

Governance Executive Summary
Advice, Discussion, Information Item

Agenda Title	Final Report of the CLE Taskforce on Student Experience of Teaching and Learning (SETL)
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Item

Proposed by	John Nychka – Vice Provost (Learning Initiatives) and Chair of General Faculties Council's Committee on the Learning Environment (CLE)
Presenter	Cheryl Poth and Brian Maraj, past members of CLE and co-chairs of the CLE Taskforce on SETL

Details

Office of Administrative Responsibility	Provost and Vice-President (Academic)
The Purpose of the Proposal is (please be specific)	To present the final report of the Taskforce on SETL
Executive Summary (<i>outline the specific item – and remember your audience</i>)	<p>CLE discussed the creation of the Taskforce on SETL at their September 2020 meeting and the Taskforce met six times over the 2020-2021 academic year and reported back to CLE at each of the four meetings held. CLE is asked to review the final report of the Taskforce on SETL which includes recommended principles to guide the work on SETL moving forward, recommendations for next steps, and a summary of the context for the Taskforce's work.</p> <p>In developing their report, the Taskforce discussed issues and opportunities involved with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRIs); - the History of USRIs at the University of Alberta; - gaps that exist in current questions and the practice of USRIs including closing the feedback loop and providing students with evidence of how the information is being used; - equity issues in USRIs; and - the Teaching Effectiveness Framework, and its applicability to development of USRI questions. <p>The final report of the Taskforce includes recommended principles for SETL, which they hope will guide action on SETL moving forward:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Equitable and inclusive environment and culture 2. Collaboration for Enhanced Engagement; 3. Accessibility for Decision-Making; and 4. Usefulness for Effective Teaching. <p>The Taskforce considered the work of various review committees at the University who have examined this issue through revisions and related reports. The Taskforce was cognizant that past committee members had proposed many of the changes to SETL for the improvement of the student and instructor experience and hoped that the following</p>

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	<p>recommendations might move the University forward with regards to SETL. The Taskforce would support:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consideration of Indigenous Initiatives, Equity and SETL as important values to consider before moving forward; 2. Creation of a communication plan to articulate the alignment of SETL with the Framework for Effective Teaching was suggested to ensure the “new” approach to SETL could be distinguished; 3. Principle-based improvement of SETL instruments with specific suggestions on instruments and protocols; and 4. Involvement of numerous stakeholders on an ongoing basis in the development and implementation of SETL.
Supplementary Notes and context	N/A

Engagement and Routing (Include proposed plan)

Consultation and Stakeholder Participation	N/A
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Strategic Alignment

Alignment with <i>For the Public Good</i>	Please note the Institutional Strategic Plan objective(s)/strategies the proposal supports.	
Alignment with Core Risk Area	Please note below the specific institutional risk(s) this proposal is addressing.	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Enrolment Management <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty and Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Funding and Resource Management <input type="checkbox"/> IT Services, Software and Hardware <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Leadership and Change <input type="checkbox"/> Physical Infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/> Relationship with Stakeholders <input type="checkbox"/> Reputation <input type="checkbox"/> Research Enterprise <input type="checkbox"/> Safety <input type="checkbox"/> Student Success
Legislative Compliance and jurisdiction	CLE’s Terms of Reference	

Attachments

- 1) Committee on the Learning Environment (CLE) Taskforce on Student Experience of Teaching and Learning - Report on the Work of the Taskforce and Recommendations for Next Steps (pps. 1-11)
- 2) Terms of Reference – CLE Taskforce on SETL (pps 1-2)

Prepared by: Kate Peters, GFC Secretary and Manager of GFC Services

Committee on the Learning Environment (CLE)
Taskforce on Student Experience of Teaching and Learning

Report on the Work of the Taskforce and Recommendations for Next Steps

Submitted for consideration of CLE September 29, 2021

Membership:

