

REPORT BY TABLE 2

Students at the Heart of the University Experience

What can the University of Ottawa do to help its students blossom and to ensure that their university experience is positive, is open to the world and to cultures, and takes place in a welcoming culture and a pleasant setting? Given the day-to-day reality of young people today, how can we foster student participation in intellectual activities that will allow them to develop their critical thinking, creativity and judgment and reach their political, social and artistic potential?

Question 1: *The University of Ottawa has a duty to promote a balance between work and study so that students have more time to read, to discuss with professors, teaching assistants and their fellow students, and to participate in extracurricular activities such as talks, sports, competitions and university governance. Does the financial aid awarded in the form of scholarships, bursaries, loans, teaching assistantships, and wages paid under the Work-Study Program suffice to ensure that students can concentrate on their studies and research? Is the average required for renewal of admission scholarships and bursaries appropriate and realistic? Is the minimum hourly rate paid to students who work at the University of Ottawa adequate? Are there enough student positions on campus? Are some study programs too demanding?*

Table 2 participants' position

We can help both undergraduate and graduate students fully blossom only by ensuring a good balance among time spent studying (time spent in class, in the laboratory, doing readings and research, participating in discussions, and attending lectures, for example), time spent working, and time spent on various university and extracurricular activities that promote academic success while going beyond that learning experience and opening to the world and to cultures.

Factors affecting the balance between students' workload and financial needs include government funding, tuition fees, study program course loads, financial aid awarded in the form of loans, scholarships and bursaries, as well as individual students' needs and requirements. Within its sphere of action, how can the University of Ottawa promote this balance as much as possible?

Take action.

1.1 Ensure that study programs are not unduly demanding.

- 1.1.1 Require schools, departments and faculties to justify any course load that is more demanding than the university standard of five courses per session.
- 1.1.2 Improve the information provided to students so that they know they may reduce their course load per session and are not required to take the five courses indicated on their registration form or suggested in a typical path.
- 1.1.3 Have the two Assistant Vice-Rectors carry out an annual study of the normal course load in all study programs and report to the appropriate authorities.
- 1.1.4 Analyse data on student course load, including comparisons with other years.

Use these tools to measure progress.

Possibly develop surveys or questions for brainstorming sessions that will make it possible to check students' level of satisfaction with their university experience.

Use these surveys and brainstorming sessions with the same group of students every year until graduation. This tool would allow the University to measure progress very easily.

1.2 Help students finance their studies.

- 1.2.1 Examine all scholarship and bursary programs at the University to check whether they reflect the established objectives of recruiting and retaining the best students and recognizing excellence.
- 1.2.2 Consider the possibility of a scholarship and bursary program focusing on a balance between excellence and student financial needs. Present programs seem to foster the accumulation of scholarships and bursaries by the top two or three students in each school, department and faculty. Promoting excellence should not limit scholarships and bursaries to the top two or three students.
- 1.2.3 Consider the possibility of providing financial aid to athletes, in order to promote their academic success and validate their participation in activities that raise the University's profile.
- 1.2.4 Review the conditions of renewal of admission scholarships and bursaries; lower the average required for renewal.
- 1.2.5 Allow students whose admission scholarships and bursaries have not been renewed to recover them when they have once again achieved the average required for renewal. This policy change would make admission scholarship and bursary renewal a tool for promoting academic success and student retention.

Use these tools to measure progress.

Ask the Assistant Vice-Rector, Strategic Enrolment Management, to report to the Administration Committee or the university community on all these points.

See also point 1.1 above.

1.3 Help students manage their budgets and debt loads.

- 1.3.1 Improve the Financial Aid and Awards Office Internet site in order to provide students with easier access to information on all scholarships and bursaries available.
- 1.3.2 Have the Financial Aid and Awards Office develop more informative and more proactive programs about all financial matters that affect students, including budget management, debt load management, risks associated with not budgeting for young persons living away from home for the first time, and risks associated with using one or more credit cards.
- 1.3.3 Develop greater co-operation between the Student Academic Success Service (SASS) and the Financial Aid and Awards Office.

Use these tools to measure progress.

