

A Case for Change eLearning Integration at York University Summary and Recommended Actions



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Background and Current Status of eLearning Integration at York

In the Spring of 2012, the Academic Technology Advisory (ATA) Group was established to provide eLearning advice and guidance to University executive leadership on the use of technology in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning and the overall academic experience of York's students.

The first task that this group was mandated to undertake was the development of high level plans and strategies to guide the innovative use of technology in advancing the University's strategic priorities. This document addresses this task.

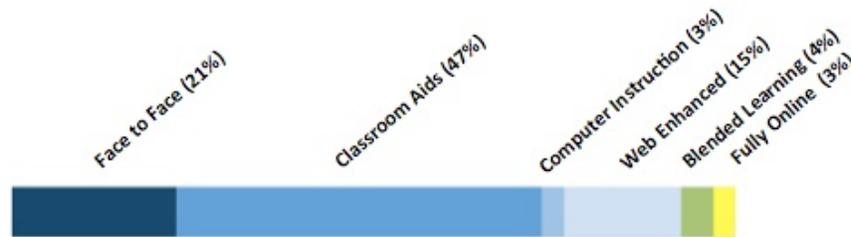
The proposed recommendations are based on direction provided in the current University Academic Plan (2010) which refers to the need to demonstrate our commitment to academic quality, student success and engagement and outreach in relation to teaching and learning by *"supporting innovative and flexible curriculum delivery through online and hybrid [blended] courses, as well as other elements of technology enhanced learning"* (UAP, 2010: 8). Further, in 2010, a working group had been established by the then Academic Vice-President & Provost with the goal of developing an eLearning business case to guide the implementation of directives from the White Paper. A document entitled an "E-Learning Business Case for York University" (June 2010) was produced. This business case has provided valuable direction for the current deliberations.

The literature shows that blended and fully online courses (see Appendix A for eLearning definitions) have been found to provide at least an equivalent learning experience to face-to-face courses (Dell, Low and Wilker, 2010); however, when compared to fully online and face-to-face, blended learning has been shown to have higher success rates and lower withdrawal rates (Dziuban, Hartman, Juge, Moskal & Sorg, 2006). One area where fully online courses show weakness is that dropout rates tend to be higher as they typically require more motivation and self-discipline to succeed. Care must be taken if offering fully online courses to students entering university directly from high school as they may not have matured sufficiently to cope with the independent study required for this type of offering.

Universities with whom York competes for students are active in developing their own eLearning initiatives. In the summer of 2012 the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities issued a request for 'Strategic Mandate Agreements' from all universities and colleges in Ontario. These statements were to address the top priorities of each institution. The University of Toronto indicated that it is part of Coursera and will offer a number of "massive, online, open courses (MOOCs). U of T also shared that it currently offers 90 for-credit courses online and that the institution is planning to offer 30 more online courses within the next 3 years. Ryerson University currently offers 282 degree courses and 186 non-degree courses via online and distance education. Ryerson is planning to develop 120 new courses online for each of the next 5 years.

A recent survey (2011-12) of eLearning at York gives additional insight into the scope of its use across the continuum from web-enhanced to blended learning to fully online. In total, surveys were distributed for 3,405 courses taught by 1,527 individual faculty members. Responses were received for 1,909 undergraduate courses or approximately 57% of the total.

The survey results showed a relatively high rate of use of technology (e.g. PowerPoint slides) in traditional face-to-face courses but few courses that use alternate modes of delivery (i.e. fully online or blended). Specifically approximately 4% (or approximately 140 courses) of current course offerings are being offered in a blended format and 3% (or approximately 105 courses) are fully online (see eLearning common language definitions in Appendix A).



eLearning Systems Map (adapted from Bates & Poole 2003)

The recommendations in this document support an increase in the adoption of eLearning tools and resources across the continuum – responding to the opportunity to use technology to enhance the in-class experience and to provide greater choice via blended and fully online course delivery options for both current and future students.

A significant increase in eLearning course offerings necessarily requires a concomitant increase in support services for development and ongoing maintenance. Currently, support for eLearning at York is available from a variety of sources including the Teaching Commons, UIT Learning Technology Services, Faculty-based Technology Support Groups, UIT Instructional Technology Centre and the Libraries.

York has over 400 classrooms of which more than 70% are 'eClassrooms' that provide faculty members with the option of supplementing their teaching with presentations, multimedia and web resources. A minority but growing number of classrooms also support lecture recording.

Every course director has the opportunity to use a Moodle site to support his/her course(s). An estimated 60% of courses currently make use of Moodle. In addition to Moodle, a number of other 'stand-alone' services are also available including: blog and wiki sites, discussion forums, quiz creation and academic integrity. It should be noted that the new regulations for the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2011)*, which will come into effect in January 2014, will demand that all course offerings are provided in accessible formats with communication supports for persons with disabilities.

