in learner populations, student motivation for program enrolment, and preferred learning environments and program structures—can pose great organizational challenges to an institution. However, these disruptions should not necessarily be perceived entirely as problematic: If Western can anticipate and plan for the growth of online learning and new and changing learner populations, it can maximize opportunities within these disruptions.

The type of changes required to meet the challenges that come with online learning also provide an opportunity for organizational and curricular renewal. That universities must seek to continuously renew themselves to keep pace with external environmental changes is not a new idea. Agarwal and Helfat (2009) note that such renewal “includes the process, content, and outcome of refreshment or replacement of attributes of an organization that have the potential to substantially affect its long-term prospects” (p. 282). An online initiative for Western provides an opportunity for it to become a more flexible and responsive organization by supporting Western’s current organizational needs while also planning for tomorrow’s changing demands and reducing the potential for negative effects of major organizational upheaval (O’Reilly & Tushman, 2008; Tushman & O’Reilly 2004). In particular, by building institutional capacity to sustain an online program development life cycle aimed at creating high-quality online programs, Western develops its capacity to enhance technology-enabled learning and student success across traditional, blended, and online student experiences.

Disruption on this scale can also be positive for individuals and units within the university. For example, it can encourage individuals to renew themselves, adopt new perspectives, and continue to evolve approaches to program design as well as learning and teaching (Harasim, Hiltz, Teles, & Turroff, 1995). Additionally, and as demonstrated by other universities throughout Canada, meeting the growing demand for online programs has also sparked curricular renewal as faculties, departments, and units meet this challenge by devising new and innovative programs and program structures that build off of faculty expertise to offer high-quality learning experiences to both new and existing learner populations.

Put succinctly, expanding online learning represents an opportunity for the Western to move beyond an awareness that a major upheaval in the educational landscape is occurring and move toward a more proactive stance, where innovation contributes to organizational vibrancy, vitality, and sustainability.

Educational Access

Online education offers access to a range of individuals who may not otherwise be able to obtain post-secondary credentials. For example, a 2020 report authored by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (2020) argues that online education should remain a priority for the Ontario government and be expanded for students in northern, rural, and remote Ontario communities through the continued development of fully online programs

and courses. Furthermore, online programs have the potential to meet the needs of learners who are unable to travel to a “bricks and mortar” institution for *any* economic, social, or physical reason, for example: established professionals who are unable to leave steady employment to pursue a desired degree at a physical location, individuals with mobility challenges who prefer not to travel to a campus, or individuals who are primary care givers. Online learning has the ability to enable a broader range of well-developed online programs for a wider audience. In addition, it is now possible to deliver online learning programs that enable access to rich, interactive, high-quality learning experiences that align with Western’s unique values and qualities.

Meeting the Needs of Lifelong Learners

In recent years, the demand for skills-based and accelerated programming at the post-secondary level has increased. Radical and rapid changes in information technology, the need to “re-skill” as a result of increased automation, and a growing emphasis on accreditation have driven the need for individuals in the workforce to regularly obtain new knowledge and skills through a process of lifelong learning. There is a considerable opportunity for Western to create flexible, responsive post-secondary learning opportunities through online programs that provide access to a variety of learners.

Equitable Access to Centralized Resources for Developing Online Programs

The Task Force recognized that interest in developing online programs is already present across many faculties, departments, and units. However, online learning initiatives require investment from an educational as well as a business development perspective, which can be beyond the means for some faculties and/or departments, regardless of the potential viability of a program. By adopting a strategic organizational commitment to expanding its online program offerings, Western can provide opportunities to mitigate some of the varying levels of resources across the campus that have enabled some faculties to develop and launch online programs using their own resources while others have been more constrained and find it challenging to underwrite the program development implementation. Equitable access to resources will allow faculties, departments, and units the opportunity to propose and develop programs that build on expertise and opportunities, leading to organizational and curricular renewal and increasing the availability of online programs across a variety of disciplines for online learners.

What Strengths Does Western University Have in Developing High-Quality Online Programs?

A strategic organizational initiative to expand online program offerings at Western can capitalize on significant opportunities by building on current strengths even while providing the potential to address some organizational vulnerabilities.

One of the main organizational strengths that Western holds is its institutional reputation as a research-intensive university with high admission standards and excellent student experience. According to Sevier (1998), an institution's image "is everything" (p. 3). While this may seem hyperbolic, Western's standing is important in the current landscape, particularly when weighed against the reputations of our primary competitors. Annual enrollment research by Canadian education marketing research firm Academica (2017) suggests that academic reputation is a top factor for students pursuing enrollment into prestigious institutions. In other words, Western's status is a particularly important predictor of success in attracting the most qualified students to online programs.

As an institution, Western has not moved intentionally into the online space; however, there are a number of examples across the campus that demonstrate a *proof of concept* that online programs can attract online learners and be self-sustaining given the appropriate programming and resources. For example, The Faculty of Health Sciences and Western Continuing Studies have online diploma and certificate programming, the Faculty of Education has online professional degree programs, and the Faculty of Music has a blended Master's degree, all of which have track records of growth and success.

Western also has burgeoning expertise in supporting online programming, which can be scaled to support the pedagogical, administrative, student support, and business needs of an online initiative. Western's strength—and opportunity—to build its capacity lies in strategically linking these units together through the use of technological and project management capabilities. Leveraging existing units will allow Western to develop a more significant presence in the field of high-quality online programs. A coordinated effort across existing units has the potential to bring together expertise essential to supporting the entire life cycle of online program development and implementation, noting that some additional aspects are required.

As a mid-sized comprehensive University, Western has a significant number of options to build compelling interdisciplinary programs that address contemporary societal challenges. Online learning can lower many of the practical barriers and provide an opportunity for Faculties, departments, units, and perhaps with other institutions, to become more networked, more collaborative, and more interdisciplinary using existing or newly created courses that are combined in innovative programs and provide nimble ways to access to new credentials and respond to rapidly shifting educational landscapes. Western has already

begun this work in some of its more traditional degree programs. Expanding online programs to meet the needs of both traditional and non-traditional learners, however, means leveraging this momentum to consider that online programs need not be considered only as *degree* programs: there is an opportunity to build on Western's multi-disciplinary nature to combine courses across a variety of programs to create, for example, diplomas, micro-credentials, or degrees.

What Threats Does Western University Face With Respect to Online Programs?

Despite the opportunities and potential for supporting growth in the number of online programs at Western, there are some threats that should be addressed to ensure the success of a strategic institutional initiative for online program expansion. In this section, we discuss the broader threats related to institutional change readiness and organizational identity that the Task Force identified. More specific threats are summarized below in recommendation rationales and expanded on in detail in the Appendices.

To be successful, online program development and implementation needs to be perceived as a positive, perhaps necessary, way forward. While this report has attempted to present the opportunities that come with online learning, the growth of online programs as a learning modality may also be perceived by others only as a threat. While some Faculties, units, departments, and/or faculty members at Western hold this perception, others do not. This speaks to a need for Western to address *change readiness* in any strategic initiative to grow online program development. In this context, *change readiness* is focused on organizational members' shared resolve to implement a change and their shared belief in a collective capability to do so (Weiner, 2009).

Related to where Western may sit on the continuum of change readiness is its *organizational identity*, which can be defined as a set of statements that institution members perceive to be central, distinctive, and enduring to their organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985). This influence is often unseen and unconscious; however, it answers the critical question, "who are we as an organization?" It also influences decision making and institutional priorities. Arguably, Western's identity has been defined by a rich on-campus experience, long historical legacy, research intensity, beautiful campus, and high academic standards. When one juxtaposes this identity to that of other, more online, institutions, stark differences emerge. An examination of university websites that are engaged more significantly in online learning shows evidence of organizational identities defined by notions of accessibility, student satisfaction, applied learning, and job readiness. Western's organizational distinctiveness, as a 'bricks and mortar' institution may stand in contrast with some of the thinking that comes with online learning. This is not to imply, in any way, that Western should attempt to change its identity: it would be inadvisable to attempt to change organizational identity to something that is not consistent

with the actual traits of the university (Tybout & Calkins, 2005). The identifiable gap here is that online learning will challenge, and will be challenged by, aspects of Western's largely unspoken organizational identity. Again, this is where strong institutional leadership, vision, and prioritization will play an essential role.

Recommendations

The Provost's Task Force for Online Education makes the following high-level recommendations for supporting the development high-quality, sustainable online programs that are framed within a life cycle approach to online education. Detailed support and suggested specific actions items for each recommendation can be found in the Appendices.

Recommendation 1

For Western to grow in online program development, it is critical that it develops a vision and strategic plan for online program development and expansion. This vision and strategy should be championed by senior university leadership.

Rationale: The Task Force identified the historical absence of an institutional vision and strategic plan for online learning as a significant barrier to the development of high-quality online programs and student experiences across the institution. Vision and strategy led by senior leaderships should enable the conditions necessary to create effective and innovative online programs across Western's faculty, departments, and units. There is an opportunity to do this as part of the strategic planning process.

Recommendation 2

Western should focus initial development and expansion on its online programs where the opportunities are greatest: (1) Professional and Course-Based Graduate Programs and (2) Continuing Education. All new online programs should have a quality at least as high as our face-to-face programs, with processes developed to ensure this.

Rationale: There is an opportunity for program expansion in the Professional and Course-Based Graduate Programs where students want and can afford graduate studies because they are working professionals. Delivering such programs online provides a level of accessibility to those who are geographically isolated / have competing priorities and/or cannot attend face-to-face classes. Focusing on Continuing Education programs allows Western University to meet the demands for new workforce skills acquisition, which has been described as of significant importance for economic and competitive reasons.

Programming options such as micro-credentials and laddering present Western with an opportunity to deliver a range of online non-credit and credit programs to early/mid-career learners. By offering these smaller online credentials that are stackable to time and task stressed adults, online education at Western not only ensures relevant programs in professional development, it would also enable access to a variety of programs.

Recommendation 3

Western should strategically increase its institutional capacity for implementing an online program development and delivery life cycle. Shared, centralized resources should be developed in-house so as to enable efficient and equitable access for Faculties, departments, and units.

Rationale: The Task Force identified several advantages to augmenting Western's current capacity to implement a complete online program life cycle as opposed to locating these efforts with external service providers or decentralizing across Western's Faculties and units. Doing so will allow Western to strategically build upon pre-existing expertise while also targeting new areas of the online program life cycle for which it will need to develop capacity, such as enrolment management, marketing, recruitment, technological infrastructure, and digital optimization strategies. This could be achieved through the development of a professional services unit to address the gaps in our current program life cycle while expanding capacity in units that already address other elements of the cycle and establishing communities of practice. Additionally, by keeping the online program life cycle in-house, Western will also develop the capacity to respond flexibly to future opportunities related to online, blended, and traditional teaching and learning.

Recommendation 4

At the institutional level, Western will need to introduce several new activities and processes and develop professional expertise in order to build capacity for the online program life cycle. Access and pathways for these professional services should be clearly laid out and easily accessible.

Rationale: Building a centrally shared structure to support faculties and departments is essential to ensuring adequate enrollment and quality of academic programs. Such a unit would provide many of the services that are critical to enrolment success such as: unified messaging, user experience (UX) strategies, marketing and recruitment, business analytics, market research, and project management services. Units that support students will need to continue to develop their services as appropriate to online learners. Additional skills training and instructor support will be required.

Recommendation 5

Faculties, departments, and units should continue to engage in Western's current processes to self-determine which new and existing programs and credentials to offer online.

Rationale: At the institutional level, Western will need to integrate online program development into the annual planning process. As with development of its traditional programs, Faculties, departments, and units are more deeply engaged in curricular vision and

renewal when they are empowered to align program offerings with current faculty interests, strengths, and expertise. They have unique insight into current course offerings, programs, and their discipline and should be encouraged to use this insight and expertise to create innovative programs and program structures.

Recommendation 6

To successfully implement these recommendations, institutional resources will need to be invested with funding based on incremental enrolment growth and strategic priorities.

Rationale: As online enrolments grow, Western will need to increase funding for the units responsible for enrolling students and supporting online programming. Additionally, the development of a greater array of online programs should not be undertaken at the expense of technology-enhanced learning and blended courses. An initial institutional investment will be required to build expertise and capacity.

Appendix 1

Current Online Programs at
Western and Comparator
Institutions

Appendix 1: Current Online Programs at Western and Comparator Institutions

In May 2013, the **Provost's Task Force on eLearning** issued the findings from its broad consultations of the campus community (Western University, 2013). The report summarized the overarching messages received from the community:

- Academic priorities must inform Western's eLearning strategy
- Pedagogical and technical support and resources are key for faculty engagement
- Policy and planning processes at Western constrain eLearning and must be revised (Western University, 2013, p. 1)

That report also expressed a vision for eLearning at Western that stated, "in keeping with the University's focus on the student academic experience, eLearning at Western must be known for its student-centred pedagogical practices, its focus on deep and active learning, and its commitment to quality and outstanding academic standards" (p. 2). This document has guided the units that centrally support eLearning at Western, such as the Centre for Teaching and Learning and the Instructional Technology Resource Centre.

Since the release of this 2013 report, support for eLearning at Western has addressed technology-enhanced learning in the face-to-face and blended environments more so than the development of online programs. This is largely in response to institutional strategy-setting. Western's most recent strategic plan, *Achieving Excellence on the World Stage* (Western University, 2014) has focused on technology-enabled learning rather than the fully online or blended program development. For example, while it noted that online courses at the time of its publication accounted for 10% of instruction (or 185 courses), discussion around innovating digital pedagogy focused on alternative or blended courses and instructional practices, rather than the development of fully online programs (p. 12).

Online programs, then, remain relatively rare at Western (see Tables 1.1 and 1.4). At Western, the online programs have been developed ad hoc at the Department level or in Continuing Education have been funded largely through available faculty resources, including grants from bodies such as eCampus Ontario. For example, the Graduate Diploma in Health Studies was funded through an eCampus Ontario grant, but these grants are no longer available. Other programs, such as those offered at the Faculty of Education, have been "scaled up" over a period of time as growing enrolment in its online programs generate the ability to invest in additional resources. Departments and units can, upon request, work with staff from centrally supported units such as the Centre for Teaching and Learning, Western Technology Services, and Western Libraries when designing online programs.

Given Western's excellent reputation as a "bricks and mortar" institution and its focus on supporting technology-enhanced instruction rather than the development of online programs, it is perhaps not surprising that, when comparing the online offerings for undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education programs across the U15 institutions and other universities in Ontario, Western lags behind in our online program offerings at each level. Any move toward expanding online program support to bring Western more in line with comparator universities, however, should not come at the cost of its current institutional supports for technology-enhanced learning for traditional course experiences, as these are a vital part of creating student-centred learning spaces.

Undergraduate Online Programs, Courses, and Enrolments at Western

In both U15 and Ontario's non-U15 schools, fully online undergraduate programs tend to be less prevalent than graduate or continuing education offerings. Currently, Western undergraduate students are able to earn a minor in four program modules and a major in one program (see Table 1.1). However, very few students have completed these fully online modules since 2011.

Table 1.1: Online Undergraduate Degree Modules

Program	Available Degree Modules	# of Graduates 2011
Anthropology	Minor	0
English - General	Minor	4
English for Teachers	Minor	0
Psychology	Major	4
Psychology	Minor	6

Western's undergraduate online program offerings are fewer than most U15 institutions, and a comparison of institutions also indicates that Western has not explored alternative online program credentialing such as diplomas, certificates, and microprograms that are now available at universities throughout Ontario and Canada (Tables 1.2 and 1.3). For example, the University of Waterloo is recognized as a leader in online programming and has nine fully online undergraduate programs in the field of humanities and social sciences. Queen's University has six fully online undergraduate degree programs and the only identified BSc program. Institutions such as Guelph, Laval, and McMaster offer credentials in the form of diplomas, degree completion, certificates, or micro-programs.

Table 1.2: Comparison of Fully Online Undergraduate Programs Across U15 Canadian Universities

Institution	Fully Online Degree Programs	Notes
University of Alberta	None listed	Offer 14 MOOC courses
University of British Columbia	7 (Real Estate)	Real Estate division: Bachelor of business in real estate, Diploma program in urban land economics, Appraisal institute of Canada program, Certificate in real property assessment, Certificate in residential valuation, Reserve fund planning program.
University of Calgary	None listed	
Dalhousie University	1	Bachelor of social Work
Université Laval	3	Bachelor of business administration Bachelor in IT Bachelor in multidisciplinary studies 30 'Microprogrammes' (9 credits) 42 'Certificats' (30 credits)
University of Manitoba	1	Bachelor of social work
McGill University	1	Bachelor of nursing (in 2021)
McMaster University	None listed	19 online diploma programs
Université de Montréal	1	Combine 3 certificates to get a BA. Certificate programs include: Gerontology, public health, independent science study, mental health, substance addiction, workplace health and safety
University of Ottawa	None listed	
Queen's University	7	BAs in English, global development studies, history, liberal studies, psychology, BSc in life sciences, bachelor of health sciences; 6 Certificates in subjects such as employment relations, media studies, and French for professionals
University of Saskatchewan	None Listed	
University of Toronto	None Listed	23 individual online courses listed, but no programs. Offer MOOCS on Coursera and EdX
University of Waterloo	9	BAs in liberal studies (3), social development studies (3), English, French, & philosophy 3 Undergrad certificates (French, social work)

Table 1.3: Comparison of fully Online Undergraduate Programs Across Sample Non-U15 Canadian Universities

Institution	Fully Online Degree Programs	Notes
Athabasca	32	Bachelor of arts, commerce, general studies, health administration, HR & labour relations, management, professional arts, & science
Laurentian	4	Bachelor of psychology, business administration, forensic identification (practicum required), 3-year interdisciplinary science
Royal Roads	2	Bachelor of arts or science in environmental practice
Thompson Rivers	23	23 bachelors' programs, plus an additional 19 certificate programs, 2 post-bachelorette certificates, and 6 diploma programs
Memorial	7	"Plus 2" certificate programs, 2 post-graduate certificates, 2 undergraduate diploma programs
Trent	0	1 diploma offering in circumpolar studies
Nippising	2	Bachelor of commerce, bachelor of business administration
Victoria	3	3 Bachelor programs in child and youth care, social work, and community services; 1 additional post-RN diploma
Winnipeg	0	1 diploma program in human resource management; 3 certificates in leadership, management and project management
Guelph	2	Offers 2 "degree completion" programs that allow qualified college diploma holders to obtain a bachelor of applied science

Undergraduate Online Courses and Enrolment at Western

Far more common at Western are online courses that are not part of the online modules listed in Table 1.1. Similar to online program development, decisions about when and how undergraduate online courses are developed are made and largely funded at the departmental or unit level. In the past, and as a result of the eLearning Task Force (Western University, 2013), some central funding was available to support the development of online courses. Other courses in the mid-2010s were developed through provincial grant competitions that awarded money to create large-enrolment online classes that were desirable as transfer credits across Ontario universities. Both sources of funding, however, have not been available for several years and now departments and units are largely responsible for the cost of course development, although central “in kind” support is available upon request through units such as the Center for Teaching and Learning, Western Technology Services, and Western Libraries.