Once it provides improved information, the Financial Aid and Awards Office should receive more applications and award more scholarships and bursaries. Ask the Assistant Vice-Rector, Strategic Enrolment Management and the Registrar to report annually on these figures.

See also point 1.1 above.

1.4 Standardize wages paid on campus under the Work-Study Program.

- 1.4.1 Where wages paid to students who work on campus are not governed by a collective agreement, develop a wage scale depending on the duties to be performed, in order to standardize wages paid to students across schools, departments and faculties.
- 1.4.2 Review the minimum wage paid to students who work on campus; the \$8 per hour rate has remained unchanged for at least 10 years and will soon be as low as the Ontario minimum wage.

Use these tools to measure progress.

Have the Financial Aid and Awards Office, which manages the Work-Study Program at present, check wages paid to students.

See also point 1.1 above.

1.5 In the weekly timetable, ensure that there is a one-hour period free of all academic activities.

- 1.5.1 Review the University's scheduling system in order to ensure that in the weekly timetable there is a free one-hour period for all schools, departments and faculties that would allow them and the student associations to organize meetings and thus promote communication and exchange.

Use these tools to measure progress.

Ask the Assistant Vice-Rector, Strategic Enrolment Management and the Registrar to report to the Administration Committee or other appropriate authorities on this point.

Question 2: *We know that professors and teaching assistants have a considerable effect on students. They are the ones who transmit to students a desire to go farther, a taste for culture, criticism, languages and research, and a penchant for university life in general. How can University of Ottawa professors and teaching assistants fully assume their role? How can we ensure that the best professors teach first-year courses without being penalized? How can we promote communication between professors and students? How can we change the University of Ottawa's "corporate culture" to ensure that students can easily meet with their professors and teaching assistants outside class hours? How can we ensure that professors and teaching assistants convey to students their pride in belonging to the University of Ottawa, their confidence in the services it provides, and their respect for the other disciplines it comprises?*

Table 2 participants' position

When students are asked what they consider the most important aspect of a successful, satisfactory university experience, they consistently and simply answer, "Good professors and teaching assistants, who communicate well in both languages, who transmit a desire to go farther, a taste for culture, criticism, languages and research, and a penchant for university life in general; and good contacts with the university administration." What, then, should we do to ensure good contacts between students and professors, teaching assistants and administrative employees? In an increasingly impersonal setting of larger classes and computerized tools such as e-mail, Internet registration, and on-line course programs,

directories and schedules, how should we change or adjust contacts and information exchange in order to improve them so that they meet students' requests and needs?

Validating teaching is the best way to ensure good contacts between professors and students.

Take action.

- 2.1 Improve students' experience in class and encourage professors and teaching assistants to learn teaching and communication methods by ensuring that all new professors and teaching assistants have the training they need to convey what they are teaching and to communicate well with students.**
- 2.1.1 Make participation in Centre for University Teaching training workshops compulsory for all new regular and part-time professors and new teaching assistants.
 - 2.1.2 Develop an ongoing training program, to be offered every session and to evolve depending on needs and existing training and experience.
 - 2.1.3 Develop an Internet or Intranet site for professors and teaching assistants providing access to all the resources available to them; University of Ottawa policies, rules and procedures with which they should be familiar; resources available to students with special needs; and similar information that will facilitate their teaching and communication with students.
 - 2.1.4 Create an atmosphere of collegiality and mutual assistance for new professors by twinning them with experienced professors and thus facilitating their integration. For new and part-time professors, have a first-year course co-ordinator, an undergraduate studies co-ordinator, or a service that facilitates their integration and work at the University of Ottawa.
- 2.2 Validate university teaching and develop a better way to use course evaluations, which are not very well regarded by students.**
- 2.2.1 Review the course evaluation questions to make them more meaningful; also review the timing of course evaluations.
 - 2.2.2 Negotiate with the unions a better use of course evaluations so that more questions are taken into consideration during regular and part-time professors' annual performance evaluations, and so that course evaluations are a better tool for monitoring professors' performance and professors' and teaching assistants' relations with students.
 - 2.2.3 Have directors ensure that all regular and part-time professors have office hours during which they can talk with students and answer their questions. One question on the course evaluation has to do with keeping office hours. Make available to deans and directors an evaluation tool allowing them to check professors' performance on this point, which students consider very important. Notify and, if necessary, reprimand professors whose performance on this point is substandard.
 - 2.2.4 Increasingly, students use e-mail to contact their professors. For some students, this means of communication replaces direct contacts with their professors during office hours. Determine whether the University should set standard hours of availability for professors to respond to student e-mail communications.

