



Your Guide to Supporting Student Success at the University of Victoria: Some Tips from Colleagues

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University
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Dear Colleague,

This booklet arose from discussions of a group of about ninety UVic Academic Administrators who met on October 4th 2006 at a retreat focusing on “the role of academic leaders and academic units in enhancing student recruitment, engagement and success.” At the end of what was a very high-energy day, a series of breakout groups formed to brainstorm on how UVic promotes and supports a student-success oriented culture amongst faculty and departments/schools. From the subsequent discussion it became clear that some wonderful ideas had emerged that people would like to both capture and share with others.

The goal of this booklet is not to be comprehensive, but rather to indicate some ideas to think about as we work towards enhancing the student experience at UVic on multiple fronts. As you chat with colleagues about curriculum development, teaching methods, co-curricular and career opportunities, or simply the social environment of your department or faculty, perhaps some of the ideas recorded here might be a catalyst for discussion. Above all, we hope this small booklet will serve as a reminder of a wonderful day spent with colleagues around common goals and values when it comes to teaching and learning at UVic.

Thanks are due to all the kind and generous colleagues who diligently recorded and sent me their notes from the small group discussions. We owe a particular thank-you to our fabulous work-study student, Susan Chalmers, who not only made sense of the scraps of paper and notes I handed her, but was also able to suggest the extremely useful categories we subsequently used to develop the booklet from the student perspective. In addition, Professor Marty Wall of Psychology, edited the booklet and developed some of the more cryptic points presented. Above all, we thank the participants on that fall day who so generously shared their ideas so we could pass them on to you. We hope you enjoy the result. If you have more ideas to share or would like more information on what you read here please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Teresa Dawson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the left from the start of the name.

Teresa Dawson
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Supporting Student Success at the University of Victoria: Some Tips from Colleagues

1. Teaching Methods, Styles, and Tools

DISPLAYING EXCITEMENT AROUND THE DISCIPLINE

Students respond well when instructors show them what they find most fascinating about their discipline rather than merely presenting their knowledge of their specialty. Displaying enthusiasm engages students and motivates them to carry on with their work on the course outside the classroom.

PROVIDING A PERSONAL TOUCH

Personalizing classes helps students feel more connected to teachers and fellow colleagues. For instance, professors in the Faculty of Education make every effort to learn student names. Similarly, the Faculty of Business uses photographs, name plates, and assigned seating to help instructors and classmates get to know one another.

STIMULATING CRITICAL THINKING

By encouraging students to question and engage in course material in a thoughtful manner, instructors can enhance the learning process more effectively than other ways, such as memorization. Students will process the material at levels beyond mere definitional knowledge.

TUTORIALS, SEMINARS AND DISCUSSION GROUPS

Through these small group settings students are able to interact more with one another and the course material, which strengthens their learning. These sessions also give students skills that they need to read effectively and to interpret scholarly ideas.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Lab work is an established successful method of teaching students, particularly in the sciences, engineering and anthropology. In other courses, experiential learning exercises can take the form of student presentations, debates, panel discussions, symposia, role playing and simulations.

PROBLEM BASED LEARNING

This instructional method challenges students to “learn to learn,” working cooperatively in groups to seek solutions to real-world problems. These problems are used to engage students’ curiosity, to initiate learning the subject matter, to prepare students to think critically and analytically, and to find and use appropriate learning resources.

DISTRIBUTED LEARNING

Under particular circumstances, classroom teaching can be supplemented by an instructional model that allows instructor, students, and content to be found in different locations so that teaching and learning occur independently of time and place.

USE OF NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

These tools can make teaching and learning more engaging. “Clickers” are an excellent example of how engagement, feedback, and learning can be enhanced in a large-class situation.

2. Academic Help for Students through the Learning Commons

<http://learningcommons.uvic.ca>

The C.W. Lui Learning Commons is located on the main floor of the McPherson Library and is a place where academic support is available for students in one physical location. The Commons provides academic services as a cohesive whole so that students have access to effective, efficient and integrated academic assistance. The Learning Commons is a space that encourages collaborative work between students and their tutors, librarians, and instructors. Services in the Learning Commons include:

WRITING HELP

The Writing Centre helps both graduate and undergraduate students write essays, papers, and projects with clear, organized, well-expressed ideas. Tutors offer advice one-on-one regarding issues inherent in academic-related assignments, including dissertations and theses. Workshops are also offered. The Coordinator provides support to instructors regarding the design of written assignments and strategies for providing effective feedback.

<http://ltc.uvic.ca/servicesprograms/twc.php>

MATH & STAT HELP

The Math and Stat Assistance Centre offers one-on-one tutors who can provide personalized help regarding 100-level math courses and 200-level statistics courses, including those specific to engineering students. The Coordinator also provides mentoring and support for TAs. <http://www.math.uvic.ca/index.php>

CHEMISTRY HELP

In the Chemistry Help and Drop-in Centre, Teaching Assistants and course instructors help students with qualitative and quantitative problem-solving. <http://web.uvic.ca/~chem101/dropin.html>

PHYSICS HELP

The Physics Help tutors assist students with a range of topics covered in undergraduate Physics classes. www.phys.uvic.ca

LEARNING HELP

The Learning Help Centre provides instruction, consultation and coaching with issues of studying and learning. Trained peer helpers and professional learning specialists assess student learning strengths and areas in need of improvement, and they offer practical strategies with accompanying learning modules that target specific needs. Learning Help also arranges follow up sessions to encourage self-assessment and continuous improvement, and refers students to other support services.