At Western, there has been a 29% decline in online courses offerings since the 2012-13 academic year, while undergraduate online course enrolments have risen by 22% (Figure 1.1), indicating rising student interest in online courses (but not, it would seem online programs, see Table 1.1), but declining interest in, or resources for, developing and offering undergraduate online courses at the departmental level.

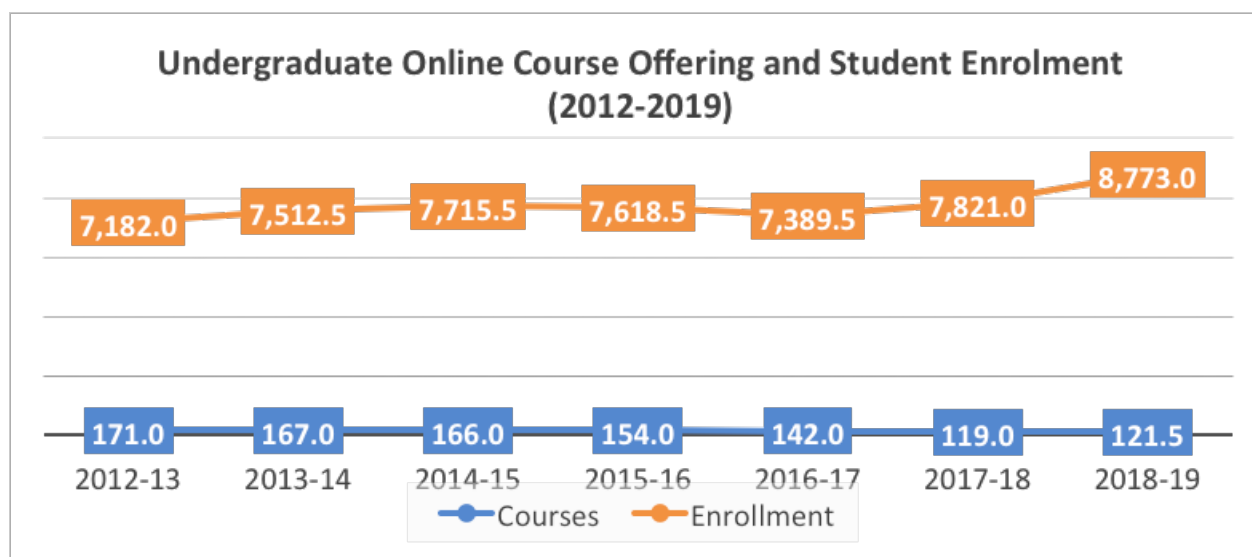


Figure 1.1: Western University Online Course Offering and Student Enrolment

Graduate Online Programs, Courses, and Enrolments

At the graduate level, Western has six fully online programs. The Master of Professional Education and Doctor of Education, launched in 2013, have the highest enrolments (Table 1.4)¹. The remaining four were launched much more recently: the Graduate Diploma in Applied Health Sciences (2018), the Graduate Diploma in Mining, Law, Finance and Sustainability (2019), and the MCISc degrees in Advanced Health Care Practice, Interprofessional Pain Management (2019) and Applied Health Sciences (2020).

Table 1.4: Enrolment in Western Graduate Online Programs

Credential	Student Enrolment by Year						
	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Doctor of Education (EdD)	40	74	111	163	198	218	299
Master of Professional Education (MPed)	107	258	288	303	401	395	418
Graduate Diploma in Applied Health Sciences	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	25	32
Masters of Advanced Health Care Practice, Interprofessional Pain Management (MCISc)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	4

As discussed in the main report of this document, several graduate programs have also had success offering blended programs. Blended programs offer flexibility to students who may not have the resources or desire to study in a traditional program, while at the same time thoughtfully integrating some face-to-face components necessary to the program's learning outcomes. Any planning for online program development going forward should take into account the possibility for intentionally blended programs, such as those in Health Sciences or the Faculty of Music, to attract students who otherwise would not enrol in a program at Western.

Comparator institutions have numerous fully online program offerings at the graduate level. For example, UBC has 6 fully online graduate programs that focus on education/adult education. Dalhousie University has 7 fully online graduate programs in diverse fields such as nursing, information studies, and business administration. Laval University has an extensive number of online graduate programs. Most comparator institutions have at least some fully online programs, with Queen's and Waterloo again leading the field among the U15 (see Table 1.5). As with undergraduate diplomas, graduate offerings demonstrate a range of certifications, including degrees, diplomas, and certificates at non-U15 schools across Ontario and Canada.

¹The programs in their first year do not have enrolments reported in the table.

Table 1.5: Comparison of fully Online Graduate Programs Across U15 Canadian Universities

Institution	Fully Online Degree Programs	Notes
University of Alberta	2	Master of education Master of library & information studies
University of British Columbia	9	Master of rehabilitation science Master in fine arts (creative writing) post-graduate certificate in real property valuation Master of global surgical care (online + 4-8 week practicum) Education appears to be their specialty: Master of education-early childhood education, Master of educational technology, Master of home economics, Master of adult learning and global change, Master of education-teaching English as a second language TESL, Master of education-science education, Diploma in adult learning and education, Diploma in education-teacher librarianship, Certificate-technology-based learning for schools, Certificate-enhancing early learning, Certificate-educating young children, Certificate-technology-based distributed learning
University of Calgary	1	Master of education Note: most of Master of counselling (Psychology) courses are online, but skills-based courses for face-to-face competency are offered in summer as residencies and workshops, making this a blended program
Dalhousie University	7	Master of nursing Master of social work Master of business administration (leadership) Master of business administration (financial services) Master of public administration (management) Master of science Master of information management Also offers 4 online university diploma programs (Graduate diploma in public administration, Graduate diploma in information management, Diploma in health services management, Diploma in emergency health services management)

Institution	Fully Online Degree Programs	Notes
Université Laval	Hundreds of programs	Université Laval has hundreds of fully online graduate programs offered in French, ranging from engineering programs, forestry, pharmacy, religion and literature. A particular focus and strength is business graduate programs in administration and finance. 21% of their courses are online (the most in Canada) Their short programs in varying length up to DESS programs (30 credits, one year and can lead to a Master's) are the most popular.
University of Manitoba	N/A	
McGill University	N/A	13 Graduate Diploma programs
McMaster University	2	Master of health management MSc in rehabilitation science Also note: Part-time Graduate Diploma in clinical epidemiology
Université de Montréal	N/A	
University of Ottawa	N/A	
Queen's University	5	Master of science in aging and health (online courses with mandatory on-site sessions) (PhD and GDip as well), Master of science in healthcare quality (online + 2 week on campus sessions), Master of earth and energy resources leadership (online +2 in person residential sessions) Professional Master of education, Master of education in world indigenous educational studies Graduate diploma in pharmaceutical & healthcare management and innovation (completed online + internship) Graduate diploma in water and human health Graduate diploma in professional inquiry

Institution	Fully Online Degree Programs	Notes
University of Saskatchewan	5	Master of public administration Master of health administration Master of governance and entrepreneurship in northern and indigenous areas Master of nursing (with 2 weeks residency requirements) Master of health administration (with two brief residency requirements)
University of Toronto	N/A	No online programs listed except for professional development: Education certificates at OISE such as: International Qualification for IB qualification, Adult learning and development Certificates at the school of the environment (4-6 course certificates) Certificates in business, management and accounting
University of Waterloo	9	Master of environment and business Master of health evaluation Master of health informatics Master of management sciences Master of mathematics for teachers Master of planning Master of public health Master of social work Master of engineering (Electric Power Engineering) Plus 3 Graduate diplomas in planning, green energy, climate risk management

Table 1.6: Comparison of fully Online Graduate Programs Across Sample Non-U15 Canadian Universities

Institution	Fully Online Degree Programs	Notes
Royal Roads	3	Master of arts in environmental practice Master of arts in learning and technology Master of science in environmental practice plus 2 graduate diplomas and 6 graduate certificates
Thompson Rivers	2	Master of business administration Master of education plus one graduate diploma and one graduate certificate
Memorial University	10	Master of education (curriculum teaching and learning studies) Master of education (educational leadership studies) Master of education (educational technology) Master of education (post secondary studies) Master of physical education Master of marine studies (fisheries resource management) Master of maritime management Master of nursing Master of technology management (engineering/applied science technology) Master of technology management (aquaculture technology) Plus 2 graduate diplomas and 2 graduate certificates
University of Fredericton	16	Specialised Masters and Executive Masters programs in business administration Plus 7 certificates and 7 masters certificates

Continuing Education

The broadest range of online programs across comparator institutions is focused on continuing education. All comparator institutions in Ontario offer fully online certificates and/or diplomas; these frequently focus on institutional strengths and regional marketing. For example, the University of Guelph has an online program in Equine Studies. Many institutions have far more continuing education programs than Western (e.g., University of Toronto, Ryerson, Waterloo, Guelph, McMaster). Although Western Continuing Studies currently has seven fully online and three hybrid programs available through continuing education, this is far less than most of our comparator institutions (Table 1.7). The strong potential for successfully expanding program offerings through Continuing Studies is discussed elsewhere in this document (see the discussion in main report as well as in Appendix 2). Also of note in this scan of comparator institutions is that certifications such as diplomas, certificates, and micro-programs are located either in a continuing education or within a department/faculty, depending on the institutions.

Table 1.7: Comparison of Fully Online Continuing Education Diplomas and Certificates at Ontario Universities

Institution	Fully Online Programs
University of Toronto	54 certificates
Ryerson	32 certificates
Waterloo	19 certificates
Guelph	14 certificates, 2 diplomas
McMaster	10 certificates
Wilfred Laurier U	7 certificates
Western	4 certificates, 3 diplomas
Queens	6 certificates
University of Ottawa	6 certificates
York University	6 certificates

Summary

While, historically, Western has provided a clear institutional vision for technology-enhanced learning, it has lacked a clear institutional vision and strategic planning focused on online program development. As a result, online program development across undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education is not as prevalent as at many of our comparator universities as well as at non-U15 schools. A scan of the environment also indicates that Western has continued to focus on degree programs, where many other universities across Canada now offer credentials such as certificates, diplomas, and micro-programs. As discussed in Appendix 2 and in the main body of this report, such offerings can be attractive because of a shorter attainment window and because they can be “bundled” as part of a larger degree program. They also attract the growing body of lifelong learners looking to address specific skill gaps and can act as a bridge for students seeking alternative pathways into academic programs.

In addition, online program development has been limited to those departments and units with the vision and resources to develop online programs. Resourcing remains a key issue in the development of online programs as smaller faculties with vision and the potential to develop quality programs may lack the resources to do so in a way that larger faculties do not, even with the assistance of current central resources. Further, the work of developing online programs has occurred largely in an ad hoc manner across various departments. As King and Alperstine (2018) note, however, “online education requires the coordination of a wide range of departments across the university, from information technology and instructional design to admissions and records to academic support and student life” (p. 21). As discussed in the current institutional resources section of this document (Appendix 3), while there are central units in place that can and do support the development of online programs and courses, the work of those units has been guided by the institutional emphasis on technology-enhanced learning and blending courses rather than developing fully online or blended programs. This has resulted in a lack of direction on how departments can and should partner with those units in the effective, efficient use of university resources and professional knowledge on online program development. However, this is not an “either/or” choice: To remain relevant to the needs to twenty-first century learners, Western will need to continue to ensure adequate resources are in place to support effective online program expansion while retaining its emphasis on and support for technology-enhanced learning.

Appendix 2

Who are the Learners in Online and Blended Programs? What are the Potential Markets?

Appendix 2: Who are the Learners in Online and Blended Programs? What are the Potential Markets?

Online learners can be considered post-traditional in that they are pursuing education through a different modality (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). They are diverse and reflect a wide range of experience, backgrounds, ages, technical abilities, and approaches to the online learning environment. They also take online courses for a variety of reasons and may come to online learning through alternative pathways, such as building on years of professional experience rather than directly from an undergraduate degree. However, we can agree upon some generalized characteristics of online learners from enrolment and marketing literature to help shape any online learning vision or strategy.

Bell (2012) cites three broad issues that post-traditional students face in their educational pursuits:

1. situational: *individual conditions* that limit student access to higher education, such as physical access, lack of time, or cost;
2. institutional: *institutional policies* or practices that limit student access, such as scheduling or transportation, lack of program relevance or practicality, bureaucracy, excessive admission fees, acceptance criteria, or lack of student support;
3. dispositional: *personal perceptions* of one's ability to access and complete learning.

Post-traditional students, such as online learners, make decisions quickly regarding their academic choices. Important considerations when designing programs for online learners include:

- Age no longer predicts enrolment patterns (situational)
- Career transitions and career-related events in life drive students of all ages back to school (situational/institutional)
- Students are cost-sensitive; therefore, tuition and fees levels are critically important (situational/institutional)
- Acceptance of prior academic credits or professional experience is critical to programmatic success (institutional)
- Students believe they must acquire soft skills that employers desire (institutional)
- Most students under the age of 45 use mobile devices to complete online coursework (institutional)
- A significant proportion of online students want a lifelong relationship with their school after earning their degree (institutional)
- Duration of program; for example accelerated or part time programming can be important factors in the decision-making process (situational/institutional)

Online learners typically independently research and register for their program using the internet, and so their contact with members of an institution's student experience or registrar staff can be minimal to non-existent. For this reason, the concept of "online program delivery" must encompass more than just the academic experience of the student and should instead be viewed as an entire program "life cycle." Just as Western has built its brand on providing "the best student experience in Canada," we will need to consider how to provide a high-quality online experience, beginning with how programs are marketed and communicated to students right through to the experiences of registering, onboarding, the academic quality of the program, student support (both academic and non-academic), and the administrative aspects of program completion and ongoing alumni outreach. These issues are described in more detail in Appendix 7 and 9.

In addition, current data indicates that the location of the institution offering an online program matters. While studying online theoretically gives students who are place-bound for work or family reasons more geographic flexibility than does in-person study, research indicates that ever larger numbers of fully online students are staying close to home (Online College Students, 2019). This may be because local institutions have greater visibility among employers and others in the community, which is valuable to a student. Students are also usually familiar with the brand of a local school and value an association with it. There is one caveat to this trend: The more in demand and specialized the degree, the broader the national reach it has. For example, the online Doctorate of Education (EdD) offered by Western's Faculty of Education's has more draw nationally than its Master of Pedagogy in Curriculum Studies because the EdD is in higher demand with fewer universities offering it. So, opportunities for program development exist to design programs that address the perceived needs of local students and wider community as well as Western alumni, while at the same time engage in curricular renewal to offer innovative programs not offered elsewhere.

Undergraduate Markets

At Western and across Canada, fully online undergraduate programs are less prevalent than graduate or continuing education offerings (see Appendix 1). Provincial and national data for online program enrolment trends is scarce, but 79% of Canadian post-secondary institutions report that they have at least one fully online program (Canadian Digital Learning Research Association, 2019).

More data exists on unique course enrolments, and this data indicates the growing demand for online undergraduate courses in Canadian post-secondary institutions. Table 2.1 compares the growth total undergraduate student online enrolments from the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 academic years at Western with those at the provincial and national level. Note that approximately 56% of national growth came from the university sector (Canadian Digital Learning Research Association, 2019). In addition, Western has seen a 22% growth in online course enrolments from 2012-2013 to 2018-2019, but a decline in the number of courses offered (see Appendix 1).

Table 2.1: Comparison of Online Course Enrolment Growth Across Western, Ontario, and Canada

	Western	Ontario	Canada
% of Online Course Enrolment Growth 2016/17–2018/19	14%	14%	10%

With only one fully online major and four minors, undergraduate education could be an area for expansion at Western, however the enrolment rates for these modules are minimal (and in some cases non-existent, see Appendix 1). It appears that “online undergraduate programs” and Western are currently not synonymous. Should Western move ahead with successfully developing new online programs or creating online/blended versions of current programs, however, we would see an increase in undergraduate enrolment with no additional revenue streams to support increased student demand due to the current provincial corridor funding model.

In addition, while the growing registration in online courses may suggest a demand for online programs at Western, more market research would need to be done to confirm this. Certainly, other Ontarian and Canadian universities have been expanding their online program offerings in recent years (see Appendix 1). Little data exists on specific degrees programs or modules that would be most attractive to undergraduate students enrolled in a Canadian institution or at Western specifically, although such research has been conducted in the United States (e.g., Learning House, 2017). In addition, the enrolment trends in Western’s undergraduate online *courses* (compared to its online *programs*) suggest that, currently, efforts would be best placed developing more online courses for current students who wish to blend online and traditional courses within existing programs rather than placing whole programs online.

Graduate Programs

Within this section, “graduate programs” refers to traditional programs such as Master’s and Doctoral degrees as well as Diplomas, reflecting current trends in online program offerings at Western, nationally, and internationally.

Identifying Western’s graduate program offerings that can be successful in the online context can be a challenging process, especially within the current higher education landscape that is rapidly evolving. Increased competition, pressure on internal resources, and delivering quality learning outcomes means that Faculties need to think strategically about which programs to launch, maintain, or expand.

Over the last two decades, enrollment in master’s programs has exploded, which may leave some to wonder if this area of growth has already matured. However, demand for master’s degrees is still growing and changing and they are projected to grow far faster

than degrees at any other level. By 2022, it is predicted that master's degrees will account for nearly a third of all degrees awarded (Academic Affairs Forum, 2015). Much of the past growth has been within traditional programming such as Business, Education, Health, and Public Administration. With the exception of programs related to Health, demand for these programs is beginning to plateau, and the graduate degrees that have historically performed very well may not offer the same level of opportunity in the future. Demand is now increasing for lesser-known, niche programs such as cybersecurity, data analytics, and health informatics (Wiley, 2018). These types of programs tend to be interdisciplinary and are tied closely to professional opportunities.

The key to capturing emerging market growth in both master's level traditional disciplines and new niche fields is to provide different ways to access graduate programs. The dominant group of learners who enroll in course-based online and blended master's degrees are working professionals. However, this category can be divided into distinct segments: career starters, career advancers, career changers, and career crossers. The way in which these different segments can be captured is through features such as flexible delivery, stackable credentials, recognition of practical experience, accelerated formats, interdisciplinary pathways, and professional opportunities.

