Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

University Undergraduate Teaching Quality

Follow-up to VFM Section 3.12, *2012 Annual Report*

RECOMMENDATION STATUS OVERVIEW					
	# of Actions Recommended	Status of Actions Recommended			
		Fully Implemented	In Process of Being Implemented	Little or No Progress	Will Not Be Implemented
Recommendation 1	4	1/3	2	1 2/3	
Recommendation 2	2	1	2/3	1/3	
Recommendation 3	1		1		
Recommendation 4	2		2/3	1 1/3	
Recommendation 5	2		2		
Total	**11**	**1 1/3**	**6 1/3**	**3 1/3**	**0**
%	**100**	**12**	**58**	**30**	**0**

Note: The fractions in some cells result from recommended actions being implemented to different degrees by the three universities we audited. We rounded the results to the nearest percentage point.

Background

In 2010/11, Ontario's 20 publicly assisted universities had the equivalent of about 390,000 full-time students eligible for provincial funding. These universities employed about 15,000 full-time faculty, including tenure-stream staff with teaching and research responsibilities, teaching staff with no research responsibilities and part-time sessional instructors under contract.

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (Ministry) expects that 70% of all new

jobs will require education and training beyond the high school level, and its goal is to have 70% of Ontarians attain post-secondary credentials by 2020.

From the Ministry's perspective, a university's most important mandate is that it does a good job of teaching its students and preparing them for the future workforce. We believe students, their parents and the public would agree.

The deans and faculty or department heads we spoke to at the three universities we visited told us that it is not easy to quantify and assess undergraduate teaching quality. Nevertheless, most felt

that measures could be developed to offer insight into teaching quality.

Although neither the Ministry nor the universities we visited were formally assessing or reporting on teaching performance on a regular basis, we found information was available that could be used to do so. For instance, all Ontario universities encourage students to complete formal evaluations of each course they take. However, we found that little aggregate analysis of the student evaluations was done at the universities we visited. Only about a quarter of Ontario's universities indicated that they make the summarized results of these evaluations available to students to help them choose their courses.

All three of the universities we visited had put some processes in place to improve teaching quality, including establishing teaching centres and giving consideration to teaching performance when making decisions on promotions and tenure. However, in 2012, we noted that universities need to better ensure that teaching quality is valued, encouraged and rewarded. Our key observations at that time were as follows:

- A number of faculty told us their annual performance appraisals did not provide them with appropriate feedback on teaching performance. We noted examples where student evaluations had been critical of teaching performance, but there was no evidence that specific guidance was provided or that faculty members had sought assistance to improve their teaching skills. None of the universities we visited required that written performance appraisals be provided to sessional instructors, even though these people accounted for 10% to 24% of full-time-equivalent staff.

- Ontario universities in general do not require faculty members to have formal training in teaching. Records at the teaching and learning centres of two of the universities we visited showed that faculty attendance at teaching workshops averaged less than one hour per instructor per year. At one university,

student course evaluation results showed the education faculty consistently outperformed other faculties in overall teacher effectiveness ratings. Interestingly, we were told that virtually all members of this faculty had formal training in teaching methods.

- The Ministry is making progress toward achieving its goal of having 70% of Ontario's population hold post-secondary credentials by 2020. However, although 94% of students were employed two years after graduation, only 65% of graduates surveyed by the Ministry in 2010/11 were employed full-time in a job that was related to the skills acquired in their studies. The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance indicated to us that students would find information on graduate employment outcomes beneficial in choosing their university and program of study.

We made a number of recommendations for improvement and received commitments from the Ministry and the universities we visited that they would take action to address our recommendations.

Status of Actions Taken on Recommendations

According to information received from the Ministry and the three universities we visited, progress has been made on implementing most of the recommendations in our *2012 Annual Report*, which were aimed at strengthening efforts to maintain and enhance teaching quality. As one university we visited had recently concluded from its own study, the design of meaningful goals, the skill of the instructor and proper course preparation were more important contributors to quality than class size alone. While a few of our recommendations have been fully implemented by at least one university visited in 2012, others will take more time. Of note, one university made progress in implementing an online course evaluation system,

and the results were available to most students to help them make more informed decisions on course selection. All three universities also noted that professional development opportunities for faculty had increased since the time of our audit. However, further progress needs to be made in evaluating the use and performance of sessional instructors.