Brian Maraj (Co-Chair)	<i>Professor, Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation (KSR)</i>
Cheryl Poth (Co-Chair)	<i>Professor, Faculty of Education</i>
David Draper	<i>Vice-President (Academic) Student's Union, Faculty of Arts</i>
Abner Monteiro	<i>Member, CLE; Faculty of KSR</i>
Sachiketha Reddy	<i>GSA VP(Academic)</i>
Ali Shiri	<i>Associate Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR)</i>
Helen Vallianatos	<i>Associate Dean of Students</i>
Cosette Lemelin	<i>Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning</i>
Jeff Rawlings	<i>Director Digital Learning Environments, Information Services & Technology</i>
Ellen Watson	<i>Lead Educational Developer (Assessment), Centre for Teaching and Learning</i>
Bradon Valgardson	<i>Data Analyst, Centre for Teaching and Learning</i>
Support: Kate Peters	<i>General Faculties Council (GFC) Secretary and Manager of GFC Services</i>

Executive Summary

The General Faculties Council (GFC) Committee on the Learning Environment (CLE) holds a responsibility to provide advice and consider essential elements to how students communicate their experience of teaching and learning, or the Student Experience of Teaching and Learning (SETL). In light of this responsibility, the CLE struck a Taskforce to examine SETL in Fall, 2020. This report is the deliverable of the Taskforce and includes recommendations on SETL that resulted from the Taskforce work.

The Taskforce considered the long history of inquiry and reflection on SETL at the University, and the recently developed Framework for Effective Teaching (2020). Committee members drew from their discussions to develop recommended principles for SETL, which they hope will guide action on SETL moving forward:

1. Equitable and inclusive environment and culture;
2. Collaboration for Enhanced Engagement;
3. Accessibility for Decision-Making; and
4. Usefulness for Effective Teaching.

The Taskforce recommends that next steps should include consideration of Indigenous Initiatives, equity and SETL, and a communication plan on the alignment of SETL with the Framework for Effective Teaching. They believe for the plan to be effective, the goal should be to articulate a departure from the past approach to student evaluation of teaching, and to emphasize alignment with the Framework.

The Taskforce also recommends that decisions and any protocols developed for instruments for SETL should consider their usefulness for improvement of teaching and learning and concluded that no single source should be used in isolation. SETL should be fuel for reflection for both students and instructors guided by honesty, compassion, anti-bias and integrity. Regarding questions for SETL, the Taskforce recommends alignment with the Framework on Effective Teaching and Learning.

Finally, consistent with the underlying principle of collaboration, the Taskforce felt that numerous stakeholder groups should be engaged before instruments for SETL are put in place. They discussed groups that have a role to play on our Campuses and how they could be involved.

The Taskforce observed the University is at an important juncture in their consideration of an institutional approach to teaching and learning. Completing their report during the third wave of

the pandemic, and as the University began to imagine a return to Campus, amplified the sense that there is an opportunity to enhance instruments for the student experience of teaching and learning in ways that are more meaningful for students, instructors and the University.

Purpose of the Taskforce

The Taskforce was struck at the request of the Chair of the CLE at the September 30, 2020 meeting. The Taskforce mandate was to examine tools and practices and to gather information on SETL. Specifically, CLE asked the Taskforce to:

- Make recommendations to improve the response rates and usability of Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRIs);
- Examine ways to engage students outside the USRI tools;
- Review the purpose of tools for SETL; and
- Use information from different stakeholder groups.

This report is the deliverable of the Taskforce and includes recommendations on SETL that resulted from the Taskforce work.

The Taskforce was convened for the first time in Fall, 2020 and was co-chaired by two elected faculty members of CLE: Brian Maraj and Cheryl Poth. Membership was established in consultation with CLE, and included three student members (two undergraduate, one graduate) and representatives from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR), the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), Information Services and Technology (IST), and the Office of the Dean of Students. Support was provided by University Governance.