Continuing Education

In university continuing education in Canada, numerous institutions have made online learning a priority to respond to the skills gap in workforce needs, as well as enable access to learners at all stages of life. The 2018/19 survey by the Canadian Association of University Education (CAUCE) demonstrates the range of credentials and number of continuing education departments that offer online learning. Across CAUCE's 23 institutions, fully online programs include: 17 that offer degrees; 16 that offer non-degree credit (i.e., diplomas, certificates); and 16 that offer non-credit.¹

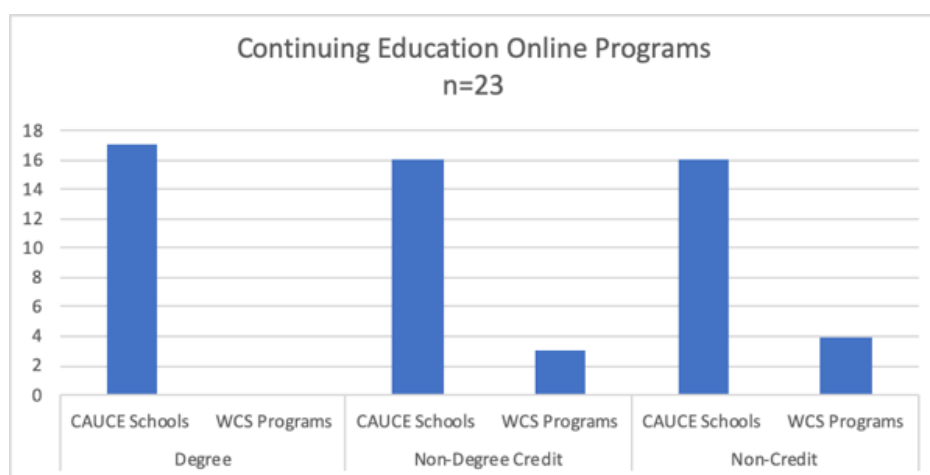


Figure 2.1: Comparison of Certifications across CAUCE Institutions and Western Continuing Studies

¹These numbers do not include continuing professional education programs, i.e., Medicine, Law, Education

Western Continuing Studies (WCS) offers 7 fully online and 3 hybrid programs; enrollment in 109 courses was 29% of total registrations in 2019. Online learners at WCS have high expectations for program outcomes. In addition to relevant skills acquisition, their key objectives are gainful employment and career mobility. The demand for online programming in Professional Development is mostly derived from employees who are eligible for funding from their employers. Most online learners live in London or nearby. Given the demands on adult learners' time and competing priorities, online learning provides access and flexibility compared to the commitment for face-to-face programming. Students in WCS's online diplomas are recent graduates seeking a specialization to achieve employment in Clinical Trials Management, Occupational Health and Safety, and Pedorthics.

In recent years the demand for skills-based and accelerated programming has increased. To address the growing demand, especially for digital skills in all industries, the federal and provincial governments have initiated a number of funding opportunities, for example Youth Employment Skills Strategy, Future Skills, Skills Catalyst, and RapidSkills Microcredentials. WCS along with 13 other universities and colleges is participating in a Micro-Certificate Pilot funded by eCampusOntario. To develop awareness and expertise in microcredentials and blockchain, and how they serve employers, each pilot includes employer partnerships.

Important market opportunities for online learning in continuing education exist among regional employers, Western alumni, as well as underserved groups, including Indigenous communities, youth at risk, and employees in small to medium sized businesses. To attain sufficient enrollment for the cost of investing in new program development, market research ensures relevant programs in skills development and ongoing sustainability.

Microcredentials and Laddering

To meet the demand for new skills acquisition as the result of disruption from automation in our workforce, Canada urgently needs flexible programming that provides access to continuous learning for working adults (Learning Nation: Equipping Canada's Workforce with Skills for The Future, <https://www.budget.gc.ca/aceg-ccce/pdf/learning-nation-eng.pdf>). Microcredentials and laddering present Western with an opportunity to market a range of online non-credit and credit programs to early/mid-career learners. By offering smaller online credentials that are stackable to time- and task stressed adults, online education at Western not only ensures relevant programs in professional development, but also enables access to diploma and professional masters programs.

Although not a common practice in Canada, several leading institutions in the United States have made microcredentials and laddering a key strategy in online programming to enable access. Both Arizona State University and Harvard University offer consistent pathways for learners to start, continue, and complete a credential over time (Working Cross-Campus

to Build a Flexible and Responsive Educational Ecosystem: [**https://evollution.com/programming/credentials/working-cross-campus-to-build-a-flexible-and-responsive-educational-ecosystem/**](https://evollution.com/programming/credentials/working-cross-campus-to-build-a-flexible-and-responsive-educational-ecosystem/))

At Western, WCS has developed a Pedorthics Bridging Program. To expand access to the Diploma in Pedorthics, WCS offers this online program prior to the first term in the diploma, so that university graduates with a STEM related degree will meet the course requirements for the Diploma.

Appendix 3

Current Resources for Online
Program Development at Western

Appendix 3: Current Resources for Online Program Development at Western

Western's emphasis on technology-enhanced learning since the release of the **Provost's Task Force on eLearning** has supported the development of tools and systems that are in many ways well-positioned to support online program development at Western. However, there are still resource and strategy gaps across all units that will need to be addressed should Western move forward with a strategy for developing additional high-quality online programs. These strengths and gaps are discussed in relation to each unit below, and they also inform the comparison of best practices with Western's readiness to address them in Appendices 4 through 9. The implications of these strengths and gaps are addressed in the main body of this report.

Faculty-Based Resources

Some of Western's Faculties have staff roles that fully or partially support online program development, and some may provide release time or other compensation for instructors who design online courses. These supports are distributed unevenly across Western's Faculties and departments, as is support for developing faculty teaching expertise in these modalities. Table 1.1 indicates faculties that currently have staff roles that in some way support Faculty or departmental online education initiatives. Western Continuing Studies, which has also developed fully online programs, is discussed in a separate section below.

There is a direct link between those Faculties and departments that have resourced online program development and the size and growth of their programs (See the Business Models section of the report for more discussion on scaling up online program development). For example, the Faculty of Education has the longest established set of online programs at Western. They have scaled up staff resources as student enrolment has grown to over 1000 students. Current roles include a webmaster, instructional designers, graphic designer, recruitment officers, customer relationship management administrator, and outsourced digital marketing and market research firms. The Faculty of Health Sciences has also scaled up its resources through the processes of creating the online Graduate Diploma in Health Science and the newly developed Advanced Health Care Practice Master's degree. An educational developer and instructional designers have played an important role in building Health Sciences' capacity to not only offer new programs, but to find efficiencies in creating online modules that can be used across a spectrum of topics. Plans are in place to build on their capacity to blend future programs.

Faculty & Support Staff for Online Course/ Program Development?	
Don Wright Faculty of Music	N
Faculty of Arts And Humanities	N
Faculty of Education	Y
Faculty of Engineering	N
Faculty of Health Sciences	Y
Faculty of Information And Media Studies	N
Faculty of Law	N
Faculty of Science, including BMSc	N
Faculty of Social Science	N
Richard Ivey School of Business	Y
Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry	Y

Table 3.1: Western Faculties with Dedicated Online Course Development Resources

Of those Faculties that do not have dedicated staff for online education, they report that development of online courses is ad hoc, driven by instructors and chairs who believe in the importance of creating online learning opportunities. One respondent summarized this approach to support being, “cobbled together informally.” Approaches include:

- Consulting faculty peers with knowledge of online course design and instruction;
- Faculty IT and Communications support, often done “off the side of the desk”
- Consultation or workshops with the Centre for Teaching and Learning
- Working with Western Technology Services (e.g., ITRC, OWL online resource guide, HelpDesk)
- Small amounts of one-time funding from the Faculty or department to assist with a course development project
- Securing internal and external grants (e.g., innovation grants or eCampus Ontario funding ¹)

Feedback from faculties without dedicated supports indicate that there is often a desire to “do more” online education, but that there are barriers to overcome. Specific barriers included:

- Lack of institutional/faculty/departmental vision for online course and program development
- Lack of institutional/faculty/departmental resources for online course and program development
- Instructor workload affecting both design and instructional capacity
- Lack of instructor expertise in online course development and instruction
- Lack of incentives or recognition
- Clarity over IP Ownership

¹eCampus Ontario Online Initiative grants were coordinated through the Vice Provost Academic and Centre for Teaching and Learning for several years in the mid-2010s. However, these external grants are no longer available

Western Continuing Studies

At WCS, support for online and blended programs and courses is distributed among several roles:

- The Program Coordinator, Professional Development and Corporate Learning, collaborates with instructors to develop curriculum and apply knowledge of adult learning principles to the development, design and implementation of online learning in new and current courses and programs in Professional Development.
- In Post-Degree Diplomas there is no formal support for online development. The Program Manager mostly outsources development and on occasion has set up OWL sections for programs.
- A Program Assistant creates course sections in OWL, reviews content for accuracy and adherence to WCS templates, and provides technical assistance for OWL users (students and instructors).
- The Communications and Marketing Manager manages the execution of marketing and communications plans, and the design, use and delivery of publications, media ads, web site content, promotional events and articles.

Central Support Units

Distance Studies

Distance Studies at Western is currently responsible for administrative tasks related to tracking, enrolling, onboarding, and scheduling exams for undergraduate fully online courses only. The same tasks for online graduate courses and Continuing Studies are undertaken at the departmental or unit level. Distance Studies currently does not play a role in online course or program marketing, development, instruction, or setting quality standards for online courses and instruction.

Distance Studies currently has one full-time staff member and a Team Leader who also oversees the administration of all approved accommodated exams at Western. Undergraduate students follow the same procedure for registering for traditional, blended, or online courses, with the exception that students in online courses must select an exam centre at the time of registration. Distance Studies emails registered students with logistical information regarding how and when to access online courses, technical support, add/drop dates, writing exams, etc. The bulk of Distance Studies work is dedicated to coordinating with instructors and students to ensure that all students who write mid-terms and exams are assigned to an exam centre. This includes coordinating exam times with the registrar, booking exam centres with adequate space that are appropriately staffed, assigning students to exam centres, rescheduling makeup exams, obtaining copies of the exam from instructors well in advanced of the exam date, distributing and collecting exams from exam centres across the

country, and ensuring they are returned to the instructors for grading. The Accommodated Exams and Distance Studies Team Leader noted that a remote proctoring tool, which would allow students to securely write exams on their own computers in a setting of their choice, would be ideal, particular in the summer term, when online student enrolment is much higher and exceeds the capacity of a single full-time distances studies staff member. Currently, the Office of the Registrar, the Centre for Teaching and Learning, and Western Technology Services are running a joint pilot project on one such tool.

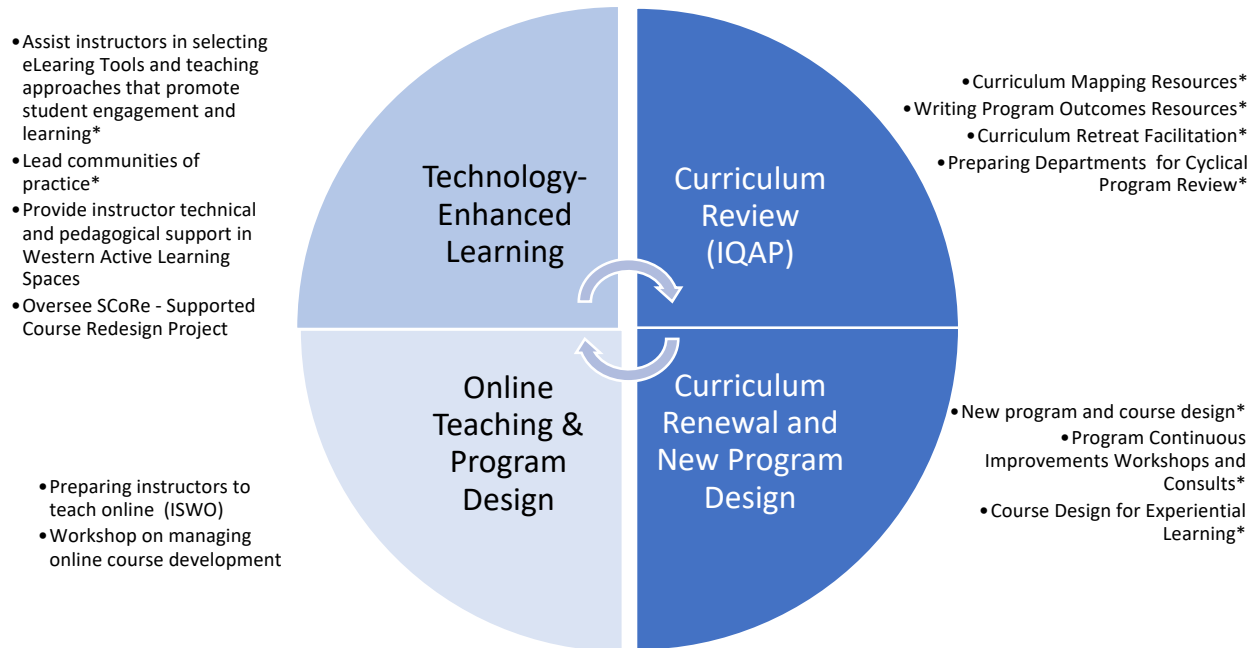
Centre for Teaching and Learning

The Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) supports the university's teaching and learning mission by providing orientation, training, mentorship, research, and innovation opportunities for instructors at Western so that, they, in turn can create high-quality undergraduate and graduate learning experiences for students. The CTL frequently collaborates with units from across Western in this work.

The Centre's eLearning and Curriculum team supports Western's teaching and learning Community in two primary areas:

- 1.** The team works with instructors and departments to create student-focused learning experiences using technology in traditional, blended, and online learning modalities.
- 2.** The team provides critical support to departments during cyclical program review as part of the Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) by facilitating curriculum retreats, curriculum mapping, creating program outcomes, and consulting on new program design and continuous improvements.

The Centre's eLearning and Curriculum team includes three full time educational developers – experts in pedagogy, curriculum, and technology-enhanced learning. Approximately 1.5 FTE of the team's time is dedicated to eLearning. The team is comprised of the Associate Director (eLearning) and two full-time eLearning and Curriculum Specialists. These roles support both faculty development and teaching innovation as well as department-level curriculum development. In addition, the Associate Director, eLearning is responsible for providing consultation and leadership supporting Western's strategic directions in eLearning campus wide. Figure 3.1 demonstrates how the eLearning and Curriculum Specialists' work is divided between eLearning and curriculum initiatives.



*=these activities support traditional, blended, and online program and course development

Figure 3.1: Division of CTL eLearning and Curriculum Team's responsibilities

A 2018 report on eLearning at the CTL summarizes the impact of the team's work over the past 4 years. Specific to their work supporting online and blended initiatives at Western, the eLearning Team draws on evidence-based best practices to design programs and create resources, working with graduate students and faculty members at all career stages as well as with departmental, faculty, and university leaders. Examples include:

- Consultations on aligning learning objectives, teaching, and assessment with eLearning tools
- Developing online instructor skills and support models, e.g., Instructional Skill Workshop Online
- Leading workshops on technology-enabled practices
- Leading blended and online course design workshops and programs
- Creating and curating "just in time resources", e.g., the eLearning Toolkit
- Piloting new eLearning tools and assessing the appropriateness of existing eLearning tools
- Facilitating Communities of Practice, e.g., Western Active Learning Spaces instructors
- Supporting and conducting research on eLearning
- Assisting with eLearning Grant applications
- Advising on faculty and institutional eLearning planning and strategies

Some of these initiatives may be undertaken as collaborative projects with other central units, reflecting the position of the CTL as the unit that brings together Western's teaching and learning community.

At present, the majority of the work done by the eLearning Team has focused on supporting the thoughtful integration of eLearning technology into traditional and blended courses. This reflects the strategy outlined in the 2013 eLearning Task Force Report to the Provost and includes the 3-year Supported Course Redesign project, which paired design teams with instructors of large-enrolment first year courses in order to transform traditional courses into blended courses (Figures 3.2 and 3.3)

A CYCLE OF THE SCoRe REDEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

3 cycles will be facilitated over the duration of the funded project.



Figure 3.2: SCoRe redesign stages

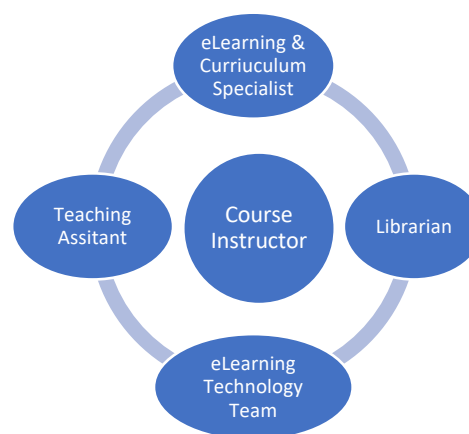


Figure 3.3: SCoRe design team model

For SCoRe, the CTL team developed an effective, adequately-funded, cohort-based model for an 8 month course redesign process, followed by a course launch and assessment: Each course instructor was supported by an interdisciplinary design team, including an eLearning and Curriculum Specialist, a TA, and either a Librarian or eLearning Technology Team member.

The CTL's work is responsive to faculty needs and, until recently, requests to support online course and program development have been few (as reflects the decline in online course and program development across Western, see Appendix 1). However, the Centre has recently begun piloting initiatives to support instructors designing courses in fully online programs. This includes a series of workshops to introduce instructors to aligning online instruction, assessments, and tools with learning outcomes as well as how to manage planning and constructing a course. They also regularly offer the Instructional Skills Workshop Online, which is an online, multi-week facilitated program that prepares instructors to design online courses and teach in the online environment.

Overall, the CTL remains positioned to work with faculty and graduate students to develop their skills related to effective online instruction and design. This would be strengthened by instructional design expertise. The eLearning Team roles align more with educational developers than instructional designers: They consult and advise on best practices related to online education and offer programming to hone instructor skill sets, but they do not project manage course development, and the responsibility to translate instructor knowledge into quality online course remains with the instructor. In addition, faculty participation in most CTL programming and consultations is voluntary, and any ongoing projects or deadlines—including those related to ongoing course or program development—are arrived at through mutual consensus without a formal agreement as to when milestones will be met. While this arrangement has resulted in many successful collaborations, projects such as SCoRe have demonstrated the benefits of a more formalized course design project.

Western Technology Services

As Western's central information technology department, Western Technology Services (WTS) supports teaching and learning at Western by administering a portfolio of stable and secure applications such as Office 365, OWL, and Western Identity Manager (See Table 3.2 for a complete list). In addition, WTS maintains the central infrastructure, servers, and databases necessary for eLearning.

The WTS Helpdesk and Application Support teams are committed to providing excellent customer support for many applications and services crucial to online learners and instructors including Office 365, OWL and Western Identity Management (IDM). In addition to in-person support, the Helpdesk also is positioned to help online learners and instructors by phone or by web and through extended evening and weekend hours.

