

Stakeholder Summary

University Teaching Certificate Program has positive impact on instructor practice

A teaching certificate program at the University Windsor has a positive impact on values, beliefs, and practices of instructors, but to be sustainable, such initiatives need to be supported by institutional and provincial postsecondary culture, say the authors of a new report from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO).

The Effects of Long-Term Systematic Educational Development on the Beliefs and Attitudes of University Teachers, examined the first level of the University of Windsor's [University Teaching Certificate \(UTC\) Program](#), the first in North America to be recognized by the UK-based Staff and Educational Development Association.

Project description

Focusing on Fundamentals of University Teaching – one of three levels in the program – the study examined its impact on participant beliefs and attitudes about teaching and learning, their teaching practices and the larger impact on departmental and institutional decision making. Participants also identified benefits, areas of improvement and barriers to participation in the program.

The study compared pre- and post-program learning plan documents and changes in program teaching philosophies. Exit surveys and focus groups were also used. A total of 23 UTC participants took part in the study – 8 from the 2009-10 cohort, 5 from the 2010-11 cohort, 9 from the 2011-12 cohort, and 1 from the 2012-13 cohort. Of the 23 participants, 18 were female and 5 were male, a ratio consistent with the full program. Full-time, sessional, graduate student and staff instructors participated, representing engineering, social sciences, humanities, education, science, nursing, business and law. Of the 23 participants, 12 participated in the focus groups and 9 completed the exit survey.

Findings

Acknowledging the small sample size and data limitations, the authors caution against generalizing from the results but note a clear change in participant beliefs and attitudes about teaching and learning. Impacts included a more student-focused approach to teaching, an increase in philosophies associated with actively engaging students in the learning process, an increased focus on discipline-specific knowledge and skills, and greater confidence.

Focus group and survey results indicate that participants worked more to develop a positive teaching and learning environment, to actively engage students and use learning-centred approaches to deep learning. The participants reported taking a scholarly and intentional approach to their design of teaching and choice of assessments while communicating the reasons behind pedagogical choices to students through course syllabi and other methods.

The study also found changes in the interactions of participants with their departments and their institution, with the instructors emerging as “pedagogical change agents.” However, the participants also identified the teaching culture as a barrier to participation in the program and to implementing their new ideas, prompting the authors to reiterate the need for long-term systematic and policy-level support from their institutions.

The authors cite research suggesting that a learning-centred culture focused on quality enhancement is difficult to sustain in a quality assurance environment throughout North America that is concerned with “quantifying some of the presumed indicators of good teaching and good management...coming to some kind of cost-benefit decision.”

“To counteract this trend locally,” say the authors, “it may be necessary to create strong, largely self-sustaining learning communities that can work toward meaningful and lasting cultural change regarding teaching and learning.”

Authors of *The Effects of Long-Term Systematic Educational Development on the Beliefs and Attitudes of University Teachers* are Michael K. Potter, Erika Kustra and Thiemann Ackerson, University of Windsor; and Laura Prada, University of British Columbia.