The Ministry also started collecting additional data as part of the Ontario University Graduate Survey, and had started to publish additional results, including results on the level of education needed in the jobs graduates were working in, an assessment of how closely the job related to their program of study, whether graduates were working full time and their annual salaries. However, while the availability of these additional results was a step in the right direction, such data was only published at an aggregate provincial level and was not made available at the university or program level to help students to make more informed decisions on university and program selection. Efforts to develop learning outcome measures were ongoing through the Higher Education Quality Council.

The status of actions taken on each of our recommendations is described in the following sections.

Procedures to Assess Teaching Quality

Recommendation 1

To help ensure that administrators and students have sufficient information to make informed decisions, and that all faculty members receive the necessary feedback to maintain or enhance teaching quality, universities should:

- *consider means to aggregate student course evaluation information at the university, faculty and department levels so that administrators can identify best practices and areas requiring attention;*

    Status: Universities 1 and 2: In the process of being implemented.

    University 3: Little or no progress.

Details

University 1 has been implementing an online course evaluation system designed to aggregate and compare evaluation results, as well as provide information to identify areas that need attention. The university's system produces statistics and aggregated student evaluation results comparing the scores on core institutional questions for individual course instructors with divisional and departmental averages. We were advised that the report is shared with both instructors and administrators. Further, the results allow administrators to compare results across divisions. Although the university did not indicate that course evaluation data had been used to identify and share best practices in teaching, we were provided with documentation from the university's teaching and learning centre that suggested ways to improve teaching.

At the time of our follow-up, approximately 80% of all students at this university were enrolled in divisions that had implemented the online course evaluation system. We were informed by this university that discussions were taking place about implementing the system across the rest of the university, and that the university planned to have the course evaluation system implemented in the remaining divisions as resources become available.

At the time of the 2012 audit, University 2 had an online course evaluation system with standardized questions for all undergraduate courses from which it aggregated data. The aggregate data is used to support curriculum reviews, as well as the tenure and promotion processes. The university has subsequently established a university-wide committee, chaired by representatives from each faculty, tasked with examining all aspects of teaching and learning with the goal of improving the student experience.

Administrators at University 3 did not have aggregate course evaluation data, and during our audit in 2012, we could not review course evaluation data because the university's collective agreement with faculty stipulated that evaluations were the property of the instructor. However, the university has set aside funding and begun developing an online course

evaluation system that would allow it to obtain aggregate student evaluation data. The university plans to implement this system in 2015/16, but noted that implementation of this tool is contingent upon negotiations with, and approval by, faculty.

- *develop a core set of student course evaluation questions to be used throughout the university to facilitate comparison of student evaluation results;*
  Status: University 1: In the process of being implemented.
  University 2: Fully implemented.
  University 3: Little or no progress.

Details

University 1 had created a course evaluation with eight questions that will eventually appear on all the university's course evaluation questionnaires. The questions are intended to measure the overall quality of the student learning experience and professor instruction. In addition, divisions, departments and instructors may add questions based on their own needs. This university also publishes separate guides on how to create questions and use results data from evaluations to improve both instruction and administration.

In 2012, we noted that University 2 had already developed and was using a common questionnaire through an online system and it continues to use this.

University 3 identified that along with the development of an online course evaluation system, a set of core course evaluation questions were being investigated, and preliminary institution-wide questions had been developed. We were advised that core questions along with an online course evaluation system were expected to be rolled out across the university by 2015/16, but the implementation of this tool is contingent upon negotiations with, and approval by, faculty through the collective bargaining process.

- *provide students with the summarized results of student course evaluations to assist them*

in making informed decisions on course selection; and
Status: University 1: In the process of being implemented.
Universities 2 and 3: Little or no progress.