Table 3.2: Western's eLearning Tool Posture

Tool	Purpose (or advantage in an online environment)	Centrally Supported Tool at Western	Assessment of Western's Posture
Learning Management System	The core of an online learning environment. Provides the entry point into courses to access content, key features and acts as a "hub" by bridging other eLearning tools.	Sakai (OWL)	The LMS review conducted in 2019 demonstrated that OWL is meeting or exceeding expectations for both students and instructors in most areas. The exception to this is support for mobile. OWL does not have a mobile app and some functionality is cumbersome through a mobile browser.
Live/Virtual Classroom Environment	Increases engagement by allowing students and instructors to interact synchronously (i.e., in "real time") or asynchronously through a media-rich environment that supports video, audio, and text. Support increases instructor presence.	Blackboard Collaborate Zoom (potentially)	Western's posture is good in this space. The modern version of Blackboard Collaborate has functioned well as a virtual classroom environment at Western and Zoom is proving to be a robust and popular virtual meeting tool. The products offer similar functionality, so a review of Blackboard Collaborate is being conducted to assess instructional needs and determine if two separate products (Zoom and Collaborate) are still required or if consolidation into Zoom is possible.
Interactive Content Authoring Tools	Interactive modules help online students stay focused and engaged while providing immediate feedback. Additionally, learning paths can personalize the learning experience so that each student can proceed at their own pace.	Articulate Storyline Adobe Captivate OWL Lessons H5P	Overall, Western is in a good position with these technologies, although an increase in the creation of online content may necessitate an increase in the level of licensing of Storyline and Captivate as well as additional infrastructure associated with H5P. Storyline and Captivate are used extensively across campus to create more involved, interactive modules with more complex activities and personalized learning paths.

Tool	Purpose (or advantage in an online environment)	Centrally Supported Tool at Western	Assessment of Western's Posture
Interactive Content Authoring Tools			H5P allows for interactions to be built in HTML5 and run in any modern browser. H5P modules need to be hosted in a WordPress, Drupal, or other compatible content management system (CMS). If use continues to grow, a local hosting solution may need to be pursued. The OWL Lessons tool allows quick and easy creation of learning modules, with some interactivity and customization. As an OWL tool, it can easily provide for both graded (summative) and non-graded (formative) assessments.
Video Tools for streaming and content management	Videos provide a richer medium to deliver content. Having a robust enterprise streaming and content management solution is important to ensure that video content is accessed in a reliable, user-friendly, and secure manner.	MicroSoft Stream	Stream shows promise and offers base functionality, but it is not quite an enterprise-level tool at this stage and doesn't have much use in the instructional space. Consequently, videos are often linked to public, non-centrally supported tools (e.g., YouTube) or are directly uploaded to the LMS (which doesn't provide streaming) making the experience less than optimal
Collaboration & Engagement Software	Collaboration and engagement software are critical. It allows instructors and learners to work together either synchronously or asynchronously via text, audio, and video as well as through file sharing and online document authoring and collaboration.	Office 365 including Email, Teams, OneDrive & Office Online VoiceThread Blackboard Collaborate Zoom	In addition to collaboration tools built into the LMS (e.g., OWL discussion forums), Western has a robust lineup of enterprise-caliber collaboration and engagement tools well-suited to enhance the online learning experience.

Tool	Purpose (or advantage in an online environment)	Centrally Supported Tool at Western	Assessment of Western's Posture
Academic Integrity Tools	Online Remote Proctoring tools are used to identify and deter cheating during online assessments; they can also be used to identify remote learners taking the assessments and improve student access and experience as learners do not have to physically visit test centres. Originality evaluation tools that assess a learner's submitted work against a database to produce a report evaluating the originality of the work aids both the instructor and the learner and provides efficiencies in evaluating student work in an online environment.	No tool for online remote proctoring currently available but will be piloting in 2020 Turnitin for originality evaluation & plagiarism detection	Online proctoring is currently a gap at Western, although progress will be made in the form of a pilot in 2020. While remote assessments can be arranged via other means (e.g. the use of remote test centres), there are advantages to implementing an online remote proctoring system, especially when dealing with many online learners in many locations throughout the world. Turnitin is a "best of class" originality evaluation & plagiarism detection tool widely used both at Western and in higher education in general.
Audience Response System	Although primarily a tool for large, in-person classes, virtual clickers are useful in online courses as well. Polling and quizzing can provide increased interaction between student and instructor and encourage engagement with course content. This can also provide immediate feedback to students and instructors about the understanding of course material.	iClicker Reef	Western's current audience response system is robust and generally well received by both students and faculty at Western.
Peer Review	Peer review can greatly improve students' interaction with and understanding of assignment requirements and grading processes. Through the review process, students gain increased engagement with content because they are exposed to alternative interpretations of the content and course assignments.	OWL Assignments Turnitin PeerMark	Although both tools are available to instructors, they both have limitations. OWL is very complex and easy to misconfigure. PeerMark is not available through the OWL integration, so instructors and students must access the tool outside of OWL.

Tool	Purpose (or advantage in an online environment)	Centrally Supported Tool at Western	Assessment of Western's Posture
Video Captioning Service	Content accessibility is especially important for students at a distance to Western, who might not have access to options such as note-takers or sign language interpreters. Video captioning is also required by Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act	No tool available at this time	This is a significant gap at Western as there are no central tools or services for captioning of video content, which is problematic from an accessibility perspective. The ITRC will caption videos they develop for courses, but instructors who develop courses outside of the ITRC are responsible for ensuring their videos are captioned.
Learning Analytics (LA)	In an online environment, Learning Analytics are important in providing useful information for instructional purposes, e.g. early identification of a student struggling with course content. The availability of appropriate analytics becomes more important in the absence of face to face information.	Not implemented at Western	While no formal LA initiatives are currently in progress, the CTL and the eLearning team in WTS have begun preliminary background work in LA to identify possibilities for use at Western. More work needs to be completed in this realm.

eLearning Technology Team and Instructional Technology Resource Centre

As part of WTS, the eLearning Technology Team (ELT) and the Instructional Technology Resource Centre (ITRC) support and guide the thoughtful and effective selection and use of eLearning technology. The ELT guides, recommends, and manages centrally supported eLearning technologies such as OWL, Blackboard Collaborate, and iClicker. Beyond support for these technologies, ELT conducts ongoing research, exploration, testing, and training to develop and maintain leading edge instructional technologies.

ELT also guides and manages the work of the Instructional Technology Resource Centre (ITRC). The ITRC is a support facility for faculty who wish to integrate technology into their teaching. The ITRC is led by the eLearning Technology Team and staffed by full-time, undergraduate students. ITRC staff provide support, instruction, and best-practice advice about the use of eLearning technologies.

Additionally, instructors can collaborate with the ITRC on projects to thoughtfully integrate technology into their teaching. Through the use of video, graphic design, web design, application development, interactive module design, and a variety of other eLearning and design technologies instructors are able to include engaging, interactive, and visually appealing course content in their online, in-person or blended courses.

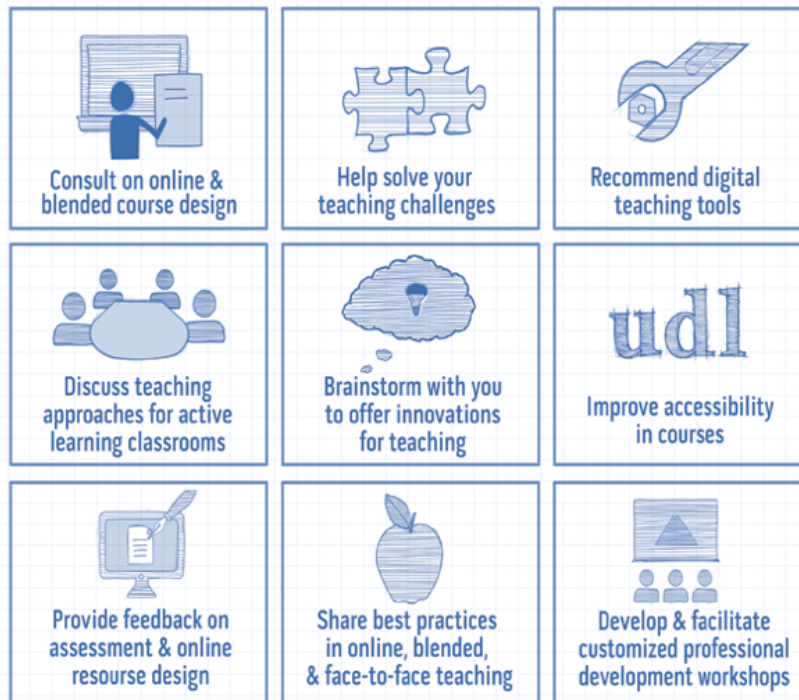
Centre for Teaching and Learning and eLearning Technology Team/ITRC Collaboration

The CTL and the ELT collaborate on a variety of eLearning-related initiatives that blend the CTL's knowledge of evidence-based online pedagogy with the technical expertise of the ELT. Faculty who have questions about eLearning at Western are encouraged to email e-leaningsupport@uwo.ca, which goes to members of both units in order to ensure that the appropriate unit responds. They hold monthly meetings along with Western's eLearning Librarian to ensure that questions, issues, and projects related to eLearning at Western are effectively and efficiently addressed, and CTL, ELT staff, and ITRC students connect throughout the week on various projects and requests. Their areas of expertise and support (summarized in Figures 3.4 and 3.5) are often combined on projects.

Recent joint projects include:

- 1.** Workshops and consultations
- 2.** eLearning Tool pilots and assessments
- 3.** Supported Course Redesign

what can the CTL eLearning Team do for you?



The eLearning team at the Centre for Teaching and Learning provides evidence-based best practices to enhance your use of technology and course design.

✉ elearning-support@uwo.ca



Figure 3.4: Support offered by CTL's eLearning Team



Figure 3.5: Support offered by WTS eLearning Technology Team and ITRC

Western Libraries

Western Libraries (WL) is committed to providing access to world-class print and digital resources that support teaching, learning, and research at Western. Students studying online can access digital resources through the library website and can also access staff support via Chat with a Librarian, while the online Research Guides provide 24/7 access to curated lists of key resources and learning materials for specific courses as well as broad disciplines.

Upon request from an instructor, WL can use the Course Readings tool in OWL to place supplemental course materials in an OWL course site; this process includes checking copyright compliance and converting physical course readings to accessible digital readings. WL's copyright librarian is also available for consultation throughout the online course design process. As part of its strategic plan to support 21st-century literacy skills in students, scholars, and researchers, WL continues to develop course- or discipline-specific modules on information literacy that can be embedded in course sites.

Student Experience

The decision to enter into a conversation about developing a strategy for online programs is timely as Western's Student Experience division is in the process of developing its own digital strategy to increase access and engage students in online spaces. This represents an opportunity to marry this strategy with a future focus in online learning and aligns with best practices in the delivery of online student affairs (Kruger & Jarrat, 2018).

Western has a robust set of support programs and services across multiple departments and faculties. There is significant expertise behind these offices that can support excellence in translating these experiences into digital environments. Many have taken steps to provide flexible delivery to engage students who cannot gain in-person access, including moving to phone, web, and video calling technology. However, these steps have been taken largely in isolation and lack a consistent approach and message to students, and there are areas that have not been able to leverage digital competencies to develop online support. To move forward effectively, it would be necessary to streamline access points and provide consistency across services. Western's current alignment with best practices in online student supports is illustrated in Figure 3.6.

It is possible that some services at Western could be operationalized online with the institutional membership with Zoom, but there would need to be an increase in resourcing to accompany a subsequent increase in enrollment and rate of access. A critical assessment of the viability of transitioning these supports into online spaces using this tool is needed. There would also need to be a robust training program for staff to support competency and confidence in using this tool.

Best Practices (Contact North/Nord)

Western Student Support & Engagement



Figure 3.6: Western's Current Alignment with Best Practices in Online Student Support

Western Student Support & Engagement Program Overview

Enrolment and Onboarding

Currently, undergraduate, graduate, and Continuing Studies students have different enrolment and onboarding processes.

Undergraduate Enrolment

The enrolment process for traditional, blended, or online courses is the same.

Distance Studies communicates with students over email about course logistics, e.g., course open date, accessing OWL, how to register for exams, how to contact technical support, add/drop dates.

Graduate Students

Students enroll through communication with the course department. Communication about course logistics is carried out from the department and/or instructor.

Continuing Studies Students

Students enroll through Continuing Studies. Communication about course logistics is carried out from the department and/or instructor.

Academic Support

Learning Development & Success holds phone appointments and already work to support distance studies students. Staff members in this area who provide learning skills coaching and support have cameras in their offices and can also support video feed appointments. When any student books an appointment, they can indicate whether they need a phone/skype appointment rather than an in-person appointment.

The Writing Centre also has an online writing help service, where students can ask questions and receive feedback on their writing at

http://writing.uwo.ca/undergrads/online_writing_help.html.

Bookstore

The Western bookstore offers online purchases with shipping to distance education students.

IT Support

Online students currently have the same access to IT support as students in traditional and blended programs. A few faculties with more established online offerings also provide additional support for some programs (e.g., facilitator support during Collaborate web conferencing sessions).

Examinations

Currently, undergraduate students in online courses write mid-terms and final exams at exam centres throughout Canada. This process is facilitated by Distance Studies. Examination procedures for graduate students are determined at the faculty or departmental level. Continuing Studies currently administers exams online. A pilot project to determine the feasibility of centrally-supported remote proctoring services, which would allow all students to securely write exams on their own computers at a location of their choosing is currently underway. Western is one of the few universities in Ontario that has not yet adopted this technology.

Accessible Education and Academic Accommodations

Accessible Education routinely has phone appointments and currently works to support students at a distance.

Health and Wellness

Currently, the university will connect and refer students to their local resources when they are studying remotely, except in an international situation. International students have a specific phone number to contact for health and wellness concerns.

Ombudsperson

The Western Ombudsperson offers meetings over the phone to discuss university policies that may apply and will talk through various options available to students.

Student Experience

Student Experience is working on a strategic approach to address how existing programs and supports can be leveraged to provide a “third space” for students to interact, connect, and learn. In some areas, there are already online supports being operationalized, while others are being reviewed, and/or developed. A shift to provide support to an increased population of online students would have an impact on existing resources and requires assessment to evaluate what changes in resourcing would be required to increase capacity. Such an investment, however, will also have a positive impact on traditional, on-campus students who will have expanded opportunities and methods to engage with the programs, resources, and supports provided.

Student Support & Case Management

Western has a new team of staff who are trained to provide care in complex cases that may include gender-based & sexual violence, conduct cases, and students in need of wrap-around support. While this office does not currently have supports specifically designed for online

students, their expertise would be needed in creating resources and support for students online.

Community Building & Engagement

The division of Student Experience houses several programs that focus on social connectedness, leadership, and peer support that could be transitioned to online spaces. Currently the Summer Academic Orientation Program offers telephone advising appointments for incoming students, and work is underway to develop a digital community space where Western students can share stories that will help them connect to each other and build a sense of community and shared identity.

Other programs include leadership, mentoring, and scholars programming that provides online resources, though not robust online engagement opportunities at present.

Careers & Experience

Western's Careers & Experience department offers a robust suite of career development and experiential learning programming for students. At present, the majority of this takes place with on-campus students in mind; however, several resources exist that can support online learners, including a job and internship posting board, a practice interview tool (InterviewStream), and a resource to help students consider the challenges they want to help solve (SparkPath). Western Connect (connect.uwo.ca) is a key online system that supports experiential learning processes, event registration, appointment booking, and the co-curricular record. In Fall 2020, they will launch the Experience Profile, designed to help students (on campus and at a distance) search for experiential learning activities, track their engagement, and reflect on their learning. This system can be further leveraged to support students as they study and plan for post-graduate education and employment.

Program Advising and Academic Counselling

Program advising and Academic Counselling for all graduate and undergraduate students occurs at within the home department and/or faculty of the student regardless of their program or course modality.

Student Feedback on Courses and Teaching

The main avenue by which students can provide feedback on their online learning experiences is through Western's online Student Questionnaire on Courses and Teaching (SQCT). All undergraduate students in an online course can complete a SQCT for each course near its end. Graduate students in courses where the Faculty has chosen to use the online SQCT also have this option. An updated version of the questionnaire was introduced in 2017. However, the questionnaire is not designed to purposively gather feedback on online learning

experiences and places little emphasis on course design. Continuing Studies also collects feedback from their online students using their own online tool.

Other, less regular opportunities for students to provide feedback on their online learning experience include the 2019 review of OWL as the intuitional LMS. The review revealed inconsistent student experience with technology-enabled and online learning facilitated through OWL, ranging from very negative to very positive. A key message sent by students was that online course quality could be improved through instructor education and better, more consistent OWL course site design.

Appendix 4

What are the Key Institutional
Supports Needed for Online
Learning?

Appendix 4: What are the Key Institutional Supports Needed for Online Learning?

Both the literature and practical experience from leading institutions who offer online programs are clear on the institutional supports needed to develop successful online programs. From this, the Task Force identified six key areas where institutional support is vital to supporting online learning:

1. Institutional Vision and Strategy
2. Recruitment & Enrolment
3. Technological Infrastructure & Resources
4. Curricular Design
5. Instructor Support/Success
6. Student Support/Success

These areas align with internationally implemented program development standards such as the Blackboard Quality Learning Matrix (Fig. 4.1) and the Online Learning Consortium's assessment for ascertaining institutional readiness (OLC, 2018)¹

The Blackboard Quality Learning Matrix™					
Build, sustain and grow quality learning experiences					
Institutional Planning	Academic Practice	Technology Ecosystem	Recruiting & Enrollment	Student Success	
Vision & Strategy	Curricular Design & Readiness	Platform Balance & Performance	Market Research & Segmentation	Financial Aid, Student Accounts, Registration	
Management & Governance Model	Instructional Design & Course Development	Identities, Roles & Access	Brand Positioning	IT Help Desk	
Program Development	Faculty Development & Support	Process & Data Integration	Marketing & Lead Generation	Risk Alerts, Intervention & Coaching	
Business Model	Curricular & Instructional Innovation	Adoption & Usage	Enrollment Management	Pathway Planning & Course Scheduling	
Analytics & KPIs	Assessment & Measurement	Operations & Service Delivery	Metrics & Reporting	Employer Connections	

Figure 4.1: Blackboard Quality Learning Matrix

¹Categories in the OLC framework include: Institution/Administration Support; Technology Support; Course Development/Instructional Design; Teaching and Learning; Faculty Support; Student Support; Assessment and Evaluation

This section of the report addresses Institutional Vision and Strategy as well as Technological Infrastructure and Resources. Curricular Design, Instructor Support, and Student Support are addressed Appendices 5, 6, and 7. The key area of Recruitment and Enrolment is addressed in Appendix 9. In addition, a vital element of Institutional Vision and Strategy is governance and the creation of policy that supports online program development. We note that importance here and address it in detail in response to the mandate question on policy, found in Appendix 8.