Although this level of support is an excellent starting point, it will need to be bolstered significantly to ensure the fulsome integration of technology enhanced learning in our curriculum. The implementation of eLearning must be planned, deliberated, and coordinated at pan-University and pan-Faculty levels rather than individual courses being offered randomly across a variety of programs. Moving forward, the programs and courses using eLearning technology should be strategically identified. The modes of delivery (e.g. web-enhanced, blended, fully online) should be decided based on the best fit with the disciplinary pedagogy and student needs. Quality assurance processes must be in place to ensure quality course development, along with educational development expertise, computer upgrades, technical assistance and appropriately equipped classrooms.

If we don't embrace eLearning we may be left behind. Students will be recruited and retained by institutions that allow them to continue accessing the technology enhanced learning approaches that they utilized in

high school. If we fail to attract the best students, this will not only affect York's reputation but will also impact directly on recruitment, retention and our ability to secure research dollars.

Proposed eLearning 2017 Vision and Recommended Actions

The ATA Group proposes that the following guiding principles underpin the proposed Vision and Recommended Actions that follow. These principles were affirmed through the consultation process that took place between November 2012 and January 2013 (see Appendix B).

Guiding Principles

Over the next five years, eLearning must become an integral element of:

- A strong teaching culture that supports good teaching and creates an engaging learning experience for students;
- A quality student experience that makes learning more accessible and adaptable to the "multidimensional lives" of our students; and
- A value proposition that enhances the reputation of the university and distinguishes York as an institution that innovates and promotes student-centered learning.

2017 Vision for eLearning Integration at York

By 2017, we will have

1. Enhanced the (commuter) student experience and made learning resources more accessible for students by ensuring that a common, centrally supported learning management system exists for 100% of courses and that these learning resources are largely accessible via mobile devices.
2. Enhanced student learning and flexibility through the adoption of blended learning as a common and accepted approach to course delivery – increasing the number of strategically selected blended courses year over year by (number)%*
3. Increased learning options for existing students and new students by identifying and developing of key, strategic fully online courses. Specifically, increasing the number of fully online courses year over year by (number) %.
4. Attracted new domestic and international students through the creation of (number)* fully online degree and/or certificate programs.

**Number or percentage to be specified in consultation with Provost & Deans (e.g. 1% increase in blended or fully online courses would be the equivalent of approximately 35 courses a year)*

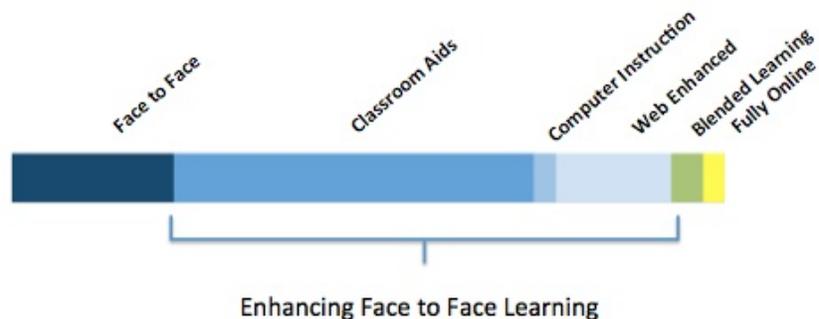
eLearning Recommendations

What follows are recommended actions that will move us toward the 2017 Vision. This Vision is driven by the desire to create more and better learning environments through technology that improve both student learning and student satisfaction. In short, York is seen as an attractive option for new students and retention is improved as a result of the choice and flexibility provided to assist with degree completion through the integration of eLearning.

Once decisions are made by the leadership regarding the broad directions and priorities to be pursued, a business case will be developed outlining the resources and time that will be required for implementation.

Recommendation One: Promote the broad adoption of eLearning tools and resources in face-to-face courses

There are a large number of tools and resources that faculty can use to enhance the learning experience of students in face-to-face courses. In order to achieve maximum use and impact, we must ensure that we are providing eLearning tools in a manner that is simple and 'turn-key' for both course directors and students. Ideally, a support system will be created that requires a minimum of human intervention and support, akin to the Facebooks of the world where the tools are intuitive, easy to use and extensive help is available online.