2.3 Ensure that students are familiar with their rights and obligations, in order to facilitate communication and clarify expectations by both parties.

2.3.1 Ensure that students are familiar with their rights and obligations, in order to avoid problems and misunderstandings with professors and with the university administration. Determine whether the University should create an intermediary or negotiator or ombudsman position.

2.3.2 Ensure that students are familiar with appeal procedures.

2.4 Ensure that students are less anonymous.

2.4.1 In schools, departments and faculties that so wish, create a student directory including students' names and photographs, by class, by year, and by school, department or faculty.

2.4.2 Where class numbers permit, encourage professors to learn the names of students in their classes.

Use these tools to measure progress.

Possibly develop surveys or questions for brainstorming sessions that will make it possible to check students' level of satisfaction with their university experience. Use these surveys and brainstorming sessions with the same group of students every year until graduation. This tool would allow the University to measure progress very easily.

Question 3: *We know that, from recruitment to graduation, good, ongoing contacts with students are important. How can we foster a welcoming culture and make students central to the concerns of all University of Ottawa employees? How can we ensure good contacts with students? How can we ensure that we provide good information? How can we ensure that differences are respected? Are on-line contacts part of the good services we intend to provide? How can we encourage students to be aware of their obligations and University of Ottawa policies, rules and procedures without penalizing them unduly? Are we doing a good job of being there for part-time students, adult students, international students and students with special needs? Do the services we provide meet their needs?*

Table 2 participants' position

In students' university experience, good services provided by support employees are of the utmost importance. The needs expressed and the services requested by young students, adult students, international students and students with special needs, which involve time constraints, a variety of religious beliefs, and a range of computer literacy from nil to highly advanced, are increasingly complex. If we are to provide good services that meet these varied needs, it is important that we continue to foster a welcoming culture, develop and promote an accessibility plan, and review training given to both new and senior support employees. If fostering a welcoming culture is a top priority at the University of Ottawa, then so are the time and money required to provide the appropriate training.

Validating the work done by support employees is another of the best ways to ensure good relations between students and employees.

Take action.

3.1 For employees who work with students, develop a training plan covering all the main aspects of developing a welcoming culture that will meet students' needs.

- 3.1.1 For all new employees who work with students, provide compulsory training covering work tools such as browsers and the Student Information System (SIS); University of Ottawa policies, rules and procedures; and the various services available. In addition, hold awareness workshops on the cultures, religions and other characteristics of the various ethnic groups that make up the student population on campus.
- 3.1.2 For senior employees as well, provide compulsory, ongoing training.

Use these tools to measure progress.

Ask the Human Resources Service to report on the workshops provided for and attended by employees.

See also point 1.1 above.

3.2 Develop an Internet or Intranet site for employees providing them with easy, up-to-date access to the many University of Ottawa policies, rules and procedures they are required to follow and the various services available.

- 3.2.1 In order to make employees' work easier, develop a shared space providing employees with access to up-to-date University of Ottawa policies, rules and procedures. Finding this information is not always easy and, given the high volume of changes, procedures are not always written, updated or distributed to all employees.
- 3.2.2 Develop a tool allowing employees to ascertain which service to contact in a given situation. Organize this tool on the basis of potential problems, not on the basis of the organization chart.

Use these tools to measure progress.

Check whether the Internet or Intranet site has been set up; check the extent to which employees make use of it.

See also point 1.1 above.

3.3. Ensure continuity of services if employees are absent.

- 3.3.1 Have faculties draw up a plan to ensure continuity of student services if employees are absent, regardless of whether the management model is centralized or decentralized.
- 3.3.2 Make employees aware of the importance of continuity of services and shared tasks if employees are absent; encourage and promote flexibility.