Best Practices for Institutional Vision and Strategy in Online Program Development

What is consistent across all literature and practice on quality online program development and implementation is that a clear (and clearly communicated) institutional vision and strategic plan in addition to well-defined policies, procedures, and structures are required for success. The success of online program development rests heavily on creating an institutional vision and strategic plan. This should align with the strategic goals of the university and also reflect the interests and goals of those who will engage with online programs at the institution (King & Alperstein, 2017; King & Boyatt, 2014).

Broadly speaking, institutional vision and strategy encompasses the institutional planning process and structures necessary to ensure a quality online program “life cycle” that encompasses all aspects of program design and student experience, not just those that relate to direct instruction (Blackboard, n.d., Online Learning Consortium, 2018). Based on the literature, the Task Force identified six “pillars” that institutions must address when planning processes that lead to effective and meaningful online programs (Fig. 4.2).

Six Pillars of Institutional Strategy and Vision

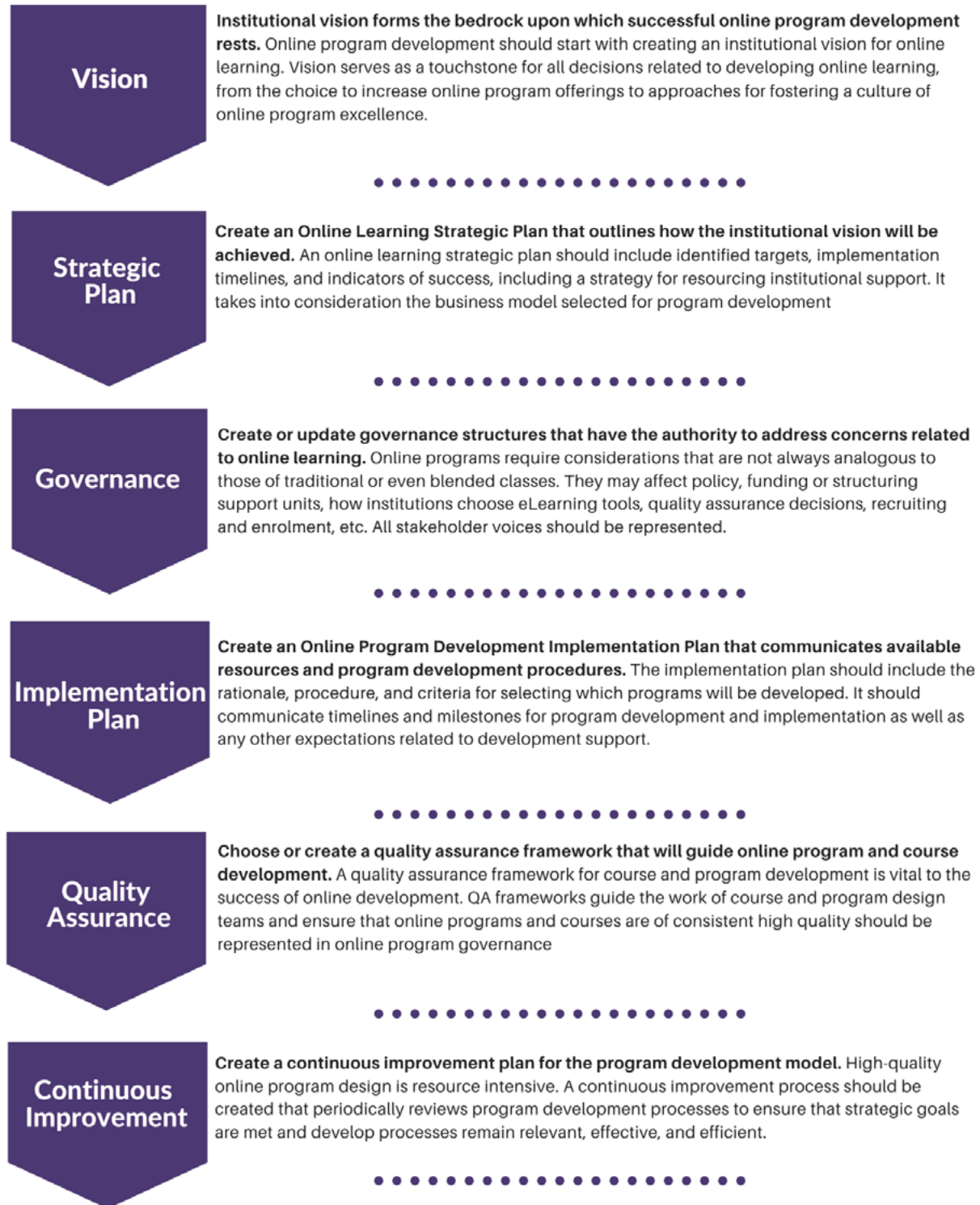


Figure 4.2: Institutional Pillars of Support for Online Programs

Key Institutional Supports at Western

Western does not currently have any of the institutional pillars in place that are the foundation of successful online program life cycle development and implementation. The last two documents giving direction in the realm of eLearning were the **Provost's Task Force on eLearning** and the 2014 Strategic Plan. As discussed further in Appendix 1, these documents primarily steered the direction of digital learning at Western to focus on technology-enhanced learning at Western (i.e., technology use in traditional and blended classroom environments) rather than to fully online learning. The result has been ad hoc development of online courses, and units such as the CTL and ITRC who are available to support online course development have seen much more interest in technology-enhanced course projects and pedagogy than fully online programs.

In the absence of a vision and strategic plan for online programs, structures governing online learning have not been developed or amended to meet the unique requirements of online programs and learners (see also Appendix 8). Lacking vision and strategy as well as an implementation plan and consistent program and course development standards (aside from the Institutional Quality Assurance process, which does not specifically address online teaching and learning), Western's current online programs have been developed with inconsistent access to resources, expertise, and continuous improvement opportunities. Given that Western is entering the realm of online programs somewhat later than many other Canadian institutions (See Appendix 1), there may be a sense of urgency around quickly developing online programs. However, developing these institutional pillars first is vital to ensuring the quality and consistency of online programs at Western. As Vivolo (2020) has demonstrated, leadership provides the overarching condition necessary to empower all elements of effective online program design, delivery, and support.

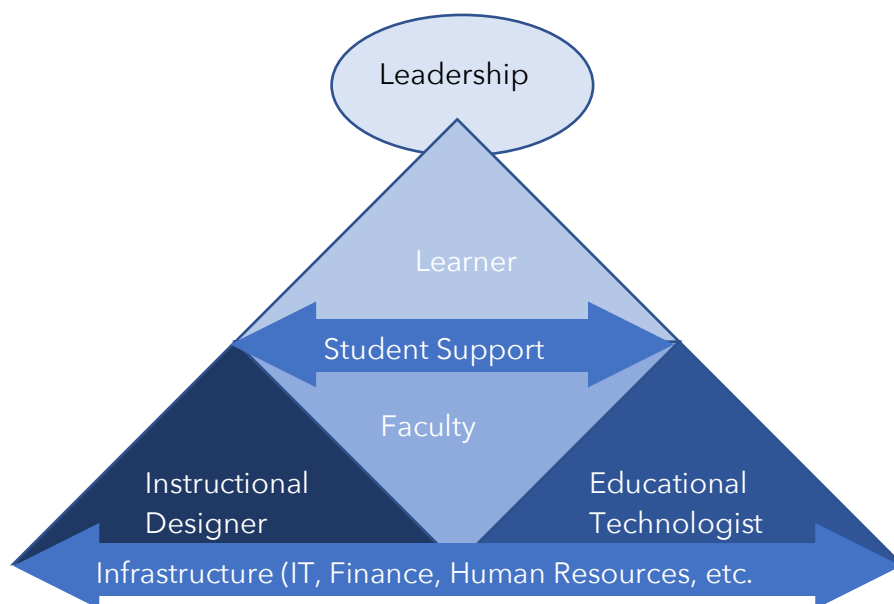


Figure 4.3: The Pyramid of Online Program Development (Vivolo, 2020).

Best Practices for Technological Infrastructure & Resources

There is no documented, universally accepted set of “best practice” tools to deliver online education. However, through experience and an environmental scan, the following tools and systems usually represent a core set of essential educational technologies required to deliver online content and provide a rich experience to online learners:

- Learning Management System (e.g., OWL)
- Live/Virtual Classroom Environment (e.g., Collaborate, ZOOM)
- Interactive Content Authoring Tools (e.g., Articulate Storyline)
- Video Tools for streaming and content management (Microsoft Stream)
- Collaboration & Engagement Software (e.g., Office 365)
- Academic Integrity Tools (e.g., Remote Proctoring, Plagiarism checks)
- Audience Response System (e.g., iClicker)
- Peer Review Tools
- Video Caption service
- Learning Analytics

Technological Infrastructure & Resources at Western

Western’s overall educational technology kit of centrally supported tools is well suited to provide an effective online experience. This has been demonstrated in practice in existing courses and programs, particularly at the Faculty of Education. Individual tools within the kit can and will evolve or be replaced over time, as new needs or opportunities arise. A list of Western’s current centrally supported eLearning tools and a more detailed assessment of Western’s posture in relation to them is provided in Appendix 3. To summarize, the following areas of improvement have been identified:

Learning Management System

Western undertook a review of its LMS, OWL, in 2019. While users were largely satisfied with OWL, some improvements were highlighted as necessary, particularly in the mobile experience and user interface. Much of the user feedback on OWL indicated the need for broader community awareness of and training in OWL’s capabilities rather than additional LMS functionality.

Online remote proctoring

No solution currently exists, but Western is undertaking a remote proctoring pilot in Winter 2020 to assess the feasibility of adopting this technology.

Video streaming & content management

The current central solution (Microsoft Stream) is relatively new (offered as part of Western's Office 365 agreement) and has not been fully evaluated. Initial assessment is that, while it has basic streaming functionality, it is not quite an enterprise tool yet.

Peer Review Tools

While two tools are centrally available, neither is ideal, seeking alternatives would be beneficial.

Video Captioning

No tool currently available at Western.

Learning Analytics

No formal Learning Analytics are in place at Western currently. Preliminary work in this area has recently begun both in central units and in some faculties, but much work will need to be done to build a robust system of analytics at Western.

Summary

Overall, Western is fairly well positioned in relation to its ability to support the technical aspects of online course design and delivery, however, there are some areas where future investment in or alternative platforms are recommended. One area where additional support is required is in the development of clear policies and procedures for suggesting and adopting eLearning tools as no process currently exists. Recommendations in relation to Western's eLearning tool technological infrastructure and resources are to:

- Develop a plan to address identified gaps in tooling
- Develop a process for the periodic evaluation of existing tools as well as a mechanism to evaluate and introduce new tools to exploit opportunities and/or address risk

Appendix 5

Current Online Programs at
Western and Comparator
Institutions

Appendix 5: What Are the Best Practice Processes for Developing An Online Course Or Program? How Is Quality Ensured?

An Overview of the Program Development Process

An environmental scan of institutions that have successfully developed quality online programs indicates their alignment with the literature on best practices of online program and course development (Vivolo, 2020). Although each institution may tailor the steps to suit their particular contexts and cultures, the general procedure for developing online programs follows the steps, summarized in Figure 5.1.

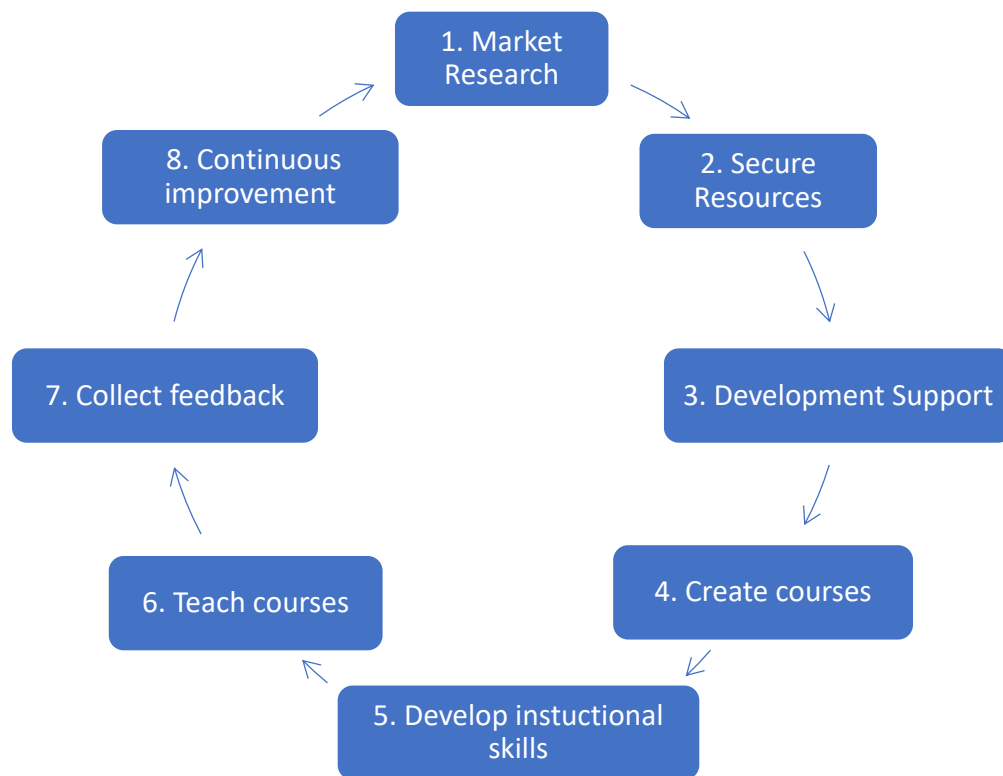


Figure 5.1: Online Program/Course Development Cycle

1. Market Research

Market Research is needed to determine the viability of offering the program (See Appendix 9).

2. Secure or Align Institutional and Faculty/Departmental Resources

Effective online program development requires considerable resources across a variety of areas, often more than those that might be needed for developing a traditional course (Poulin & Taylor Strout, 2017). Adequate resourcing ensures that programs meet the institutional standards for online programs. This includes considering resources for:

1. marketing costs
2. course development costs
3. faculty and staff workload
4. the effect the new program will have on resources and enrolment in existing programs
5. faculty development and preparedness to create and teach online courses
6. continuous improvement timelines and resources

3. Course Development Support

Online course development requires a unique set of skills and resources. It cannot be stressed enough that the development of an online course is not simply the transfer of content and teaching techniques from a traditional, face-to-face format to a digital medium. For example, an online “course” that is a collection of PowerPoints and readings (or even pre-recorded videos of classroom lectures) with little interaction with the instructor is not a course so much as it is a repository of information. Online courses must utilize design and teaching approaches adapted to or unique to online learners in order to successfully engage and instruct them (Linder & Mattison Hayes, 2018; Redmont, et al. 2018). For example, one widely accepted model for supporting engaging online students in the Community of Inquiry Framework (Garrison, 2007), illustrated in Figure 5.2. This model blends direct instruction and course design (teacher presence) with the intentional creation of conditions that create a sense of community and collegiality within a course (social presence) so that students master course learning outcomes during, “the exploration, construction, resolution and confirmation of understanding through collaboration and reflection in a community of inquiry” (cognitive presence) (p. 65).

Due to the ways in which online courses must combine expert content knowledge with online learning pedagogy and technical expertise, the best practice in course design is an interdisciplinary design-team model, where faculty members are positioned as subject matter experts (SME) working in collaboration in a team comprised of educational developers, instructional designers, educational technology specialists, librarians, etc. (see Figure 5.3).

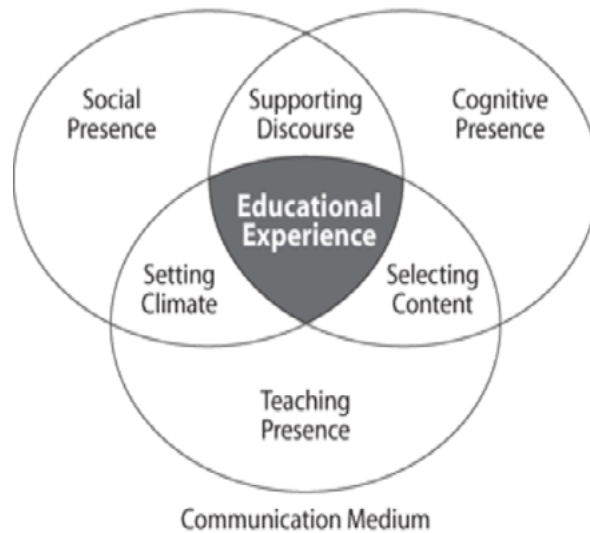


Figure 5.2: Community of Inquiry Framework for Developing Online Learning Experiences (Garrison, 2007)

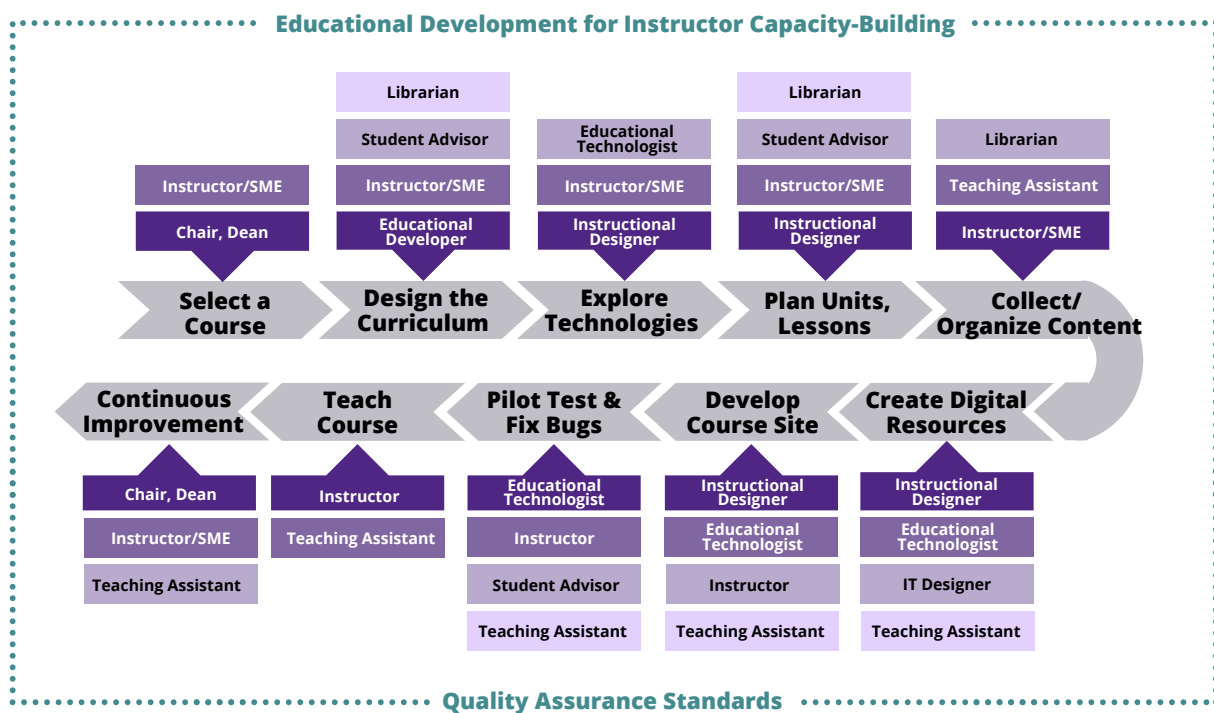


Figure 5.3: Process for Online Course Design with Related Design Team Roles

As discussed further in Appendix 6, this model in Figure 5.3 ensures that a lone faculty member is not positioned as a SME, online instructional expert, content creator, and educational technologist, among other roles. Faculty are subject matter experts (SME), but if they are to create an online course themselves, they also have to be experts in online pedagogy practices, digital content creation, the institutional learning management system, copyright, etc. In a traditional classroom, this is the equivalent of an instructor who knows the course content well, can design high-quality lessons, write the course textbook, and then arrive at the institution several months ahead of the semester to build the classroom. Working together and guided by agreed upon institutional guidelines for course design and learning experiences, an interdisciplinary design team approach brings to bear expertise across all areas on online instruction to ensure that online courses are well-designed and effectively taught.