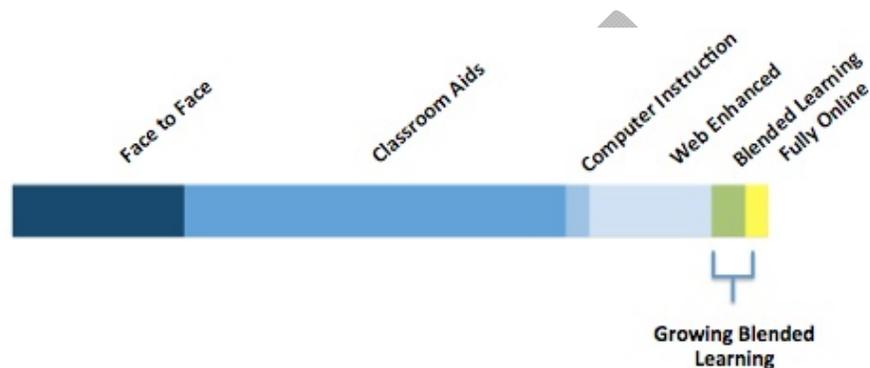
Suggested Actions to Support Recommendation One

- 1.1 Develop extensive online help and tutorials for course directors and students with the goal of making them "self-sufficient" in the use of Moodle, classroom technology and other eLearning tools.
- 1.2 Examine and improve the overall usability and accessibility of the Moodle environment (e.g. simplify the navigation of the Moodle course home page for students; create a 'Moodle light' course template to help course directors get started; investigate mobile options; ensure that standard course templates are AODA compliant).
- 1.3 Ensure that all classrooms are equipped with at least the minimum standard of technology equipment and that measures are in place to ensure ease of use and reliable performance of classroom equipment.
- 1.4 Encourage the use of digital lecture recording (with transcriptions and sub-titles) by CDs. These recordings should be navigable so that students can fast forward to the lecture content that most interests them.
- 1.5 Ensure that libraries are embedded in online course websites to provide information literacy and

library collection resources and to provide students will support for learning style self-assessment.

Recommendation Two: Increase the Adoption of Blended Learning

The blended model must become a common and accepted approach for course delivery at York. We are recommending that we develop strong internal competencies and processes in the development and support of blended courses. The research to date suggests that the blended learning approach, when well designed and implemented, provides students with the best learning experience when compared to both face-to-face and fully online. Blended course delivery is very well suited to York as it is grounded in an engaging face-to-face experience that is enhanced by online resources that improve the accessibility of learning to students.

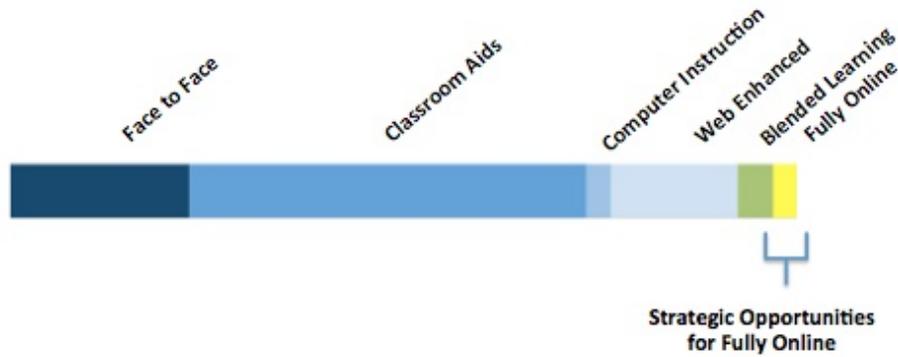


Suggested Actions to Support Recommendation Two

- 2.1 Establish Faculty 'road maps' defining where blended learning can best serve each degree program. Strategically select which courses and the number of courses to be converted annually.
- 2.2 Establish and communicate broadly a pan-University incentive program for those CDs who are willing to create or transform courses.
- 2.3 Resource the Teaching Commons, UIT Learning Technology Services and Faculty Technology Support groups as appropriate in the creation of an integrated suite of professional development offerings, teaching resources (e.g. list of repositories of learning objects, etc.) and course design, development services and support services to assist CDs in utilizing blended learning approaches.

Recommendation Three: Pursue the Strategic Development and Introduction of Fully Online Courses and Programs

There are current and emerging opportunities for York in online learning – to provide greater access and choice to our students and to attract new students. Timely action is needed to move York into the 'fully online arena'. In order to act on these opportunities and build capability in online course delivery, we are suggesting collaborating with other higher education institutions that are moving to establish fully online programs (undergraduate, graduate or continuing education). We should also consider engaging third parties (i.e. contractors or vendors) to provide capacity and expertise to convert courses and/or programs to fully online formats in a timely fashion.



Suggested Actions to Support Recommendation Three

- 3.1 Establish Faculty 'road maps' defining where fully online fits best (e.g. degree programs, continuing education initiatives, international initiatives, etc.).
- 3.2 Identify external expertise that would assist with the development of and provide ongoing support for strategically selected domestic and international courses and/or programs.
- 3.3 Pursue institutional opportunities to engage with a broader community around emergent trends in online learning - support the Council of Ontario Universities in its creation of Ontario Universities Online; work with partners to pilot and learn from innovations such as Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs).
- 3.4 Establish and communicate broadly an incentive program for those CDs who are willing to create or transform courses strategically selected by each Faculty.
- 3.5 Establish extended (i.e. 24/7 and online) technical and general student service support appropriate for fully online students including resourcing the Learning Common in supporting students to develop academic literacies in fully online courses.