The Taskforce met five times between November 2020 and May 2021 and reported back to CLE after each of their meetings. Throughout their work, the Taskforce:

- Engaged in discussions on the purpose of SETL from the perspective of students, administrators and faculty;
- Reviewed literature on student evaluation of teaching;
- Considered the history of USRIs at the University;
- Engaged with the Framework for Effective Teaching and discussed how it could be used to guide SETL; and
- Provided feedback on draft SETL questions aligned to the Framework.

The Centre for Teaching and Learning presented on the history of SETL at the University that was particularly impactful on the Task Force's work.

Review of the history of student evaluation

The long history of inquiry into SETL at the U of A and the use of the USRI questions developed in 1999 was reviewed by the Taskforce. Members also considered context and background on the development of the Framework for Effective Teaching.

The historical review allowed the Taskforce to build their recommendations on the body of work on USRIs and SETL at the University of Alberta over the past twenty years. The Taskforce wishes to acknowledge in their report, the work of GFC and many others on the practice of student evaluation of teaching and learning, such as:

- GFC Report on the Learning Environment Evaluation of Teaching at the UofA (2008, 2009);
- Renaissance Committee Report (2013);
- Summary Report of the Evaluation of Teaching at the UofA GFC Report on the Learning Environment (2017); and
- Framework for Effective Teaching and Learning (2020)

The review of these documents and subsequent discussions led the Taskforce to observe:

- Student evaluation of teaching are currently being used in diverse ways. This means that there is an enhanced need for collaboration with many stakeholders and may contribute to a lack of a clear way forward for SETL.
- Measurement challenges inherent to the assessment of teaching and learning appear to be consistent obstacles in capturing the student experience.
- Use of evaluation feedback for instructor reflection and the improvement of teaching is inconsistent and has been cited by students who call for closing the loop on feedback provided.
- When and how students are asked to provide feedback or comments is impactful, and it is important to make information gathered available to students and instructors.
- Principles set out in the Framework for Effective Teaching are valuable for SETL, especially the pedagogical and technological considerations, the learning environment, equity, and reflection on teaching with the aim of removing barriers for student learning and enhancing the student experience for all.
- The University lacks a guiding policy framework that makes more explicit how evaluation of teaching and learning could be multifaceted and not reliant upon a single source of data.

The Taskforce found that the historical review leading to the research and development of the Framework of Effective Teaching offered important learnings to inform future directions. In particular, past work suggests that teaching evaluation needs to be multifaceted and the use of USRIs must consider the student experience. The Taskforce felt that the Framework could be used as a conceptual framework to guide the development of student survey questions.

Review of the Framework for Effective Teaching (2020)

The Taskforce reviewed the CTL's work to develop a framework to describe effective teaching and to support better methods of developing, documenting, and evaluating teaching at the University. Specifically, the Taskforce examined the five dimensions of effective teaching, especially those associated with the course, the instructor, and the learning environment.

The Taskforce also discussed how the Framework intersects and aligns with diverse policy, procedures and regulation at the University including the current Collective Agreement's language on evaluation of teaching (Collective Agreement, A6.03.4), University policy regarding teaching and assessment (GFC 111.1), and the perspectives of department chairs (Forgie et al., 2017).

The Taskforce felt that the goals underpinning the Framework were aligned with the perceived purpose of SETL, especially the need to communicate and build consensus about effective teaching; to support multi-faceted evaluation of teaching; to guide collection of qualitative and quantitative data that could be used to inform formative and summative evaluation of teaching. They discussed the importance of teaching resources, methods and strategies, as well as resources available to support students in their learning, as being essential to SETL as a means to assess the extent to which the instructional approaches as executed in the course delivery contributed to effective teaching and learning.

The Taskforce concluded that the Framework is coherent with goals for SETL and was supportive of its use by the CTL to revise the current USRIs. In particular, the Taskforce felt three aspects of the Framework should guide SETL at the U of A:

- 1) To what extent the assessments and learning resources as set out in the course design contributed to effective teaching;
- 2) The need to consider student engagement in the course and the instructional approaches that create a supportive climate for learning;
- 3) Considerations about the learning environment that will influence the SETL including the physical or virtual environments and scheduling (which may not be under the instructor's control).