Quality Assurance frameworks or guidelines are embedded within the team-based design, with each team member ensuring that institutionally agreed-upon design and instructional standards are met as well as those required by provincial legislation, such as the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). For example, numerous Ontario institutions subscribe to the **Quality Matters Framework**, which is a rubric intended to evaluate the design of online courses and to ensure alignment with industry standards (e.g., **University of Guelph**, 2016; **University of Ottawa**, n.d.).

Due to the resources that are required to develop the courses in a successful online program, institutions should develop a clear model for how these resources are distributed and allocated to those departments wishing to develop online programs. When these resources are centrally located, it is not uncommon for an interested department or instructor to complete an application for development support. (See Appendices 4 and 8 for a discussion of policy and structure frameworks needed to guide this step.) Support may take the form of:

1. Incentives for faculty to develop courses (release time for workload, adequate recognition of course development in the APE process, see Appendix 6)
2. Access to a course development team, which is a vital part of the online course development process. This includes educational developers and/or instructional designers, educational technologists (i.e., experts who build the digital course), librarians, etc.
3. Access to eLearning tools and developer licenses (see Appendix 4)
4. Professional development opportunities for faculty members developing and teaching online courses (see Appendix 6)
5. Assistance with marketing (see Appendix 9)

It is common for departments or instructors who successfully apply for institutional supports to formalize the arrangement with a Course Developer Agreement or similar document (e.g., **UNA**; Memorial University, Newfoundland outlines its course design procedures, timelines, roles, and contract expectations in its **Content Author's Guide**). These usually include some combination of the following:

- Faculty participation in online course development and instructor professional development
- Meeting development timelines
- Working with course design team to develop the course and meet agreed upon course standards
- Offering courses in the program for a set amount of time
- Application of an industry-recognized quality assurance framework or agreed upon institutional standards in order to ensure that the developed course and instructional methods facilitate effective online learning experiences
- An agreement on who owns the intellectual property (IP), including which elements of the course can be reused by the instructor at other institutions.
- Develop the courses in the program using a quality assurance framework (QA) (e.g., Quality Matters, Blackboard, institutionally-developed QA guidelines). This should be done with, at a minimum, the support of an instructional designer (ID) who knows how to apply the QA framework through the development process.

4. Create Courses

The development supports and process for discussed in the above section are applied to creating a course or series of courses over an agreed upon timeframe. The time it takes to develop an online course will vary based on factors such how much the course's subject matter has already been prepared (e.g., developing a course from a traditional course versus an entirely new course), the amount of media creation required during the development periods, and user testing. However, many institutions have standardized the timeframe for course development to be between 4 and 8 months.

5. Develop Instructional Skills

Provide faculty training in best practises for online instruction. Educational developers are largely responsible for assisting faculty in developing these skills. This step can occur during the course design phase if the faculty subject matter expert is also the instructor. It might also happen after design but before the course is taught, particularly in cases where the faculty member was not involved in the course design process. Appendix 6 discusses this step in more detail.

6. Teach Developed Courses

Pilot testing of course elements should be done during the development phase, but—just as with any course offered for the first time—only by teaching the course can instructors and students truly understand what is working well and what may need to be adjusted for future offerings.

7. Collect Feedback on Taught Courses and the Program

This may come from SQCTs that are developed for the online context, peer feedback, application of a quality assurance framework, student surveys, etc.

8. Engage in Continuous Improvement of the Course and Program

IQAP currently requires this, but Western would also need to consider the ways in which tools beyond IQAP (such as Quality Matters and peer review) might be employed to capture the online context. These tools can then inform the IQAP self-study.

Overview and Recommendation of Best Practices for Developing Online Programs

The above section outlines the key steps taken to develop online program and course content and to ensure they are of high-quality. The following list of best practices support the effective implementation of these steps. The Task Force also regards them as recommendations for Western's future development of online programs:

- Articulate the institutional vision, rationale, and supports (budgetary and otherwise) for increased development of online programs. Faculties/departments developing online programs should also articulate their vision, rationale, and support for online programs and learning (see Appendix 4).
- Program and course design take considerable time and resources. Ensure appropriate incentives, resources, and rewards are in place to make this effort desirable and manageable.
- Don't scale too quickly. In the initial online expansion, find promising programs with a high likelihood of success in order to boost confidence in expansion. Understand that adjustments to systems and procedures may be necessary, particularly at the beginning of online program expansion, and, by scaling up, institutions can be more flexible with adjustments as they arise in early days.
- Faculties should remain autonomous regarding the choice of which new and existing programs to offer online. Instructors should continue to have autonomy when it comes to deciding course content.

- Position faculty members as subject matter experts (SMEs) who work as a team with instructional designers and educational technologist in order to create a student-centred course experience.
- Ensure that instructors receive training in online instructional skills
- Build in resources and quality standards procedures to address copyright and accessibility.
- Formalize the arrangement between incentives and support. Set clear milestones and timelines for course development within the overall program and, at the course level, for content generation and course creation.
- Have a course content/intellectual property policy in place.
- Align policy and work agreements with program and course development models.
- Implement a quality assurance framework that accounts for the best practices in online course and program design while also accounting for specific desirable outcomes at the institutional level.
- Ensure that supporting technology systems are reliable and fit the needs of course and program design.
- Ensure that students have access to necessary supports.
- Review the program and course design model every 3-5 years based on pre-determined measures of success and stakeholder feedback and implement improvements as necessary.

Online Program Content Development and Quality Assurance at Western

Currently at Western, there are no clear policies or procedures for ensuring high-quality online program development and design, aside from the regular Institutional Quality Assurance Process, which does not differentiate between traditional, blended, and online instruction. Moving through the Online Program/Course development cycle, several opportunities and challenges are noted.

1. Market Research

Western's role in relation to market research is discussed in detail in Appendix 9.

2. Secure Resources

Visioning and planning for more online programs can be addressed through the development and implementation of a Western vision and strategy for expanding online learning (See Appendix 4). These documents should demonstrate the opportunities and benefits

of developing programs and instructional expertise in online pedagogy for Faculties, departments, units, and instructors. In addition, program development at Western has been limited to those departments and units with the vision and ability to secure resources to develop online programs. Resourcing remains a key issue in the development of online programs as smaller Faculties with vision and the potential to develop quality programs may lack the resources to do so in a way that larger faculties do not. For example, a department may have the vision to develop a new program, market research to demonstrate its viability, and access to central development resources from units such as the CTL and ITRC, but they may not have resources for the faculty release time. Conversely, resources for faculty release time may be present, but the CTL and ITRC may have a full roster of commitments.

3. Course Development Support

The work of developing online programs has occurred largely in an ad hoc manner across various departments and units. As King and Alperstine (2018) note, however, “online education requires the coordination of a wide range of departments across the university, from information technology and instructional design to admissions and records to academic support and student life” (p. 21). At the moment, instructors and departments who wish to develop online programs and courses can collaborate with the CTL, ITRC, and Western Libraries; however, there are no formal agreements regarding timelines, quality standards, and milestones for course development, although the ITRC does have a project request applications process and agreement. And while the CTL’s eLearning and Curriculum Specialists are experts in supporting the development of program and course learning outcomes and advising on instructional activities and assessments for online and blended programs, they are educational developers rather than instructional designers (See Appendix 3). Currently, there are no instructional designers at either the Centre for Teaching and Learning or the ITRC, although a few Faculties have hired their own to assist in course development. The result is that faculty are largely responsible for the final course product, which in turn reflects both the resources they have for developing it (e.g., time and access to technology) as well as their ability to design and create online course content. In some cases, faculty can work with instructional designers and educational technologist housed within their faculty. Alternatively, a faculty member may develop a course completely on their own, regardless of their own training and knowledge of instructional design, online pedagogy, and educational technology.

This is not to say that there are not excellent examples on online courses at Western, but that the current course development model does not promote any sort of consistency or standard in online course development and experiences. This often leaves instructors to create online courses on their own without adequate resources and support to create effective online courses. Moving to a formalized, interdisciplinary team-based model for course design, where instructors are adequately incentivized to participate in the course-creation process and instructional professional development, is recommended.

While this may seem like an entirely new approach for many faculty, it is not without precedent at Western. For example, the Supported Course Redesign (SCoRe) project developed by the CTL reflects many elements embedded in Step 2 (Secure Resources), Step 3 (Course Development), and Step 4 (Create Courses) (See Appendix 3). Departments applied for course redevelopment, and chairs and instructors on the selected project signed a Service Level Agreement where the instructors agreed to work as part of an interdisciplinary design team with the CTL, ITRC, and Western Libraries in order to meet course development milestones and develop the course within a specific 8-month timeframe. In exchange, they secured funding for release time, TA support, and course development expenses outside the purview of the CTL or ITRC. The project demonstrated that departments are willing to engage in formalized, team-based course design at Western if benefits, incentives, and support are clearly articulated and provided.

4. Create Courses

Currently at Western, the time given to develop a course is largely determined at the department, unit, or Faculty level. Western will need to adopt general guidelines and policies for a development period that allows adequate time for the course development and creation process.

5. Develop Instructional Skills

The Centre for Teaching and Learning and the ITRC offer opportunities throughout the year for instructors to explore new educational technologies and their application to teaching and learning. These include workshops, mini-conferences, drop in days, and consultations. The CTL, ITRC, and Western Libraries offer “just in time” resources on their websites and through a joint eLearning newsletter that also address specific questions related to teaching and learning. The CTL offers the Instructional Skills Workshop Online (ISWO) yearly to instructors who wish to take this six-week course on designing and teaching online courses. With additional resources, the ISWO could be “scaled up” to be offered to more often and/or include additional participants.

In addition, the CTL offers, upon request, workshops and consultations to departments and instructors wishing to create program or course learning outcomes and to map program outcomes to teaching and assessment activities. These workshops are an effective activity for developing quality programs regardless of learning modality. eLearning and Curriculum specialists will consult with departments and instructors regarding questions specific to online teaching and learning.

Currently, there are adequate supports for instructors who take the initiative to develop their knowledge of teaching in online spaces. Western might consider incentivizing professional development for instructors creating or teaching online courses for the first

time. Departments developing online programs are encouraged to continue working with the Centre for Teaching and Learning to develop program-level outcomes and strategies online programs.

6. Teach Developed Courses

7. Engage in Continuous Improvement of the Course and Program

Currently at Western, feedback on courses and teaching is primarily collected through the Student Questionnaire on Courses and Teaching (SQCT.) However, this tool does not contain questions that are specific to experiences of online course design. This will be important to address moving forward. In addition, feedback on course and teaching should not rely only on the SQCT: there are other avenues by which an online course and instruction Western might receive feedback. For example, through peer review, by observation, or by engaging in course certification programs such as **Quality Matters** that emphasize continuous improvement. Western will need to consider which tools and procedures it could use that will empower instructors and design teams to engage in continuous improvement.

Programs at Western go through a 7-year cyclical Institutional Quality Assurance Process, which also emphasizes continuous improvement. Western has yet to have one of its online programs complete this cycle. This presents an opportunity for Western to develop additional guidance and resources for online programs as they engage in the creation of self-studies and work with external reviewers.

Appendix 6

How are Online Instructors
Supported?

Appendix 6: How are Online Instructors Supported?

A critical component of successful online programs is the preparation and support of faculty to teach online (Baran & Correia, 2014; Kerrick, Miller, & Ziegler, 2015), particularly when most new online instructors begin teaching with little to no training or preparation specific to the online classroom (Alexiou-Ray & Bently, 2015; Fish & Wickersham, 2009).

There is significant evidence that expansion and scaling of online courses and programs by institutions should be developed based on an integrated approach that draws on interdisciplinary design teams to facilitate the intersection of faculty, online course design experts, and the educational and information technology communities (Vivolo, 2009) (See also Appendix 5). This work should be situated within a broader context of institutional supports that create a positive and meaningful culture and vision around online learning, noting in particular that, without faculty support, institutional efforts to develop high-quality online programs face significant challenges to their success (King & Alperstein, 2017).

Faculty support is situated along a continuum of supports, from the institutional “macro” requirements for online faculty support to those that the faculty members experience in their everyday work as online course creators and instructors. Existing research and the leading quality assurance processes that are built upon them suggest the following, which we have arranged in the categories of Institutional-, Departmental-, and Individual-Level Supports, noting that there is invariably some overlap between these categories. The supports listed here can also be read as recommendations for Western as it moves forward with developing online programs.

Institution-Level Support

Supports at the institutional level provide strategy, direction, and resources for online program development and are particularly vital in changing the conversation and culture around online learning when the emphasis shifts to this new mode of teaching. Historically, many faculty have had poor experiences with online courses and/or simply do not fully understand the ways in which a digital classroom can be leveraged to create meaningful, transformative learning experiences. Institutional action can frame the shift to online program development and instruction by:

- Creating a clear vision, rationale, and strategic plan for the move online that engages faculty consultation in the development process (See Appendix 4)
- Ensuring that resources are available to accomplish the vision/strategic plan: this includes adequate resources for work and training that impact faculty course and instructional development as well as highlighting quality work by online course developers and instructors (e.g., awards, consideration for P&T, mentoring opportunities).

- Setting course development implementation timelines and clear indicators of success (See also Appendix 5). For example, McGill University's School of Continuing Studies outlines a 10-step process and provides a Teaching Checklist for guiding their online course development and delivery process (McGill, 2020), while University of Waterloo offers an 8-step example of guided course development (Waterloo, n.d.). These programs should include formal and informal opportunities to celebrate milestones when they are reached, particularly the role faculty and well-designed courses and programs have played in achieving these successes.

Institutions must also set policies and procedures that positively affect and protect faculty members who are designing and teaching online courses and, as applicable, they should align with faculty collective agreements (see also Appendices 5 and 8. Many of these items are captured in the examples of Course Authoring agreements in Appendix 5). Policies and agreements to consider include:

- A transparent procedure and criteria for deciding which programs/courses will be developed, and when, as well as how they will be supported. For example, both Concordia University and McGill University consider instructor readiness as a factor in selecting courses to be developed and taught online.
- Agreements on recognition for designing online programs and courses. Online course design is time intensive, and instructors need to be incentivized to create them or else buy in will be low. Annual workload assignments should take into account the course development time via some time release from other activities, as allowed by the UWOFA Collective Agreement.
- Recognition for exceptionally innovative or well-designed courses needs recognition in the Annual Performance Evaluation, which drives the Performance Linked Career Progress component of salary increases.
- Agreements on who owns the intellectual property generated through course design. This must, at minimum, meet the requirements in the UWOFA Collective Agreement.
- A guarantee that the course or program will be offered for a specific amount of time longer than one semester. This ensures the time, effort, and resources invested by the faculty member and course designers will go toward a course that runs more than once.
- Agreements on Teaching Load: Faculties and Departments have authority to determine how to fit online teaching into the Unit's Standard Normal Workload statement, but a university-wide minimum baseline might be that an online course

should count as the same teaching load as a face-to-face course. At the Faculty level, agreement on TA support for medium to large online courses should be considered.

- Agreement on course development timelines and deliverables.
- Agreement distinguishing between the responsibilities of faculty as Subject Matter Expert, instructional designers, and educational technologists. This is likely to be most successful if faculty can come to understand designers and technologists as supporters and collaborators, rather than managers, of their efforts. For example, Queen's University developed a resource entitled, *Roles, Responsibilities and Expectations for Developing and Teaching Online Courses in Continuing and Distance Studies* to aid in creating a shared understanding ([Queen's University](#), 2015). In another example, OCAD University outlines the roles, responsibilities, and available support in their eLearning Course Development Process ([OCAD](#), 2013)
- An industry-approved or quality standards framework or set of institutionally agreed upon standards (e.g. Quality Matters, Blackboard Quality, or an internally developed tool) that empowers faculty to engage with best practices when designing online courses.
- A policy or tool for facilitating exams for online courses. In the past, distance studies courses at many institutions typically required students write an invigilated exam at a physical exam centre. However, remote or virtual invigilation via platforms such as ProctorU have been adopted by institutions such as Athabasca University. In another example, Memorial University offers online proctoring – a process managed by the Centre for Innovation in Teaching and Learning ([Memorial University](#), n.d.)
- In addition, other supports need to be in place for pre-existing policies, such as AODA, mental health, academic integrity, IQAP, etc.

The institution also needs to provide support for online student learners: Faculty may be the online “face” of the students’ experience, but this does not mean that they are more equipped to work with online students to address non-course related concerns than they would be with students in the traditional classroom, and neither should they do this when they may not be experts in these areas. This topic is covered in more depth in Appendix 7, which addresses supports for online learners. To summarize here, while instructors should strive to build a community of trust and engagement in their courses, they should not be considered experts in Student Experience and Registrar services. Thus, a robust framework and process for online student support should be developed by the institution. The faculty member should know how to connect students to these services as needed and appropriate (e.g., writing services, accessible education online learner orientation, graduation requirements) as the

would for students in traditional or blended programs. Existing campus service providers in these areas should be consulted and, where appropriate, supported in developing their own approaches to these issues online, both for consistency of student experience and to avoid duplication of services.