Use these tools to measure progress.

Ask each faculty to report on their practices to ensure continuity of services if employees are absent.

See also point 1.1 above.

3.4 Continue to foster a welcoming culture and to empower employees who work with students.

- 3.4.1 Provide reception employees with training so that they can answer students' questions; give employees some decision-making authority in student matters.
- 3.4.2 Make employees responsible for finding answers to questions asked of them and finding solutions to problems presented to them. This approach would ensure that employees no longer shift the questions and problems to someone else: they would be responsible for finding answers and solutions and for providing them to students themselves.
- 3.4.3 Set up a system to validate employees who work with students by rewarding groups of employees who provide excellent services to students.

Use these tools to measure progress.

Possibly develop surveys or questions for brainstorming sessions that will make it possible to check students' level of satisfaction with their university experience. Use these surveys and brainstorming sessions with the same group of students every year until graduation. This tool would allow the University to measure progress very easily.

3.5 Change the University of Ottawa's punitive line authority approach to student mistakes; encourage employees to find positive solutions that allow students to learn and take responsibility.

- 3.5.1 Decentralize decision-making on exceptions so that, depending on individual situations, each faculty is authorized to make, not a recommendation, but a decision on student matters such as deadlines, late payment fees and late registration fees, although not requests for refunds.
- 3.5.2 Do not automatically penalize students, particularly new students, who make mistakes. Students are less and less familiar with University of Ottawa policies, rules, procedures and deadlines. Students need to be told the rules, not penalized the moment they break them.

Use these tools to measure progress.

Possibly develop surveys or questions for brainstorming sessions that will make it possible to check students' level of satisfaction with their university experience. Use these surveys and brainstorming sessions with the same group of students every year until graduation. This tool would allow the University to measure progress very easily.

Question 4: *The University of Ottawa has an obligation to promote learning, study, and discussions among students, between students and professors, and between students and employees. Does the physical aspect of the campus have a role to play in the adventure of the university experience? Is the esthetic aspect of buildings and classrooms important? Are there enough spaces in the library for students to enjoy spending time there? Would a better-designed, less noisy cafeteria promote meetings and discussions? From the perspective of the student population as a whole, is it advisable to develop green spaces at the expense of parking spaces? Is it possible to do that on an urban campus? What factors need to be taken into consideration in developing spaces where students can meet?*

Table 2 participants' position

A welcoming, well-organized, multifunctional, clean and esthetically pleasing setting plays a very important role in the university experience for both students and the community. While the campus location in an urban residential area has a great many advantages, it also presents a certain number of challenges and limits the construction of new buildings and the development of green spaces and parking spaces. The University of Ottawa buildings are over 40 years old and require a great deal of renovation if they are to meet the needs of a student population that has more than doubled over the past 10 years.

Take action.

4.1 Improve the esthetic aspect of the campus, including building interiors, building exteriors and green spaces.

- 4.1.1 Repaint and furnish the interior of buildings constructed a number of years ago, such as the University Centre, the Library, and Lamoureux Hall, so that they give a better impression to students and to the community.
- 4.1.2 Continue to improve the esthetic aspect of building exteriors and, despite the high costs, continue to repair and to make secure the gray houses that are falling down and are in an advanced state of disrepair.
- 4.1.3 Preserve all the green spaces; continue to plant perennials in these spaces and to make them pleasant places in which to sit, read, discuss and rest in sun or shade.
- 4.1.4 Continue to place sofas and armchairs for students in various locations in the buildings.

4.2 Increase the number of multifunctional spaces for reading, study and discussion.

- 4.2.1 In constructing new buildings, plan multifunctional spaces such as those in the new School of Information Technology and Engineering (SITE) building. Students say this building is ideal in terms of space to eat, study, read, work with one's computer or simply have a conversation among friends in a bright, sunny space.
- 4.2.2 Increase the number of carrels in the library; near them, create discussion spaces for students.
- 4.2.3 In existing buildings, increase or create spaces where students can study, read and discuss.