Recommended principles for SETL

The Taskforce discussed guiding principles and values for SETL at every stage of their work. Members drew upon their different perspectives from their experience as students, faculty and content experts in teaching and learning. The committee believed that a principle-based approach to decision-making on changes to how data is collected about the student experience would be preferable. To support this work, they recommended the following principles and values for SETL.

1. Equitable and inclusive environment and culture
 - SETL should reflect the university's commitment to equity, diversity and inclusivity by supporting an equitable and inclusive environment and culture for all members of its community.
 - SETL should not be used as a vehicle for the expression of hateful or discriminatory remarks on the basis of attributes such as gender, sexual or gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion, or disability.

- SETL can present barriers including racism, bias, equity and diversity that should be considered in the approach to decision-making and making changes to data collection.
2. Collaboration for Enhanced Engagement
 - SETL should encourage students to provide insight about their experiences as a learner in an unbiased and mutually respectful manner.
 - SETL should encourage instructors to demonstrate to students how SETL feedback informs ongoing teaching improvements.
 - SETL should convey to students that their feedback matters and that instructors are listening.
 - SETL should promote innovation and inform course content, design, and delivery, including of the physical or virtual learning environment.
 3. Accessibility for Decision-Making
 - SETL data, whether quantitative or qualitative, should be credible and accessible to members of the University community, including students, to ensure they have information about teaching and courses at the UofA.
 - SETL instruments should enable students to provide timely and specific feedback with a mechanism for students to opt-out of answering questions where they don't have meaningful feedback to offer.
 - SETL should be designed to align with the teaching context.
 4. Usefulness for Effective Teaching
 - SETL should be used by students to provide meaningful feedback about their experience of learning in a course in the spirit of improvement; and should be used by instructors to inform their teaching.
 - SETL should be an avenue for faculty members to engage in reflection on their teaching and support their ongoing teaching development.
 - SETL should draw upon qualitative and quantitative data to provide feedback to instructors that can inform their teaching.

The committee hopes this report will influence future decision making on SETL instruments through this articulation of principles. Further, they hope that the use of principles will better support the University as it seeks to navigate the complexity of this work.

Recommendations for Next Steps

The mandate of the Taskforce was to make recommendations to improve the response rates and usability of Universal Ratings of Student Instructions (USRIs). To accomplish this, the Taskforce iteratively reviewed the purpose of SETL, the use of information by different stakeholder groups, and ways that students may evaluate teaching outside USRIs. Armed with this information, and after examining the Framework for Effective Teaching and considering the work of GFC and other stakeholders on these questions, the Taskforce articulated four recommendations for the consideration of CLE. They would support consideration of Indigenous Initiatives, Equity and SETL, a communication plan being formulated to articulate the alignment of SETL with the Framework for Effective Teaching; principle-based improvement of SETL

instruments; and that numerous stakeholders should be involved on an ongoing basis in the development and implementation of SETL.

1. Consideration of Indigenous Initiatives, Equity and SETL

The taskforce discussed the University's values of integrity, responsibility, equity and inclusiveness. These values apply to faculty, staff, and students and should be applied when considering SETL.

- Principles that underpin changes to SETL should include anti-racism, decolonization, anti-misogyny, anti-transmisogyny, anti-ableism, and any other idea that might help the University move toward the focused removal of barriers inherent in SETL.
- Diversity should be considered in the sources of evidence for effective teaching which can be found not just in student evaluations but also in other fronts such as assessments, assessment strategies, feedback strategies, and instructor performance.
- Guided by these values, instructors should be reflecting on more than just SETL, including course design, lesson planning, teaching approaches, teaching philosophies, and assessment strategies.