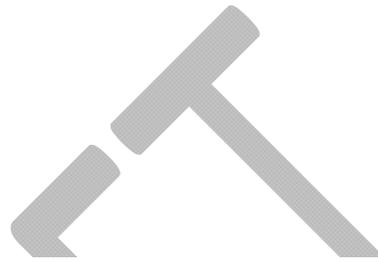
Recommendation Four: Elevating the Culture of Teaching and Learning through eLearning

The implementation of an eLearning strategy could do much to improve teaching and learning generally by focusing attention on aspects of Quality Assurance such as well-developed course learning outcomes and curricular mapping. Much of the feedback that we received through the consultation process spoke to the need to create a more positive environment for teaching development in general and spoke to the role of eLearning in this culture shift.

Suggested Actions to Support Recommendation Four

- 4.1 Reduce or eliminate real and perceived barriers to eLearning adoption by addressing and resolve/clarify issues associated with intellectual property, use of quality standards and evaluation, copyright, privacy and associated course fees.
- 4.2 Strengthen the importance of teaching (including eLearning) in the tenure and promotion standards.

- 4.3 Develop a special professional development strategy and incentive program for *contract* faculty willing to create or transform courses strategically selected by each Faculty.
- 4.4 Require all *new* faculty members to participate in professional development activities addressing eLearning in their first year at York.
- 4.5 Promote scholarship of teaching and learning by encouraging evaluative research on different platforms and to measure the impact of eLearning approaches on learning outcomes and student retention.
- 4.6 Implement a promotion and communications strategy to support exploration and innovation in teaching and learning with eLearning embedded.



Appendix A: Proposed Common Language for eLearning

It is proposed that the following operational definitions be adopted by York.

Term	Operational Definition
<i>eLearning</i>	The development of knowledge and skills through the use of information and communication technologies to support interactions for learning...interactions with content, learning activities and with other people.
<i>Face-to-face</i>	"Traditional" lecture or seminar format.
<i>Classroom aids</i>	A traditional face-to-face lecture format supplemented by the use of presentation or online tools such as PowerPoint slides, videos, "clickers", etc.
<i>Computer labs/laptop instruction</i>	Face-to-face instruction in a setting where every student has access to a computer (lab or personal laptop) and the computer applications or online materials are integral to the instruction.
<i>Web-enhanced learning</i>	Face-to-face lecture format where learning is supplemented by web materials, resources or activities. Web-enhanced courses will use a learning management system (LMS) such as Moodle to make lecture notes and recordings available, provide links to resources, online quizzes, discussion forums, etc. Usual face-to-face instruction time remains the same in these courses despite the addition of a web component.
<i>Blended learning</i>	In this mode, also known as 'hybrid', class time is divided between a combination of face-to-face and online delivery. At least a third of the course will be delivered online and a third face-to-face, the remaining third may be any combination of online or face-to-face.
<i>Fully online</i>	Students do not have to physically attend classes (may be synchronous or asynchronous fully online "classes"). Typically, 100% of the instruction is delivered online. There may be some face-to-face at the beginning or end of sessions/programs and there may be face-to-face final exams. Another term often used interchangeably with fully online is 'distance'.

Appendix B: Major Themes That Emerged from the Consultation Process

Between November 2012 and January 2013 thirteen consultation sessions, including two open forums, were held with various groups of students, staff and faculty across campus to discuss the integration of eLearning at York. The discussion was very rich and instructive. Listed below are the themes that emerged from this consultation process. The recommended actions that follow reflect this feedback.

About eLearning integration....

- Pedagogy must drive the use of technology; decisions to integrate need to be made based on the learning outcomes of the course or program
- Technology must be seen as a means to an end; it should provide students with greater control over their learning
- Any Learning Management System utilized (e.g. Moodle) must be customizable, easy to navigate and mobile device accessible

About faculty support....

- Faculty members must be provided with the 'eLearning infrastructure' (e.g. professional development, technical equipment training, etc.) support that they need to successfully mount new courses or transform existing courses
- Faculty members want classroom equipment that is reliable with timely technical support and better wireless connections

About student support....

- Students want choice in selecting the format for their courses such that core courses are delivered in multiple formats (e.g. face-to-face and blended or fully online)
- Students want access to recorded lectures for all face-to-face courses
- Students want support for assessing their own learning styles and for effectively using Moodle
- Students with disabilities request that a 'universal design' approach be utilized such that a student can "walk into a classroom or a virtual environment and not have to explain my disability to the professor or fellow students".