Details

While instructors at University 1 can opt-out of publicly sharing their course evaluation data, we were advised that in divisions where such data is available, 96% of instructors chose to allow students to view course evaluation results. Nevertheless, while only a small percentage of faculty members chose not to release their course evaluation data, we were informed that this still affects 15% of the student population in these divisions.

University 2 chose not to provide students with summarized results of student course evaluations. This university indicated it did not believe the results of course evaluations would assist students with their course selections. The university was concerned that posting results could lead to students punishing instructors who challenge their students, teach complex, difficult or controversial material, or grade more rigorously. The university also noted that it would look for other ways to help students make informed choices, such as posting more detailed course information.

University 3 would like to provide the results of student course evaluations to help students make more informed decisions, but its collective agreement with faculty stipulated that evaluations were the property of the faculty member and students were not given access to them. This university advised us that this status had not changed.

- *ensure that faculty, including sessional faculty, periodically receive constructive feedback on their teaching effectiveness, and encourage faculty to undertake any necessary professional development.*
  Status: Universities 1 and 2: In the process of being implemented.
  University 3: Little or no progress.

Details

During our 2012 audit, we noted that faculty members at University 1, with the exception of sessional instructors, received annual performance evaluations. During our follow-up, we were advised that although sessional instructors still do not receive annual performance evaluations, those that teach on a regular basis are evaluated at the time they are considered for promotion to Lecturer II or III status. As well, during our audit we noted that student comments recorded on course evaluations were not generally reviewed by administration, and that administration often evaluated only one question on the student course evaluations that asks about overall performance. However, the university indicated that it has now fully implemented a policy that specifically states that administrators are responsible for reviewing quantitative and qualitative course evaluation data as one component of these assessments.

During our audit, we found that all faculty members at University 2 are to receive an annual performance evaluation, although there was still no requirement that sessional staff be evaluated. The university indicated that it planned to include considering such an evaluation requirement in its upcoming collective bargaining with faculty. Although the university was not able to demonstrate that it had a process in place to formally encourage professional development, the university had enhanced its tracking of faculty professional development and found that more than half of its faculty members had attended the teaching and learning centre in 2013.

During our audit at University 3, we noted that although regular faculty members were evaluated annually, sessional instructors only occasionally received an evaluation. The university indicated that where performance problems are identified, faculty are encouraged to engage in professional development, but the university did not have a formal process in place.

Tenure and Promotion of Faculty

Recommendation 2

To help ensure that tenure and promotion decisions and the underlying documentation appropriately reflect the relative importance of a professor's teaching ability, the universities should:

- *ensure that all relevant information on teaching performance is made available to tenure and promotion committees and that all documentation supporting their recommendations is retained for an appropriate period of time; and*

  Status: University 1: In the process of being implemented.
  University 2: Fully implemented.
  University 3: Little or no progress.

Details

Policy at University 1 included the evaluation of teaching as part of a faculty member's career. The university advised us that revised guidelines for preparing written assessments of teaching in promotion and tenure decisions had been developed, that additional training is now being provided to members of the tenure and promotion committees with regard to the assessment of teaching, and that its updated guidelines are expected to be rolled out across all of the university's divisions by June 2015.

University 2 reiterated that it places equal value on teaching and research in its tenure and promotion processes and noted that the most recent collective agreement with its faculty association requires that committees in the tenure process receive access to the official faculty files that contain among other items, course evaluations, performance evaluations and a teaching dossier.

At the time of our 2012 audit, University 3 provided a list of the criteria used to support an application for tenure and promotion. However, we were only able to review documentation relating to 2011 tenure and promotion decisions because a clause in the collective agreement required all tenure and promotion documents to be destroyed immediately after a decision, unless an appeal or grievance

was lodged. The university advised us that it was still under the same collective agreement. As well, we were advised that the university was planning to put in place a tool to collect aggregate course evaluation data to help inform tenure and promotion decisions, but its implementation is contingent upon negotiations with, and approval by, faculty through the collective bargaining process.

- *explore means to ensure that tenure and promotion processes clearly reflect the relative importance teaching ability has with respect to such decisions.*
  Status: University 1: In the process of being implemented.
  Universities 2 and 3: Fully implemented.