2. Communication Plan of the Alignment of SETL with the Framework for Effective Teaching

The Taskforce believed that to move forward with SETL in meaningful ways, effective communication on a shift in SETL at the University was necessary. Communications should emphasize a new approach to SETL guided by principles set out in this report, and the desire to address perceived inequities in the current USRI questions. In particular, the Communication Plan should include:

- Key messages will include a description of the *new* approach to SETL guided by the larger guiding framework for effective teaching and the principles that guided the *new* SETL approach: Collaboration, Accessibility, and Usefulness.
- A focus of the *new* SETL approach is to value the student experience and provide a mechanism for demonstrating the use of student feedback for improving teaching.
- The *new* SETL approach addresses the inequities inherent in our current questionnaire and includes the measurement of variables that influence learning beyond the instructor.

While the communication plan should be developed and implemented by administration, CLE may have a role to play in providing feedback and advice.

3. Improvement of Instruments for Evaluation of Effective Teaching and Learning

The Taskforce discussed at length possibilities to improve instruments for evaluation of effective teaching including evaluation tools, the importance of instructor reflection, and peer review. The Taskforce believes that improvement should be driven by the principles set out in this report, and offers some key considerations:

- Decisions about instruments and protocols need to consider usefulness as well as limitations, and no single data source should be used in isolation. The Taskforce offers the following examples as potential sources of evidence for effective teaching:
 - Student evaluations of specific courses
 - Instructor reflection of student evaluations
 - Peer Review of course materials
 - Peer Review of teaching performance
- SETL should consider the inclusion of both open- and close-ended questions aligned with the Framework on Effective Teaching and Learning.
- SETL should consider the need for learning opportunities for both students and instructors to support the implementation of the *new* approach to SETL. The Taskforce offers the following examples as potential areas for guidance:
 - How students can provide meaningful feedback for teaching improvements
 - How instructors can use and demonstrate the use of feedback to improve teaching

The Taskforce recognized the need to balance technological and pedagogical considerations, and hoped that ongoing involvement and collaboration with stakeholders would promote accessibility, sustainability and engagement.

4. Ongoing Involvement and Collaboration Among Stakeholder Groups for Evaluation of Effective Teaching and Learning

The Taskforce drew from multiple perspectives and experiences and believed this involvement and collaboration were a strength. The Taskforce recommends ongoing involvement and collaboration of various stakeholders in the student evaluation of teaching and learning but recognized their contributions would need to be different. The Taskforce recommends the use of a Framework to articulate how the different stakeholders might be engaged, including a leadership role for CLE, and collaboration, engagement, consultation or informing others. Specifically:

- Empowering the GFC Committee on the Learning Environment to make decisions on essential elements of SETL, including the physical and virtual learning and teaching environment and how SETL intersects with university policy;
- Collaborating with key stakeholders to build ownership of SETL and to promote shared decision-making through partnership with stakeholders including:

- Information Services and Technology (IST)
- University of Alberta Students' Union (UASU)
- Graduate Students' Association (GSA)
- Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR)
- Faculty members
- Engaging with other stakeholder groups to ensure commitment to SETL and to ensure that concerns and aspirations are understood and considered, including, but not limited to:
 - Aboriginal Student Council (ASC)
 - Indigenous Graduate Students' Association (IGSA)
 - International Students' Association (ISA)
 - Black Students' Collective: Black Graduate Students' Association, Black Students' Association
- Consulting with experts on Campus to build knowledge, obtain information and feedback on alternatives. This may include:
 - Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL)
 - Test Scoring & Questionnaire Services (TSQS)
 - Faculties and Colleges that have explored new instruments (e.g., St. Joseph's College)
- Informing leaders who use SETL in indirect ways to build awareness and request information be shared with different constituents. For example:
 - Office of the Provost
 - Dean of Students
 - Vice-Provost (Indigenous Initiatives)
 - Special Advisory (Human Rights and Equity)
 - Dean's Council
 - Chair's Council

The Taskforce believes this approach to implementation of the *new* SETL, and ongoing change and evolution of SETL, will ensure more effective instruments and contribute more broadly to the improvement of teaching and learning.

