

Developing Pan-University Collaborative Initiatives in Support of Diversity and Inclusive Campuses

Authors : David Philpott, Karen Kennedy

Abstract : In recognition of an increasingly diverse student population, a Teaching and Learning Framework was developed at Memorial University of Newfoundland. This framework emphasizes work that is engaging, supportive, inclusive, responsive, committed to discovery, and is outcomes-oriented for both educators and learners. The goal of the Teaching and Learning framework was to develop a number of initiatives that builds on existing knowledge, proven programs, and existing supports in order to respond to the specific needs of identified groups of diverse learners: 1) academically vulnerable first year students; 2) students with individual learning needs associated with disorders and/or mental health issues; 3) international students and those from non-western cultures. This session provides an overview of this process. The strategies employed to develop these initiatives were drawn primarily from research on student success and retention (literature review), information on pre-existing programs (environmental scan), an analysis of in-house data on students at our institution; consultations with key informants at all of Memorial's campuses. The first initiative that emerged from this research was a pilot project proposal for a first-year success program in support of the first-year experience of academically vulnerable students. This program offers a university experience that is enhanced by smaller classes, supplemental instruction, learning communities, and advising sessions. The second initiative that arose under the mandate of the Teaching and Learning Framework was a collaborative effort between two institutions (Memorial University and the College of the North Atlantic). Both institutions participated in a shared conversation to examine programs and services that support an accessible and inclusive environment for students with disorders and/or mental health issues. A report was prepared based on these conversations and an extensive review of research and programs across the country. Efforts are now being made to explore possible initiatives that address culturally diverse and non-traditional learners. While an expanding literature has emerged on diversity in higher education, the process of developing institutional initiatives is usually excluded from such discussions, while the focus remains on effective practice. The proposals that were developed constitute a co-ordination and strengthening of existing services and programs; a weaving of supports to engage a diverse body of students in a sense of community. This presentation will act as a guide through the process of developing projects addressing learner diversity and engage attendees in a discussion of institutional practices that have been implemented in support of overcoming challenges, as well as provide feedback on institutional and student outcomes. The focus of this session will be on effective practice, and will be of particular interest to university administrators, educational developers, and educators wishing to implement similar initiatives on their campuses; possible adaptations for practice will be addressed. A presentation of findings from this research will be followed by an open discussion where the sharing of research, initiatives, and best practices for the enhancement of teaching and learning is welcomed. There is much insight and understanding to be gained through the sharing of ideas and collaborative practice as we move forward to further develop the program and prepare other initiatives in support of diversity and inclusion.

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