Faculty/Departmental-Level Support

Faculties and departments creating programs also have distinct support needs. These typically include:

- Market research assistance to help identify potential students (e.g., people working in a related fields) who could benefit from online education (See Appendix 9).
- The autonomy to create programs that align with current faculty interests, strengths, and expertise, and that may be able to incorporate pre-existing courses and programs in order to reduce the number of courses that need to be created for a new program in whatever form it takes (e.g., degree, diploma, micro-credential)
- Financial support/incentives to facilitate the release time or monetary compensation given to instructors designing online courses. For example, Trent University's Online Course Development Pilot offered the option of course release or equivalent honorarium to instructors engaged in online course development in addition to in-kind development support. Incentives across U.S institutions have included everything from stipends to preferential scheduling (**Lieberman**, 2017).
- Established programs should not be affected by reassigning faculty to new online course options.
- Resources that enable programs to creatively vision and articulate learning outcomes for new online programs
- Resources to train instructors and Teaching Assistants in effective online instructional practices
- Adequate instructional design and educational technology support (See Appendix 5).
- Adequate access to eLearning tools to support course design (See Appendices 4 and 5).
- A process that identifies areas of continuous improvement. For example, Purdue University is explicit about their data-driven and collaborative auditing process for ensuring curriculum quality for online offerings (**Purdue**, 2019). Numerous Ontario institutions subscribe to the Quality Matters Framework – a rubric intended to evaluate the design of online courses and to ensure alignment with industry standards (e.g., **University of Guelph**, 2016; **University of Ottawa**, n.d.).

Instructor-Level Support

Faculty need to be properly incentivized to develop online courses. As stated above, this usually takes the form of renumeration or release time and is often tied to course design support and professional development in area of online instructional skills.

- Faculty need to engage in quality training to develop their skill as online instructors. While a good relationship with an instructional designer and course design team can promote faculty knowledge of online course development, instructional skills are not developed through this process. This could include orientation sessions to teaching online, mentorship, communities of practice, Instructional Skills Workshops for Online Instructors, PD opportunities at Western and elsewhere, etc.
- Faculty need feedback on their instructional skills. This might take the form of SQCTs (which should be adjusted to reflect an online teaching and learning context), peer observation, application of a continuous improvement framework (e.g., Quality Matters), etc. Procedures should be in place to collect and deliver feedback.
- Faculty need recognition for work well done. This could be in the form of awards, recognition at events, or opportunities for them to “give back” to the community by mentoring others and presenting their work in public forums. P&T consideration is crucial and should be developed in consideration with appropriate existing P&T bodies. This includes recognition for research on the scholarship of teaching and learning related to online instruction.
- Faculty need access to reliable, effective eLearning tools as well as well-developed technical support pathways. This can include:
 - Troubleshooting of technical issues
 - Support for selecting technology for use in the online classroom
 - Support for creating accessible class media
 - Audio/visual resource support
 - Faculty also need Library Staff Support for
 1. Finding resources for the online classroom and embedding them in OWL (e.g., the course reading tool)
 2. Developing digital literacy skills

Faculty Support at Western

Across Western, pockets of institutional, departmental, and instructor supports are currently in place and have driven the institution's advances in online education.

Uniting around the 2013 Provost's eLearning Task Force Report and its vision for supporting student-centre pedagogical practices, deep and active learning, and high academic standards, the Centre for Teaching and Learning, Western Technology Services, and Western Libraries have largely led efforts around an ad hoc institutional strategy that supports online program and course design. One recent example of this collaboration is the Supported Course Redesign (SCoRe) Program, which brought together interdisciplinary teams from each of the three units (CTL, WL, and WTS) to support instructors in their redesign of fully face-to-face courses to a blended design (See Appendix 2). The interdisciplinary nature of this work has been essential to effectively supporting online development as these units bring together curricular, technological, and information literacy expertise.

Overall, advancements in online education at Western have largely been driven by individual chairs and instructors expressing a desire to advance their program or course offerings online. They have made progress by: (a) working in isolation, (b) seeking out and receiving support from units such as the CTL, WTS, and/or WL; or (c) through support of Faculty- or Department-specific resources, when they are available. Western as an institution has yet to create a vision for online learning that demonstrates to faculty the opportunities and benefits that developing and teaching online programs holds.

Managing online courses at the Institutional level, the Office of the Registrar's Distance Studies unit has traditionally overseen administrative tasks related to tracking, enrolling, onboarding, and scheduling exams for undergraduate fully online courses only. Similar tasks at the graduate level and for Continuing Studies offerings are undertaken at the departmental or unit level. Distance Studies currently does not play a role in online course or program marketing, development, instruction, or quality assurance.

Additionally, some individual units and Faculties have invested in Faculty- or Department-specific resources. For example, the Faculty of Education established the IMPACT group to support its set of online programs. Current roles include a webmaster, instructional designers, graphic designer, recruitment officers, customer relationship management administrator, and outsourced digital marketing and market research firms. Local resources of this nature have tended to flourish in units that require more support and time dedicated to development than can be sourced from central units such as the CTL and WTS. This assumes, however, that all faculties and departments have the ability to muster such resources, which is not currently the case. Additionally, the UWOFA Collective Agreement provides some guidance on faculty compensation, workload, intellectual property (IP), and rights of first refusal for online courses, but it also provides flexibility for alternate agreements related to faculty compensation, course authoring, and IP.

Support for instructor professional development in the realm of online pedagogy is offered by the Centre for Teaching and Learning through workshops, programs, and individual consultations that are largely developed and offered upon request and in response to new innovations and identified gaps (for example, as identified through the 2019 user review of OWL). Faculty can also contact the Instructional Technology Resource Centre for assistance with learning how to use specific educational technologies. The CTL and ITRC often combine their two areas of expertise to work to create workshops or consult with individual instructors, and they have also visited departments and units upon request (See also Appendix 3). Currently, these units see more requests for assistance with technology-enabled learning than for fully online learning, although there has been increases interested in developing online courses in the last year.

Other areas, such as the Faculty of Education and Continuing Studies, also offer workshops and individual consultations to assist instructors in developing their pedagogical expertise and technology skills.

Overall, the story of Faculty support at Western remains, much like the process of course development (See Appendix 5), somewhat ad hoc and unguided by a strong intuitional vision, strategy, governance, or implementation plans. Given that faculty support for online learning is an essential component of developing successful online programs, Western has considerable work to do to ensure that the supports are in place to create a positive faculty culture around online learning.

Appendix 7

How Are Online Learners
Supported Through Technology,
Academic Support, and Student
Services?

Appendix 7: How Are Online Learners Supported Through Technology, Academic Support, and Student Services?

Overview of Best Practices for Supporting Online Learners

When considering the support needed to create excellent experiences for online students, the focus often tends to be on remedial and responsive services that students can access when struggling. As in on-campus environments, however, the best approach to support students is to consistently aim for a baseline of thriving rather than focusing on catching students as they are about to fall.

Online learning environments have been in existence long enough now to have some established best practices in delivery. Just as with students studying in traditional settings, a key strategic area that can have as much impact as academic instruction and formal learning experiences on online students is the way in which they are supported, engaged, and connected to others throughout their programs. The quality of these experiences is an important predictor in retention of online students (Kruger & Jarrat, 2018).

Students in online learning environments are likely to need more intentional support than is normally expected in on-campus learning spaces because there is a lack of organic collision space and relationship-building becomes more difficult (Kruger & Jarrat, 2018). Support and effective course design within the online classroom are significant influencers on student engagement, and online learners require a variety of structures that mirror the services and programs available to on-campus students such as:

- registrar's services
- financial aid
- admissions
- orientation
- IT support
- academic and learning support
- career services
- health and wellness
- advising
- leadership
- community building

Two primary service models exist to support online learners, although it is common to see a combination of the two in many institutions (Figure 7.1). One option is to centralize support within an online learner support team that is responsible only for online learners. The other is to create an online access portal where online learners can access existing on-campus supports.

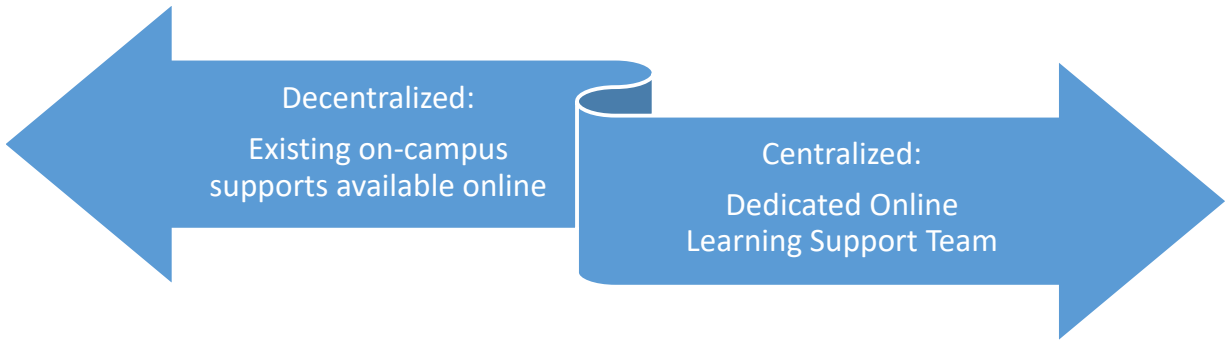


Figure 7.1: Centralized vs Decentralize Support for Online Learners

Some common traits of online learners are described in Appendix 2, but Western must also recognize that making choices about an approach to providing online student support, be it centralized or decentralized, will depend heavily on the strategy and goals set for the university's expansion into online learning spaces. For example, creating a best practice informed support model for full-time undergraduate online programs would look very different from one designed to support mature professional students who are seeking upgraded credentials and graduate programs. Providing space for self-direction, experiential learning, and networking between industry & public sector and students is especially important when considering support for students pursuing post-graduate employment, graduate education and/or micro-credentials.

Offering traditional models of post-secondary education in an online environment is not likely to meet the needs of future students. Western has an opportunity to leverage the disruptive capabilities of technology to make a fundamental shift in its teaching models. Online learning spaces are best used when creating innovative and creative spaces for participants, where they are empowered to be self-directed and in relationship with a community. This is relevant when considering supporting students online as it would require professionals with expertise in crafting vibrant learning and community spaces with embedded principles of entrepreneurship and experiential learning. In this way, the focus for online learning is not unlike the vision expressed for eLearning at Western in the 2013 **Provost's Task Force on eLearning**, which stated, that "eLearning at Western must be known for its student-centred pedagogical practices, its focus on deep and active learning, and its commitment to quality and outstanding academic standards" (p. 2). Such an approach to online learning has two benefits—it will provide engaging and transformative experiences for online learners, and it will serve to attract students who are searching for a sense of control in the face of a rapidly shifting job market, which is causing undue anxiety among students (Pisarik, Rowell, & Thompson, 2017).

Empowering students to co-create their learning environment can give them tools to design a meaningful life and career. This is fundamentally different than focusing on an education

that is responsive to employer needs. Instructional models such as the Community of Inquiry Framework (Fig. 7.2) have been widely adopted as a best practice for building online courses that promote student-centred learning experiences that encourage deep engagement and collaborative learning in online learning experiences (Garrison, 2007). This model blends direct instruction and course design (teacher presence) with the intentional creation of conditions that create a sense of community within a course (social presence) so that students master course learning outcomes during, “the exploration, construction, resolution and confirmation of understanding through collaboration and reflection in a community of inquiry” (cognitive presence) (p. 65). As discussed in Appendix 5, an interdisciplinary design team approach to creating online learning experiences ensures that frameworks such as these as well as other best practices in designing and facilitating effective student learning form the bedrock of outstanding academic instruction.

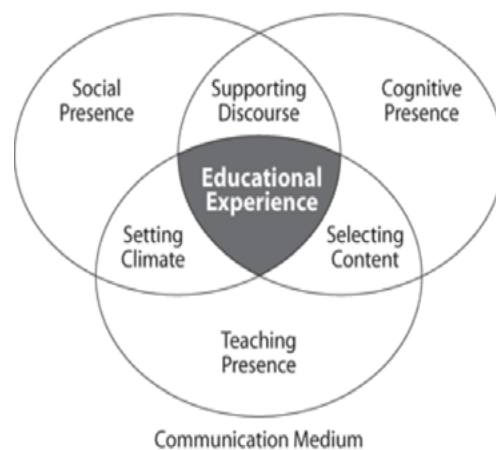


Figure 7.2: Community of Inquiry Framework for Developing Online Learning Experiences (Garrison, 2007)

In addition, Western should consider the role that Learning Analytics (LA) could play in supporting student learning. Defined as, “the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for purposes of understanding and optimizing learning and the environments in which it occurs” (Society for Learning Analytics Research, n.d), LA combine data from student interaction with online course sites with other available institutional data to empower students, instructors, and administrators to make data-informed decision about teaching and learning in the following ways:

- 1. Descriptive analytics** takes student data and creates dashboards that display meaningful patterns and trends.
- 2. Diagnostic analytics** seeks to understand the reason for trends and outliers in the data, e.g., Why did this one student do poorly on the assessment? Why did the entire cohort miss this question?

3. Predictive analytics uses historical trends and patterns to predict individual students' success or failure. This allows instructors to identify learners early on who are most likely to fail or drop out.

4. Prescriptive analytics aims to provide recommended interventions that the instructor—or the student—can take to improve a student's chances of success (Yupangco, 2017).

Existing best practices in supporting online students are well-documented. Contact Nord/Contact North identifies four types of core services that are needed for online learners:

- those that help students engage with the institution
- those that help students succeed in their studies
- those that help students connect with each other
- those that help students make a successful transition to the workplace

A list of services suggested for consultation during the building of effective online learner supports included: Student Affairs (e.g., information, advising, career and personal counselling), academic support (e.g., academic skills assessment and development, writing centre, math support), support for students with disabilities, Registrar's Office (student information systems, admissions, transfer credit), recruitment & admissions, web and IT services, faculty representatives, institutional research, and student awards and financial aid.

As noted above, the important consideration here is the motivation for students to choose online learning in the first place, which is often due to existing barriers preventing their access to education. Those considering education that are working full-time, that might be caring for dependents, that have existing financial barriers, or myriad other situational barriers are turning to online spaces for its flexibility, lower-cost point, and opportunities for self-direction. In short, designing for online learning is essentially designing education for access (See Appendix 2).

Building a Digital Student Experience

Western's brand is well-established as a leader in providing exceptional student experience. This must form the basis for any online strategy moving forward, though in online contexts, student experience overlaps heavily with user experience, and so is essential to consider student experience as part of an online program life cycle rather than only a concern related to enrolment and academic performance. The decision to enter into a conversation about developing a strategy for online programs is timely as Western's Student Experience division is in the process of developing its own digital strategy to increase access and engage students in online spaces. This represents an opportunity to marry this strategy with a future focus in online learning and aligns with best practices in the delivery of online student affairs (Kruger & Jarrat, 2018).

It is possible that some services at Western could be operationalized online with the institutional membership with Zoom, but there would need to be an increase in resourcing to accompany a subsequent increase in enrollment and rate of access. A critical assessment of the viability of transitioning these supports into online spaces using this tool is needed. There would also need to be a robust training program for staff to support competency and confidence in using this tool.

Gaps in Approaching Online Learning Models at Western

Current Decentralized Administrative Model

Most online programs are delivered by institutions that began as purely physical learning environments, and this means that their supports are also borne from models designed to meet student needs in those physical learning spaces. The simplest (but not always most effective) way to transition into providing support to students when building new online programs is to replicate existing supports in online spaces: This is where Western finds itself now, and a high degree of intentionality is required to build an innovative and effective support model that is sufficiently designed for online students. Western's work so far can be contrasted with noted leaders such as Athabasca University who provide fully online access to all supports using an array of software tools that were integrated from its early days as a primarily distance-learning focused institution. Athabasca also provides individualized models of support that include an assigned tutor, academic advisor, and community platform that encourages relational communicating.

The decentralized administrative model used broadly at Western presents an additional level of challenge when striving to build a consistent approach to supporting online students. It will require more dialogue, collaboration, and ongoing assessment to be as successful as a more centralized organization. If Western wishes to focus on providing the best digital student experience, it would be worth developing a specific team of staff who are focused on the specific needs of online students to assist in navigating the existing Western support landscape. Ideally, this team would not be responsible for all support provided, but would be a point of contact for online students who need a consistent relationship as they navigate the coupled systems of the university.

Lack of Integrated Web Presence & Student Support Systems

At present, Western maintains multiple systems across its student supports that work together to varying degrees (e.g., OWL, Sharepoint, Orbis, etc.). This is combined with a diffused web presence that lacks consistent language across its navigation and can fail to support easy navigation for students. While there are opportunities to pivot some of these

systems toward an online student audience, there would need to be a review to establish the feasibility of utilizing existing systems.

An integrated systems approach is simpler for online students to navigate and easier to administer once built. This type of organization of software is utilized by Thompson Rivers University, and Royal Roads, and offers seamless navigation for students from one part of the organization to another in online spaces. Although this offers better outcomes for students, this approach would require a significant amount of strategy and resources to restructure Western's existing decentralized systems this way.

Opportunities at Western

Digital Student Experience Strategy

There is an opportunity to build on Western's existing brand—that the institution hosts an exceptional student experience—and establish an online learning environment that is focused on excellent user experience, social connectedness, and well-being. This represents a gap in the current online learning landscape as most eLearning focuses on the “bare bones” of education. Principles of User Experience (UX) should be applied at minimum, but if an effort was made to foster peer connection and relationship with instructors in online spaces (as supported, for example, by excellent course design), the overall satisfaction with online learning is very likely to increase.

Any Digital Student Experience strategy must be considered in context with and aligned to the university's data strategy as well as other institutional priorities to make room for convergence. It is important to take a step back from looking at simple support services for online students in isolation and view this initiative from a systems level. For example, it would be appropriate for the university to plan for the inclusion of learning analytics and any early alert systems into the online learning strategy so that they can be seamlessly accessed by instructors to support the learning goals of their courses. Coupled with this is a need to ensure the digital safety and privacy of students who are participating in online learning. This includes securing of data as well as engaging with students in critical conversation about behaviour and conduct in digital spaces.

Existing Staff Expertise

Western has the benefit of housing many trained student support and student affairs professionals on the campus who have valuable perspectives and expertise to bring to any discussion about designing supports for online students. Partners within Student Experience, Residence Life, the Registrar's Office, Academic Counselling, the Centre for Teaching and Learning, and the Libraries should be included in assessments and future discussions. Decisions about how to introduce support for students in online environments should be

made after a thorough investigation by a cross-sectional team of approaches that will work best within Western's context (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005). This group must consider the goals of Western's online learning strategy, existing structures and supports available, and the development of new interventions and services, along with the following questions:

- Who are the learners we want to focus on engaging?
- What strengths and unique content is Western in a position to offer that differentiates us?
- What priorities are we focusing on in this strategy?
- Do we want to focus on online courses or fully online credentials and/or programs?