Conclusion

Student Evaluations have been a component for the assessment of teaching and learning at the University of Alberta since 1978. During these ensuing 43 years, the debate regarding their relative utility has been ongoing. On a larger scale, we should note that the University is not unique in this regard as student evaluation of teaching and learning has been an institutional concern for nearly a century of higher education instruction (Zimmerman, 2020).

The Taskforce considered the work of various review committees at the University who have examined this issue through revisions and related reports. The Taskforce was cognizant that past committee members had proposed many of the changes to SETL for the improvement of the student and instructor experience. Their dedication and efforts informed the work of this

Taskforce who noted these initiatives are evidence of the aspiration of constant improvement of teaching and learning.

Like other reports, we recognize that there are limitations to our input. That Taskforce's desire to see a principle based approach to decision-making on SETL was guided by these values articulated over the course of discussions:

- Principle of an Equitable and Inclusive Environment and Culture, to ensure that the University's commitment to EDI and Indigenous Initiatives is foregrounded in decision-making.
- Principle of Collaboration for Engagement, facilitated by respecting the value of community, connection and unity towards the common goal of enhancing the student experience of teaching and learning.
- Principle of Accessibility for Decision making, enhanced by the values of fairness and Equity, which works best where there is trust and respect for the processes that aspire to facilitate constant improvement and growth in teaching and learning.
- Principle of Usefulness for Effective Teaching, augmented by the value of pedagogical Excellence, which the Taskforce sees as an ongoing commitment to achieving the highest levels of instructional quality for the classroom experience.

The task force's intent in submitting this Report is to support the pursuit of the most optimal means of assessing SETL in ways that will inform us about the student experience in class, and the nature of the climate that was created by the interaction of students and instructor(s). The Taskforce hopes that these principles will shape the future iterations of SETL in ways we believe will bring the voice of the students to the fore and empower the instructor to utilize that feedback in fostering constant improvement in teaching and learning with novel and innovative approaches for the 21st Century.

References and Links

Framework for Effective Teaching

- Marin, Poth, Miller-Young (2020), [Dimensions of Effective Teaching and Learning](#)

Minutes from CLE Discussions on the Taskforce

- [September 30, 2020](#)
- [December 2, 2020](#)
- [February 3, 2021](#)
- [March 3, 2021](#)

[GFC Policy 111 - Teaching and Learning and Teaching Evaluation](#)

Zimmerman, J. (2020). *The Amateur Hour: A history of college teaching in America*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

PURPOSE

The Committee on the Learning Environment has struck a taskforce to examine tools and practices to gather information on how students are engaged in the classroom and the student experience of teaching and learning. The Taskforce will:

- Make recommendations to improve the response rates and usability of Universal Ratings of Student Instructions (USRIs)
- Examine ways to engage students outside the USRI tools
- Review the purpose of Student Assessment of Learning (SAL) and the use of SAL by different stakeholder groups
- Working in conjunction with a new teaching policy, make recommendations on the tools and format of SAL to facilitate use by different stakeholder groups

RESPONSIBILITY

- CLE will be responsible for the direction, monitoring, and evaluation of the Task Force work.
- Deliverables where governance is required, will be first vetted and approved by CLE.

SUGGESTED COMPOSITION

- Co-Chairs - Members of CLE
- At least two student members (Vice-President (Academic) SU and GSA)
- One representative from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
- Dean or Delegate of the Office of the Dean of Students
- One representative of University of Alberta (IST)
- One representative from the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL)
- One representative University Governance, others as required

The Task Force may add to its membership as it deems necessary.

DELIVERABLES

- Draft principles that speak to the purpose of SAL
- Draft questions that might be used in a pilot
- Consistency with other practices of our community (open communication)

MEETINGS

The Task Force will meet once or twice a month until completion. Guests will be invited to attend as required. Other consultation activities will be determined by the Task Force.

CLE Task Force on Student Experience of Teaching and Learning

Revised: December 2, 2020

A member of CLE will act as Chair.

Administrative support for the Taskforce will be provided by University Governance.

Any member of the Taskforce may submit agenda items to the Chair.