



Kwantlen Polytechnic University's Foundations of Excellence Summary Prepared for the 2011/2012 Cohort Summit Meeting By Jody Gordon and Joshua Mitchell

Introduction

In summer 2011, Kwantlen Polytechnic University (Kwantlen) was the first Canadian university to be selected by the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education to participate in the Foundations of Excellence (FoE) program for four-year degree-granting institutions. In July 2011, the two co-liaisons began to populate the 9 Dimension Committees resulting in over 130 participants including students, staff, faculty and administrators. Of these 130 participants, over 50 were faculty. The FoE self-study is the largest initiative ever undertaken by Kwantlen that critically examines our approaches to teaching, learning and student engagement in the first year (and beyond).

The 9 Dimension Committees and the Steering Committee (comprised of all chairs, and vice-chairs from each of the 9 dimension committees) began meeting in September 2011. Under the watchful eye of our adopted Canadian and FoE advisor, Drew Koch of the Gardner Institute, the committees deliberated over the next 9 months wrapping up in May 2012. All Dimension Committee final reports, as of June 1, 2012, have been vetted and signed off by our FoE Steering Committee.

Why FoE?

Kwantlen participated in FoE for 5 primary reasons:

1. With Kwantlen's transition to full university status and the creation of the Student Life and Community Division (SLC), Kwantlen is focused more than ever on student retention through student success, student engagement and student life.
2. As a new division, SLC will seek to launch a number of new initiatives, but wants to take a "do no harm" approach.
3. Kwantlen loses upwards of 42% of our students between first and second year, most of who are not in any academic difficulty. While some of these students transfer to other institutions many are simply classified as stop-outs or drop-outs.
4. Kwantlen participated in the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) for the first time in 2010. While NSSE provides valuable and useful data, FoE shapes the plan for moving forward.
5. Kwantlen finalized its vision, mission and mandate which includes commitments to:
 - The Student Experience – providing an outstanding student experience through our teaching, support programs, services, and systems that enhance and enrich student life.
 - Service Learning – providing informative experiences that integrate academic learning with principles of civic responsibility and community engagement.
 - Work-Integrated Learning – programs that will include practical experience in the form of co-ops, practica, internships or other applied initiatives.

- Aboriginal Engagement – developing meaningful partnerships, pedagogical approaches, program offerings, and student services to meet the distinctive needs of all Aboriginal peoples.

Dimension Reports

The efforts of the 9 Dimension Committees resulted in over 140 action items, the majority of which fall within the following broad themes:

- Kwantlen must craft a philosophy statement for first year experience;
- Kwantlen must have a commonly understood and widely disseminated sense of our identity to inform our fundamental approach to learning;
- Kwantlen needs a shared perspective on co-curricular and community-focused service learning and work-integrated learning;
- Kwantlen must develop strategic admissions pathways for first year entrance reflective of our identity as a polytechnic university and to improve opportunities for student success;
- Kwantlen must develop a definition of first year for the purposes of consistent data collection;
- Kwantlen needs a systematic and robust assessment of the first year experience;
- Kwantlen must extend its reach to, and intentionally coordinate transition programs for, all new students;
- Senior leadership at Kwantlen must endorse a First Year Student Experience Committee to carry on the work of FoE.

Reflections

Through the institution-wide self-study process a collection of current good practices in support of first year students were identified. The FoE Current Practices Inventory (CPI) was a wonderful tool for summarizing the first year services, programs and initiatives that currently exist. Despite a fulsome list of evidence in the FoE Evidence Library, as a result of populating the CPI a considerable gap in the formal assessment of the services, programs and initiatives in support of first year students was revealed.

Reflecting on the last 9 months many of the committee members stated that this process facilitated necessary conversations, albeit difficult ones at times, that had yet to occur. We, as co-liaisons, echo that sentiment and wish to express that this experience has been the most rewarding of our careers because it was evidence-based, institution-wide with the bringing together of the learning and student support communities, and holistic in its approach to student engagement, development and learning.

As we move from the FoE self-study, we begin our vision for creating an excellent beginning for our students at Kwantlen. So...

Let's get it started...
 1st year where your 4th year begins