4.3 Make the University Centre a service provision and meeting place again.

- 4.3.1 In light of the services that InfoService provides, make InfoService an integral part of the University Centre; it is important that students be able to come to a central location where the basic services that InfoService provides are offered.
- 4.3.2 In order to provide a meeting place for the university community, open a bar at the University Centre, under University of Ottawa supervision and responsibility and using an external call for bids.

Since the closure of the two student bars, Equinoxe and Solstice, students have gone off-campus to meet. Student groups wishing to organize an evening on campus are required to use the services of the University of Ottawa caterer, which requires setup costs or sales guarantees that students are unable to assume. We point out that the new bar in the sports complex is on the outskirts of

campus and cannot always accommodate the type of evenings student groups usually organize.

As a result of this situation, students are meeting in bars off-campus, where ensuring prevention is problematic. In earlier days, campus bar employees kept an eye on patrons' behaviour. The Protection Service could testify to the change that has occurred since the closure of the student bars.

Nor should we overlook the fact that student bars are also a place where students can relax and engage in informal discussions with professors.

In its role as a gathering place, a central bar is an essential element of university community life. At present, the tiny Café Nostalgica serves graduate students, and all other students fall back on the Zam Pub, on the outskirts of campus.

4.4 Construct a stadium for campus sports activities, in order to re-create team spirit and give back a sense of pride and belonging to the university community as a whole and to the broader community as well.

At present, football games are played off-campus at Lansdowne Park. We know how important football games are in creating team spirit on campus. Attendance at these games is very low: students are discouraged by complicated transportation, the distance between the main campus and Lansdowne Park, and the fact that the most of the bleachers in that overly large venue are empty for varsity games.

4.4.1 Adding bleachers to the sports complex would open up a multitude of possibilities for events to bring the university together. Without drawing comparisons with universities in the United States, we note that many Canadian universities manage to generate good attendance at their sports events. Students are proud of their teams, alumni and alumnae return on every occasion, and there is a heightened feeling of belonging for everyone.

4.5 Have a policy of seeking greater student involvement in the planning and construction of new buildings.

Use these tools to measure progress.

Ask the Vice-Rector, Resources and Planning to report annually on all matters concerning infrastructures.

See also point 1.1 above.

Question 5: *The University of Ottawa wants to encourage student involvement in extracurricular activities such as volunteering, mentoring, entering competitions, taking part in sports activities, and being active in student associations, but how should it do so? What can the University of Ottawa do to promote student involvement in university governance? Would recognition of volunteer work and involvement in university life, student associations, and groups that help other students to blossom promote student development? How could these volunteer activities be recognized and encouraged?*

Table 2 participants' position

An enriching university experience starts with initial contacts and first impressions on admission, deepens as students return each year, and continues until graduation. A positive university experience means more than achieving academic success and earning a diploma: it means reaching one's full potential through

involvement in various aspects of university life such as student associations, university governance, mentoring, and work on campus; participation in social and artistic activities such as competitions organized by faculties, talks, films and exhibits; sports activities; volunteer work; in fact, everything that allows students to go beyond academic success and become citizens and leaders of the future. How can the University of Ottawa take up the challenge of promoting extracurricular activities? How can it encourage student involvement in university governance?

In their discussion, Table 2 participants defined "student involvement" as, firstly, voluntary commitment to one or more student groups and, secondly, participation in or attendance at one or more activities.

Take action.

5.0 Strike a committee to study various ways of recognizing student involvement including participation in university governance, volunteer work, mentoring on campus and in the community, and success in competitions.

5.1 Consider the possibility of rewarding student involvement with university credits, using the example of the School of Management.

Many students are passionately involved in various aspects of university life. They give their time, even without pay, in order to enhance their university experience. At present there is no practical structure for rewarding or stimulating dedication of this kind.

Active involvement outside the classroom enriches students' knowledge and develops their interests and skills.

5.1.1 In order to promote student involvement, which benefits the University of Ottawa enormously, design a program of rewards in the form of university credits. An optional course could be developed taking into account the operations of individual faculties, and interested students could submit proposals in accordance with a list of selection criteria.