Details

During the audit, at University 1, we noted that an overwhelming majority of tenure decisions were made on the basis of excellent research and competent, rather than excellent, teaching. Since that time, the university has drafted revised guidelines for developing written assessments of teaching in promotion and tenure decisions to affirm the university's commitment to promoting teaching excellence and to a rigorous evaluation of teaching. While the university has indicated that it is committed to promoting teaching excellence, 94% (136/144) of tenure-track faculty in the past two years (2012/13 and 2013/14) received tenure based on excellence in research and competence in teaching. In the same period 100% (28/28) of teaching stream faculty that had been promoted to senior lecturer had received the promotion based on excellence in teaching.

University 2 reinforced its commitment to equally value teaching and research by stipulating in its most recent collective agreement that: "Faculty members have an obligation to develop and maintain their scholarly competence and effectiveness as teachers. Faculty members have an obligation to continue their professional development to enhance and broaden their professional and teaching ability." In addition, the university has

formalized its record-keeping practices to require that all faculty tenure files be kept indefinitely and, as previously noted, the agreement requires committees in the tenure process to receive access to all relevant information on teaching.

At University 3, the collective agreement between faculty and the university outlines specific criteria for tenure and promotion, including effective teaching. The collective agreement requires sustained satisfactory and effective teaching during the probationary appointment or previous relevant teaching experience. We were provided with examples of criteria to be considered by the tenure and promotion committee, including teaching evaluation scores, written comments from students, peer reviews and course materials.

Training and Professional Development

Recommendation 3
To help ensure that all faculty members provide effective classroom instruction, universities should work with faculty to encourage greater participation in professional development activities and implement procedures to ensure that faculty who would benefit from additional teacher training are formally encouraged to participate in these activities.
Status: Universities 1, 2 and 3: In the process of being implemented.

Details
University 1 noted that it provided increased funding to its teaching and learning centre to expand capacity and provide more programming for faculty members and sessional instructors. The teaching and learning centre has indicated to administrators that they can support teaching development by connecting faculty to resources such as the centre. In addition, since university policy requires the Provost's office to be notified of any concerns related to teaching, the Provost can suggest remedial courses of action for professors, such as a referring them to the teaching centre.

University 2 noted that it had increased funding to its teaching and learning centre and enhanced its tracking of faculty attendance at the centre. Although the university was not able to demonstrate that it had a formal process in place to encourage professional development where necessary, more than half of its faculty had attended the teaching and learning centre in 2013. The university also noted that attendance at its orientation sessions in 2013 was 63% for sessional instructors and 90% for core faculty members. In addition, the university had launched a new support website where instructors can find information on topics including teaching strategies and tips.

University 3 informed us that it was committed to providing more professional development opportunities for interested faculty. To encourage participation in teaching-related events, financial incentives, such as the reimbursement of costs, were made available to faculty. In addition, as part of the annual performance review, faculty deans may provide feedback to staff on their performance and highlight areas related to teaching. Where teaching concerns are noted, deans may encourage faculty to seek professional development through programs and services offered by the university's teaching centre.

Faculty Cost and Workload

Recommendation 4

To enhance their understanding of the impact that use of various teaching resources has on teaching quality and student outcomes, universities should:

- *assess the impact of class size on teaching quality and study how best to address the challenges posed by large classes; and*
  Status: Universities 1 and 2: In the process of being implemented.
  University 3: Little or no progress.

Details
University 1 indicated that it planned to use the database that is now being generated from its new online course evaluation system to study, among other issues, the impact of large classes on teaching quality. As well, this university was actively studying the impact of class size on teaching quality and provided the results of a review of the literature on the subject of tutorials, class size and student learning. The review suggested that the design of meaningful learning goals, the skill of the instructor and proper course preparation were more important contributors to quality than class size alone.

University 2 officials indicated that they had not attempted to assess the impact of class size on teaching quality. However, they did not think they had very many large classes. Nevertheless, the university indicated it was engaged in a study that would assist it in assessing the challenges posed by large class sizes and that it planned to look at student evaluation data to study the links between class size and student evaluations.