LIBRARY INSTRUCTION

The integration of library instruction programs into classes can improve the quality of class assignments and encourage students to make effective use of library resources.

RESEARCH HELP

By integrating examples of one's scholarly research into the classroom, instructors can illustrate real-life or discipline-based applications of concepts and theories. Students can connect more readily with the course material and be excited about future participation in library or laboratory-based research.

3. Curriculum Design and Structure

COURSE PROGRESSION AND PROGRAM COHERENCE

Courses in a program are designed to support academic progression. This provides a coherent connection among the courses and encourages students to enroll in courses that are appropriate for their level of understanding in a subject.

STUDENT INPUT IN CURRICULUM RE-DESIGN

Student feedback on existing courses and their views on course content and how courses could be taught can provide useful input into initiatives on program and course re-design.

FLEXIBILITY AND DIVERSITY OF COURSE STRUCTURE AND ARRANGEMENT

Implementing courses that differ in length and distribution of course meetings can provide useful flexibility, where relevant, and can be appealing for both students and instructors. For example, Environmental Studies offers an intensive five-day course.

CROSS-DISCIPLINARY COURSES

Initiatives that involve the design of courses team-taught by faculty from different disciplines can provide rich and sometimes unexpected synergies.

4. Professional Development and Career Preparation

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLARSHIP

Students in 3rd or 4th year of their undergraduate studies can undertake a research investigation under the mentorship of a faculty supervisor. There are two or three scholarships available per academic unit for a total of approximately 100 scholars per year.

THE ARBUTUS REVIEW

This undergraduate, peer-reviewed, online research journal showcases the best of undergraduate research at UVic. <http://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/arbutus>

GRADUATE STUDENT PROGRAMMING

The Learning and Teaching Centre provides extensive support to graduate students to help prepare them to enter the academic job market and to hone their teaching skills. Included are the Teaching Assistant Consultant program, workshops and conferences to support TA development, and the Professional Development Program in University Teaching Certificate.

INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

Opportunities for students to spend a term studying at an overseas institution for course credit provide outstanding educational experiences. <http://iess.uvic.ca>

CO-OP EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Co-op education allows students to combine academic studies with paid work experience related to their field of study and is an excellent way to gain relevant work skills and experience. One in four UVic students takes part in the program each year. <http://mycoop.coop.uvic.ca>

CAREER COUNSELLING

In addition to providing personal counselling, the counsellors provide information to help students decide on an appropriate career path or choose the best graduate school. <http://www.coun.uvic.ca>

ACADEMIC ADVISORS

Most faculties maintain advising centres where students can receive counselling on programs, courses, and regulations.

CAREER SERVICES

Students can work one-on-one with a career consultant, join career exploration workshops, and learn how to conduct their own job market and graduate school research. <http://careerservices.uvic.ca/>

SPECIAL PROFESSIONAL EVENTS

UVic provides the basis for showcasing student endeavors in the arts. For instance, the Faculty of Fine Arts organizes many events that allow writing and theatre students to promote their work. Readings—and a follow-up reception—

are held at the Belfry Theatre to showcase aspiring writers. In addition, an annual film festival displays student videos before industry personnel. Several student plays are produced and directed by colleagues in the Department of Theatre.

5. Social Support from Faculty, Staff and Other Students

ALUMNI AND UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT EVENTS

These social gatherings allow students to interact socially with alumni and learn about career opportunities following graduation.

STUDENT SOCIETIES

These organizations provide students with opportunities to socialize with one another, which serves to enhance their overall university experience. The primary events usually consist of lectures, workshops and social outings. <http://gss.uvic.ca>

CLUBS

Students can join numerous clubs encompassing a broad range of interests to augment their academic experience. <http://www.uvss.uvic.ca/clubs/list.html>

STUDENT ORIENTATIONS

Annual orientations initiated by Faculties or by the University help students become familiar with the university, specific programs of study, student services and the range of experiences available to them. <http://orientation.uvic.ca>

COHORTS

In certain disciplines, students take the same courses and thus regularly interact with the same cohort group for the duration of their studies at UVic. Cohort identity helps to sustain a social support structure, which can be useful for many undergraduates and graduates.

ABORIGINAL AWARENESS

The Native Students Union annually sponsors Aboriginal Awareness Week with various events across campus. In 2007, for example, the theme was “Aboriginal Wellness.” <http://www.uvss.uvic.ca/nsu>

CAMPUS RESIDENCES, RESIDENCE ADVISORS AND THE FAMILY CENTRE

Residence advisors help students adapt to living in UVic residences and maintain an environment for students to live and learn comfortably. The Family Centre serves the families of UVic students both living on and off campus and provides family-initiated activities and programs that support both new and experienced families. <http://web.uvic.ca/family-centre> and <http://housing.uvic.ca>

RESOURCE CENTRE FOR STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY

In addition to arranging for alternate exams, note-taking assistance and assisted learning strategies, the Centre maintains an extensive inventory of up-to-date adaptive equipment and software. <http://rcsd.uvic.ca>

Learning and Teaching Centre

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