5.2 Set up a program to highlight volunteer work.

Each year, many students offer their time as volunteers. Although the University of Ottawa expends considerable effort to acknowledge and attest to the importance of this phenomenon, nothing tangible has been done to recognize officially the hours given by volunteers. Holding an annual gala event that some students cannot afford and others are unable to attend, and awarding scholarships, bursaries and honourable mentions to a limited number of students are inadequate forms of recognition. A university without volunteers is a lifeless university.

5.2.1 Set up a program to recognize student volunteer work officially. Consider the possibility of setting up a system to account for the hours students volunteer during their academic careers, for example in service learning projects and volunteer work on campus and in the community, and include a notation of that work on students' official transcripts. Instead of letters of reference or awards, notations on student transcripts would be very much appreciated. There is no doubt that this form of recognition would create a significant incentive for students to become involved in university life.

5.3 On the Roger Guindon campus, promote all activities held on both campuses.

Students who take most of their courses on the Roger Guindon campus often indicate dissatisfaction with the lack of student life there; they feel forgotten or neglected. Organizing activities on the Roger Guindon campus is not necessarily a solution, since many students go to the main campus after class.

- 5.3.1 In order to address feelings of being forgotten or neglected, ensure that all students in the Faculty of Health Sciences have access to information on student life at the same time as students in other faculties.

Use these tools to measure progress.

Possibly develop surveys or questions for brainstorming sessions that will make it possible to check students' level of satisfaction with their university experience. Use these surveys and brainstorming sessions with the same group of students every year until graduation. This tool would allow the University to measure progress very easily.

See also point 1.1 above.

Question 6: *The University of Ottawa recognizes that achieving academic success and earning a diploma are still central aspects of a positive university experience. As well, since many factors affect program completion, academic success is a responsibility that is shared by the university community as a whole.*

Take action.

6.1 Promote interdisciplinary initiatives and partnerships among various stakeholders, faculties and services; support programs aimed at improving academic success and program completion.

- 6.1.1 Ask SASS and Strategic Enrolment Management to develop formal connections and to co-operate closely throughout the university continuum from student recruitment to alumni relations.
- 6.1.2 Through SASS, strike a committee of all entities directly involved in providing services to students: Strategic Enrolment Management (including Liaison, Admissions and InfoService), the Financial Aid and Awards Office, the Housing Service and the Rez Life team, the Community Life Service, Computing and Communications Services, Sports Services and the Library Network, in order to develop quality standards for services to students and evaluate the services provided.
- 6.1.3 Develop mechanisms to encourage faculties, particularly those that accept first-year students, to include in their annual development plans initiatives aimed at supporting academic success, such as:
- the welcome and integration program;
 - programs to identify students experiencing difficulties; and
 - academic support programs such as the student mentor initiative organized jointly by the faculties and SASS.
- These initiatives could be organized jointly with other faculties and services.

6.2 Acknowledge the importance of conducting research on factors affecting academic success and program completion, in order to focus student support programming.

- 6.2.1 Ask the Vice-Rector, Research and SASS to work on funding for research on factors affecting academic success.

6.3 Acknowledge that, although to a great extent a positive university experience depends on the quality of professors and the classroom setting, that experience is

incomplete if the atmosphere outside the classroom is not conducive to reaching students' full potential.

- 6.3.1 To ensure that first-year students successfully make the transition to university studies, continue to support the welcome and integration program, and encourage faculties that accept first-year students to work in partnership with SASS in setting it up.
- 6.3.2 In addition to offering actual student support services, offer extracurricular support services such as occupational guidance, counselling for students experiencing personal difficulties, and accommodation for students with disabilities.

6.4 Validate peer assistance and student involvement in community service.

- 6.4.1 Work with the faculties and SASS to identify and develop suitable spaces for student mentoring activities. See also point 4.2 above.
- 6.4.2 Provide appropriate recognition to students who voluntarily become involved in community activities such as volunteer work, service learning projects, mentoring and university governance.

Use these tools to measure progress.

Develop a survey that will make it possible to check students' level of satisfaction on these points. Use this survey with the same group of students every year until graduation.