University 3 had not formally evaluated the impact of class size on teaching quality and did not consider large classes to be a significant concern at the university because small classes had been a cornerstone of the university since its inception. As well, officials told us the university had worked on balancing large lecture classes by including a secondary component to these courses that splits the class into groups of 15 to 40 students per section to encourage small group learning.

- *weigh the impact of using teaching and sessional faculty and the extent to which they can best be used to address resource constraints.*
  Status: Universities 1, 2 and 3: Little or no progress.

Details
At University 1, no formal assessment had been done on the impact on teaching quality and student outcomes of using teaching and sessional faculty. However, we were advised that the new online course evaluation tool will allow academic management and other administrators to consider the impact of different delivery options on student learning.

University 2 stated that no assessment had been done to assess the impact teaching stream and sessional instructors have on teaching quality. During the audit we noted that students had indicated in evaluations that, although they were satisfied with the performance of sessional instructors, teaching-stream and tenure-stream faculty tended to perform better than their sessional counterparts. The university indicated that following the audit, it had decreased its use of sessional instructors.

At University 3, sessional faculty positions were limited by the collective agreement to 14% of total teaching staff, and the university did not have teaching-only faculty. Nevertheless, the university had not formally assessed the impact that using sessional faculty had on teaching quality and student outcomes.

Performance Measurement and Reporting by the Ministry

Recommendation 5

To assist students in making informed decisions on university and program selection and to help achieve its goal of adequately preparing Ontario students for the future workforce, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities should:

- *collect and make public sufficient information on student outcomes, including information on graduate employment outcomes and students' satisfaction with the quality of their education; and*
  Status: In the process of being implemented.

Details

The Ministry took a number of steps to collect better student-level data and provide more information publicly to support informed decision-making about postsecondary education and career choices. For example, the Ministry established a working group in January 2013 to discuss the Ontario University Graduate Survey and opportunities for gathering additional data and increasing the amount of survey data made public. The Ontario

University Graduate Survey captures data from students six months and two years after graduation. In addition, the Ministry continues to work with universities to expand the use of the Ontario Education Number (OEN) to assist in the collection of student-level data. The Ministry noted that university reports have OENs for 95% of students, and the Ministry has introduced legislation to further expand the use of this student identifier. Also, to make career and labour market information more readily available to students and the public, the Ministry released updates to its Ontario Job Futures and its Employment Profile websites in March 2014.

We noted that the Ministry had started to publish additional results from the Ontario University Graduate Survey, including results on the level of education needed in the jobs graduates were working in, an assessment of how closely the job related to their program of study, whether graduates were working full time, and their annual salaries. However, such data was only published at an aggregate provincial level and was not made available at the university or program level to help students make informed decisions on university and program selection.

The Ministry updated the 2011 graduate survey to include questions such as whether the respondent was working more than one paid job and whether the respondent was working in an unpaid position. While the Ministry increased the number of questions in the survey and plans to collect additional information, it had not yet committed to publishing the results of specific survey questions asked.

- *work with the university sector to support the development of meaningful measures for student learning outcomes as a way to maintain teaching quality.*
  Status: In the process of being implemented.

Details

The Ministry noted that since the release of our *2012 Annual Report*, it has continued to explore ways to

measure the quality of postsecondary education with the help of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), an agency of the Ontario government. For example, HEQCO piloted a number of learning outcomes projects with Ontario college and university partners and has commissioned 40 projects to evaluate a variety of innovations in teaching and learning. As of October 2014, it had published 21 studies commissioned from this series, including Undergraduates' Understanding of Skill-Based Learning Outcomes, Cooperation and Competition in Large Classrooms, and Developing Teaching Assistants as Members of the University Teaching Team. HEQCO had also piloted three major approaches to learning outcomes assessment, was supporting ongoing institutional work to identify effective methods of evaluating learning outcomes, and in 2013 convened a multi-year Learning Outcomes Assessment Consortium of three Ontario universities and three colleges.