Experiential Learning Focus

Western has already established a strong and varied approach to experiential learning on-campus. A network of employers works closely with the institution to provide work integrated learning experiences, as well as a number of events and programs that support student connections to industry in the context of their learning. Moving education into online domains creates unique opportunities to partner with a broader cross-section of employers who could engage with Western students and bring theory to practice for learners at a distance from campus. Approaching online learning with an experiential learning lens would also create traction among employers to place tangible value on credentials provided online and perhaps could plug into a professional development market for their existing staff.

Summary

Western's existing brand as an institution with a strong emphasis on student experience means that online learning environments must adopt this as part of the future strategy, otherwise a critical mass of stories detailing poor experiences online could risk diluting the Western brand.

As detailed above, and further in Appendix 3, Western has a robust set of support programs and services across multiple departments and faculties. There is significant expertise behind these offices that can support excellence in translating these experiences into digital environments. Many have taken steps to provide flexibility of delivery to engage students who cannot gain in-person access, including moving to phone, web, and video calling technology. However, these steps have been taken largely in isolation and lack a consistent approach and message to students. There are areas that have not been able to leverage digital competencies to develop online support. To move forward effectively, it would be necessary to streamline access points and provide consistency across services.

Defining the priorities within which the university will engage, as it builds an online learning presence, will likewise define our approach to supporting and engaging online learners. There

are pros and cons to ranking these priorities, which must be considered within the context of Western's brand, institutional strategies, and future vision. Given the complexities of supporting online students at Western, a cross-sectional group of student affairs and services professionals and faculty representatives should be struck to develop an online student support and engagement model.

Appendix 8

Are There Current Western Policies and Structures in Place That Conflict With Best Practices for Online Course/Program Development and/or Delivery?

Appendix 8: Are There Current Western Policies and Structures in Place That Conflict With Best Practices for Online Course/Program Development and/or Delivery?

Policy

All academic programs at Western, regardless of modality, are approved and periodically audited through the Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) appropriate to their status and credential (e.g., new program, major modification; undergraduate degree, graduate diploma) (Western University, n.d.). This also includes all programs offered jointly by Western and other institutions, such as Fanshawe College. These processes are governed by the Quality Council of Ontario. While Western's IQAP process does not prevent the development and implementation of best practices related to online education, its neutral approach to modality also does not necessarily encourage it.

Given the significant resources needed to develop high-quality online programs, it is recommended that post-secondary institutions develop a set of policies, procedures, and processes that ensure consistency and quality across programs (See Appendix 4). Aside from IQAP, Western has no policies, procedures, or processes in place that specifically support the development of high-quality online and blended programs, instruction, and student experience.¹ In other words, the primary gap in Western's policies related to online learning is not that they conflict with best practices for online course and program development and delivery, but that this work is currently created in a policy, structure, and guideline vacuum.

There is no lack of research and accompanying guidelines on what policies, procedures, and practices should be implemented to support the online program life cycle. The Task Force has drawn on the institutional readiness frameworks described in Appendix 4 (e.g., Blackboard, n.d.; King & Alperson, 2017; Vivolo, 2020) to create a list of policies, procedures, and practices that Western will need to address when moving forward with an institutional plan for online program development. Appendices are noted when they contain more information on a list item.

¹A policy does exist limiting the number of online courses a undergraduate student can take in an during an academic year (no more than 2.5 online credits during the Spring/Summer Session and 3.0 credits during the Fall/Winter Session), but they can request special permission to take more from their home faculty academic councillor (Office of the Registrar, n.d.). Undergraduate students in online course are also currently required to write exams at an exam centre, a process facilitated by Distance Studies. Western is currently undertaking a pilot project in remote proctoring to assess the feasibility of implementing virtually proctored online exams in the future.

Best Practices for Policy, Processes, & Procedures for Online Programs

- Strategic plan for online learning (Appendix 4)
- Data sharing agreements (e.g., for Learning Analytics, Enrolment)
- Process to have admissions decisions made quickly and efficiently (Appendix 9)
- Process for suggesting and adopting eLearning Technologies (Appendix 4)
- A well-articulated program and interdisciplinary team-based course development process that incorporates best practices in course and program (Appendix 5)
- Adoption of a quality standards framework for developing and continuously improving online courses and associated development procedures (Appendix 4 and 5)
- Course/program development agreements (Appendix 5)
- Faculty developer agreements (incentives, timelines for development, online instructor training) (Appendix 5 and 6)
- Alignment of relevant policies with collective agreements (Appendix 6)
- Intellectual Property agreements (Appendix 6)
- Process and resources for meeting AODA requirements (Appendix 5)
- Procedures and resources for meeting Copyright requirement (Appendix 5)
- Extension of student policies to the online context (i.e., 48-hour assignment relief policy) (Appendix 7)

Appendix 9

What Are the Business Models for
Delivering Online Programs?

Appendix 9: What Are the Business Models for Delivering Online Programs?

Traditional academic programs tend to be developed within departments who create the programs with curriculum committees and professors responsible for course content. In a sense, the business model for traditional, on-campus programs has been “if you build it, they will come” (Chaffee, 1998). Online programs have additional requirements because of the nature of online learner populations and increasing access to provincial, national, and international post-secondary institutions (see Appendices 2 and 7 for more information on the criticality of the student experience).¹

Students interested in online academic programs apply different criteria to determine where and which programs to enroll in than they would for on-campus programs. While program quality, teaching excellence, and institutional reputation are critical to any online initiative, responsiveness, flexibility, and professional engagement are also key success factors. In this context, enrollment is driven more by demand than supply, where applicants have more choice as to where they choose to enroll. A lack of knowledge about the online learner population can lead to low enrollment and unacceptable attrition rates. A business model, different than those for traditional programs, is required for the success of an institution-wide initiative focused on enrolling net new students into online programs.

Faculty immersed in their discipline and its application often have ideas for new online programs based on their expertise in their discipline. However, they may not have the expertise and data needed to conduct environmental scans, needs analyses, feasibility studies, develop a business case, and plan for a new online program. A solution to this barrier is for the university to support Faculties, departments, instructional units, and instructors in these endeavors on an ongoing basis (Morriss-Olson, 2016).

Models for Institutional Support

As online offerings have grown increasingly important to learners as well as universities, large publicly funded universities, such as Western, looking to launch or expand degree programs have been faced with a key question: What is the optimum organizational model to support the online program life cycle?

Universities across North America have adopted a wide range of approaches ranging from outsourcing many of the tasks associated with the online program life cycle, a decentralized

¹ Charles Sturt, an Australian University, has developed a virtual Canadian campus and has large cohorts of online students, particularly in the Education sector in Ontario [www.charlessturt.ca/]. Central Michigan University, an American University, has recently launched a virtual Ontario campus [Google Keywords - central michigan university Ontario].

approach to developing and launching online programs at individual faculties, or creating a centralized support for all online efforts. Each approach offers benefits and drawbacks, with no one emerging as the dominant or superior model. A specific approach that best suits Western's strengths and diminishes its challenges is key to the success of any institution-wide initiative.

Business Models

Table 9.1: Models of Institutional Support for the Online Program Life Cycle

Outsourced	Decentralized	Centralized
Outsourcing is the practice of shifting some, or all, of the business processes, program design and/or operations for online learning from in-house to an Online Program Management (OPM) company. Examples of OPM's are Keypath Education, Pearson, and Embanet.	A second model of an online program initiative is to continue what is currently happening at Western, which is a decentralized model at the Graduate and Continuing Education departments. In this case different units undertake all facets of program design as well as many of the professional tasks.	The third model is to develop a centralized department that can support faculties as they seek to launch, grow, or maintain enrollment in online degrees. In this context, several centralized units would be involved in supporting the growth of online programs. A new professional unit would need to be created that is responsible for the business activities needed to support online learning.

Analysis

Outsourced	
Positives	Negatives / Potential Obstacles
• lower risk for the University • low upfront costs borne by the university • improved efficiencies and shortened turn-around times • immediate access to business development expertise	• little opportunity for institutional capacity building • loss of potential revenue - OPMs typically claim 50-70% of enrolled student tuition (Mckenzie, 2018) • loss of 'brand control' • potential issues around transparency • faculty member's perceptions of outsourcing • ownership of infrastructure • enrollment studies show that an OPM has more success in growing undergraduate enrollment and less impact on graduate enrollment (Garrett, 2018; Lurie, 2018)

Decentralization	
Positives	Negatives / Potential Obstacles
• faculty sense of ownership over programs • allows for innovation at the Faculty level • relatively little to no cost at the institutional level for program development and launch	• unequal access to business and technology resources across campus • lack of expertise in many Faculties (marketing, recruitment, pipeline management, search engine optimization, CRM implementation) • Faculties will struggle to generate enough internet / social media presence to drive enrollment • creates redundancies for roles, activities and infrastructure investments across the campus
Centralized Support	
Positives	Negatives / Potential Obstacles
• Several supports and high level of expertise already exist at the central level • opportunities to employ a 'project management' approach to program development • cultivates a common understanding of best practices in program development • potential for economies of scale reducing costs for business development tasks • opportunity to create cogent, well defined marketing, recruitment and enrollment strategies • optimized website increasing likelihood of success • increase likelihood of successful enrollment into programs • avoids unnecessary duplication of resources across campus • creates internet visibility using Western's full brand and institutional weight to garner sufficient attention • opportunities for sharing resources and knowledge across campus • ensures that Western offers support specifically to the online population, while ensuring that they receive the same level of service and instruction that onsite students receive • higher levels of coordination with central university resources for students	• introducing program 'marketability' can challenge traditional perceptions of the university and academic programming • requires financial investment at the institutional level for various support functions • requires a level of organizational change readiness management to ensure and revisiting historical administrative practices • requires a high level of coordination of various units across campus • to garner commitment, Faculty members need to perceive this type of support as being helpful to academic interests • coordinating efforts across the campus can be challenging when executing strategy

Discussion

Faculty member engagement is central to any online initiative (See Appendix 6). In addition, it is critical that Faculties, departments, and units realize the benefits of entering the online space. With the outsourced model, there is little incentive for individual faculty members of departments to innovate and launch online programming. Furthermore, Western would lose an opportunity to develop in-house expertise by using a private company to assist in launching online degrees.

The decentralized model is close to what currently exists on campus, with some Faculties able to embrace the opportunities that come with developing online programs. However, this model has also illustrated that, without the expertise and resources, it is extremely difficult for those areas wishing to develop online programs to 'go it alone.' (See Appendices 1, 5, and 6). This model also encourages redundancies and a lack of institutional coordination, which can delay program launch and diminish the likelihood of success.

To avoid redundancies, and ensure access to expertise, it is recommended that Western support the full program life cycle by (1) accessing expertise within existing units along with (2) creating a professional services unit. This model offers the highest likelihood of long-term success for Western. Some the Faculties, departments, and units at Western have demonstrated *proof of concept* that well-designed, responsive online programs can be successfully launched by the University.

This approach will require some adjustment in how Faculties, departments, and units interact with central services. Given the resources required to research, build, and launch online programs, Faculties are strongly encouraged to actively engage with centralized units during the entire program life cycle.

Existing Centralized Units to be Involved to Support Program Life Cycle

- Curriculum Teaching and Learning Centre
- Western Technology Services
- Library Services
- Western Communications and Public Affairs
- Student Services

Core Functions of a Newly Created Professional Services Unit

The one area where there is no centralized support for online programs is professional services, such as project management, marketing, recruitment, application life cycle management, digital optimization, and market research.

To ensure success, this unit should undertake the following functions:

Project Management

As part of the business model, the professional services unit can serve as project managers to ensure a coordinated, outcomes orientated approach to program development. Doing so will encourage responsiveness, timely deliverables, avoid redundancies, and ensure access to high levels of expertise from the various institutional offices.

Marketing and Recruitment

Develop and operationalize a unified communication, marketing, and recruitment strategy for all university online programmatic offerings (degree, certificate, diploma, and non-credit) ensuring cohesive, professional, polished messaging.

Digital Infrastructure

Implement a digital infrastructure that supports key business functions (centralized website, landing pages, auto-responders, artificial intelligence tools, Customer Relationship Management Software (CRM), and non-credit registration software).

Intelligence

Serve as an intelligence unit which can include report generation, developing analytical frameworks, data mining, process mining, business performance management, benchmarking, predictive analytics, and prescriptive analytics. Conduct, collect, structure, and disseminate market intelligence and research.

Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM) Model

Enrolment Management is a term that is used to describe well-planned strategies and tactics to shape the enrolment of an institution and meet established goals. Plainly stated, enrolment management is an organizational concept and a systematic set of activities that are designed to enable Western to exert more influence over their student enrolments.

Enrolment Funnel

Below is an in-place model for online graduate and continuing education programs within a Faculty at Western University.

- 1 - all activities logged in CRM in both recruitment and program office
- 2 - all steps are time stamped to identify systemic delays
- 3 - enrolment goals are determined within the budgetary process

Responsible Unit

 Marketing and Recruitment Unit

 Program Office

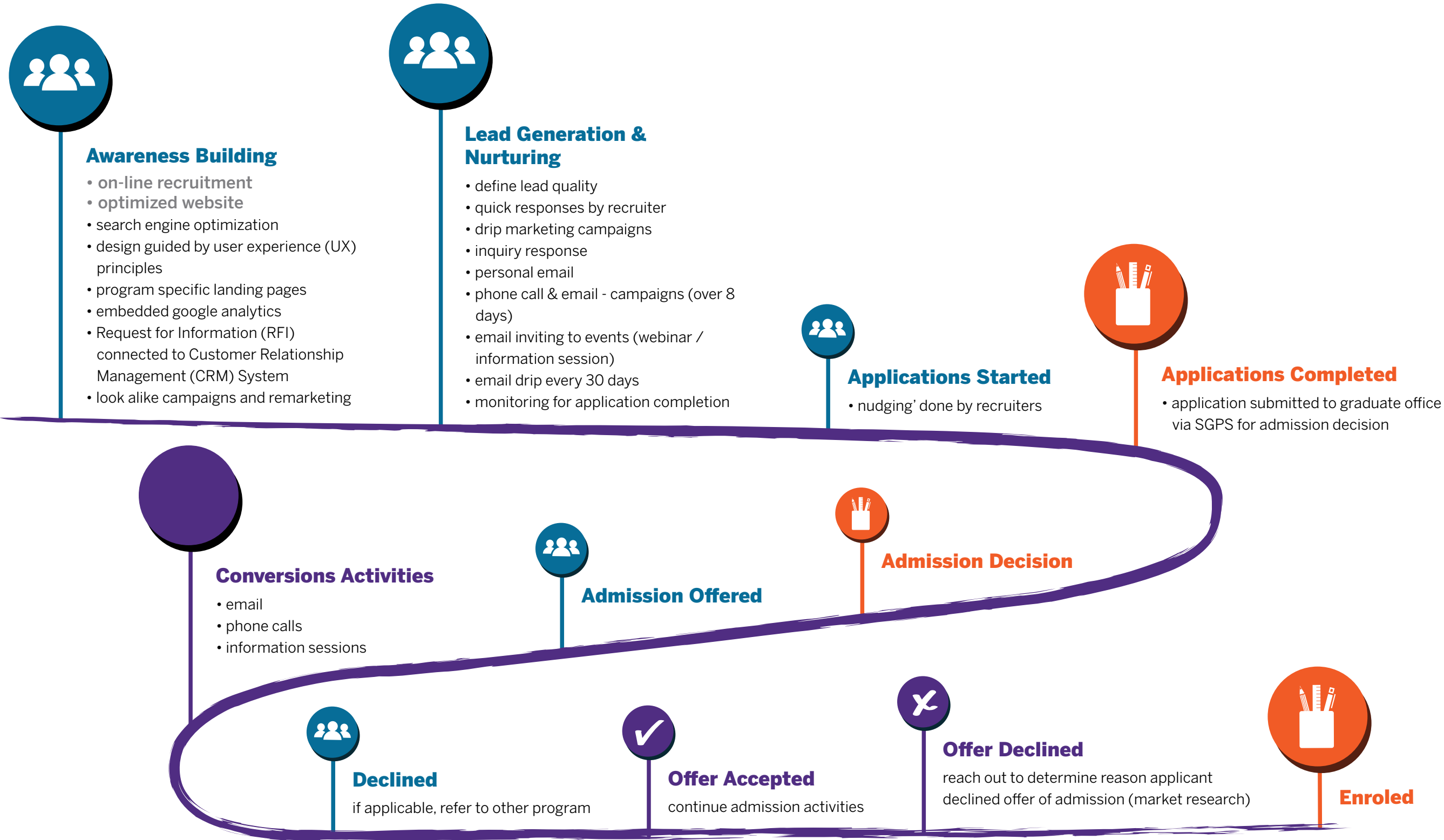


Figure 9.1: Current model in Faculty of Education

The more nuanced strategies for funnel management give rise to new metrics that aim to more precisely and appropriately track conversions and yields.

Data Collected Within This Model

- website traffic (click through rates / unique visits / RFI's generated / penetration rate of social media campaign)
- source of traffic to website
- method for accessing website
- inquiry yield
- application completion rate
- yield rate at each stage of the funnel
- time required to make admission decision

Summary

It is critical for the university to select a business model that matches its context and aspirations. Western has several organizational pieces in place to successfully support online programming. As a modality, online programming holds great potential for the university in meeting future strategic mandates of accessible education - likely one that is too important to outsource to an OPM. However, some expertise is not available to all units on the campus. An institutional investment in existing units as well as the creation of a professional services unit is the most effective, responsible, way in which the University can launch online programs that contribute to the university's mission and sustainability.

Appendix 10

Provost's Task Force For Online
Education, Membership



Appendix 10: Provost's Task Force for Online Education, Membership

Matt Bazely, Faculty of Education, Senior Director, Integrated Business Office

Stephanie Brooks, Ivey Business School, Chief Administrative Officer

Dianne Bryant, Faculty of Health Sciences, Assistant Dean

Danny Chang, USC representative

Colin Couchman, Western Technology Services, Director, Cyber Security and Business Services

Lesley D'Souza, Student Experience, Director, Digital Engagement and Storytelling

Joyla Furlano, SOGS representative

Stephanie Horsley, Centre for Teaching and Learning, Acting Associate Director, eLearning

Gregory Kopp, Faculty of Engineering, Professor (Chair of Task Force)

Sarah McLean, Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry, Assistant Professor

Ruth Martin, Faculty of Health Sciences, Professor

Sergio Rodriguez, Western Technology Services, Director, Client Services

Patrick Schmidt, Don Wright Faculty of Music, Associate Professor

Thomas Streeter, Faculty of Information and Media Studies, Professor

Carolyn Young, Continuing Studies, Director

Resources

Karen Campbell, Vice-Provost (Academic Planning, Policy and Faculty)

Ruban Chelladurai, Associate Vice-President (Planning, Budgeting & Information Technology)

Mark Daley, Special Advisor to the President (Data Strategy)

John Doerksen, Vice-Provost (Academic Programs)

Jennifer Massey, Associate Vice-President (Student Experience)

Linda Miller, Vice-Provost (Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies)

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