

# Proposed Guiding Questions Related to Student Engagement for TRU's 2015 SEM Working Groups

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## **Student Engagement Committee Working Group on Strategic Enrolment Management**

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### **Purpose of the Working Group**

This working group was struck to form guiding questions, on behalf of the Student Engagement Subcommittee of Senate, that will be submitted to each of the three Strategic Enrolment Management working groups. The questions are intended to share the benefit of the Subcommittee's experience in the area of Student Engagement, and specifically how it relates to student recruitment, transitions, and retention. It is our intention that these guiding questions will help inform the planning and discussion activities of the SEM groups and ensure that concerns related to these questions are addressed by the SEM process.

### **Group Composition and Methods**

The working group included a member of each of the following groups: student, support staff, faculty, and administration.

The questions were formed following a review of past Subcommittee discussion, topics covered by the TRUSU Student Caucus, and a review of 2014 student survey results: National Survey of Student Engagement and CUSC Survey of Middle Year Students. The survey results were from baccalaureate, on campus TRU students in years one through four.

The three main areas that arose from our research were academic advising, sense of belonging and student expectations.

### **References**

Gilbert, Angela. 2015. Analysis of NSSE student comments.

IPA. 2013. CUSC 2013 – The First Year Experience.

IPA. 2014. CUSC 2014 TRU Overall Report.

IPA. 2014. Engagement & Retention at TRU.

IPA. 2014. NSSE 2014 – Overall Results.

Kuh, George D. 2008. High-Impact Educational Practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

The referenced documents, and additional information regarding the topics covered in this work group report are available from the Student Engagement Subcommittee of Senate or from Institutional Planning & Analysis.

**Academic Advising:** Given that Academic Advising has significant and lasting effects on the student experience, how will TRU ensure that all students have consistent and positive experiences with this essential service?

The topic of Academic Advising at TRU sees a wide range of feedback, with a large variation in satisfaction from students. Advising is an important touch-point in the student experience, with lasting impacts on expensive course selection, program satisfaction and, ultimately, student success at TRU.

### **Student Comments – Development of Advisor Capacity**

An analysis of student survey comments showed that **development of advisor capacity** was a key theme. It should be important to know how advisors arrive in their role. How are they chosen, and what kind of support do they have to fully develop? What are the key attributes of successful advising, and what can be done to inventory and achieve consistent success? How are individual faculties monitoring the effectiveness and student satisfaction of their ‘in house’ academic advising?

It would be of value to segment the advising question per faculty and have a chairperson do an independent evaluation of each program. This would identify key-performing areas for future benchmarks of success, while drilling down on the global information garnered from the NSSE and CUSC student studies. Furthermore, it would provide specific, applicable feedback per faculty, which will be more helpful than the global survey results.

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*“I am a mature student. My educational experience has been up and down. When I came back to attend this institution I didn't know very much and the advisors were not very knowledgeable or available. I feel there is a need for education about the ways of navigating the programs and what classes you need to graduate. I found with myself and others that we were expected to know what was required without being given the knowledge.”*

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### **Academic Advising Forum**

The strategic enrollment and student retention working group minutes from Nov. 24, 2014 contain an action item of “**creating a forum for all advisors to meet up and work together to cross train on creating a higher level of service to students**”. This working group would like to encourage the Transitions and Retention SEM groups to follow up on this item.

### **For Consideration**

Questions for the SEM working groups to consider include the following:

- What is the bench mark for excellent academic advising?
- How do we increase the consistency of excellent, student-centered advising?
- How do we increase the individual capabilities of advisors to build capacity in the area of academic advising on the whole?
- How do departments build capacity of advising in their programs? This would include succession plans for people *and* information

Sense of Belonging: Given that TRU students are less likely than other Canadian students to say that they would recommend TRU to others, how will TRU ensure that we are providing an excellent engaging educational experience by providing High Impact Practices in all programs?

### High Impact Practices

An analysis by program showed faculties that provide opportunities for **High Impact Practices** (HIPs) early and often tended to also have higher scores in the Sense of Belonging component. HIPs include study abroad, being in a learning community, researching with a faculty member, participating in courses with a service learning component, completing an internship or field experience, and completing a culminating senior project (i.e. portfolio, thesis, etc.).

HIPs are shown to positively impact engagement and retention, and should be included each department's programming (best practices indicate that students should participate in at least two HIPs) (Kuh, 2008). Having a quota or measurable number of HIPs in place, in addition to tracking student participation in these HIPs, will increase student retention and their sense of belonging to the department and therefore the institution.

Chairs of each department could then share on the successes and failures of the HIPs their departments implement. After best practices and opportunities for collaboration and resource-sharing have been identified, consistent implementation of the highest performing Hips across all faculties may increase sense of belonging scores.

### For Consideration

Questions for the SEM working groups to consider include the following:

- What are the most successful HIPs currently in place at TRU?
- Who implements them, and how are they implemented?
- How does participation vary in our diverse student population?
- Are there opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing?
- How can we provide similarly enriching and successful opportunities in all programs?

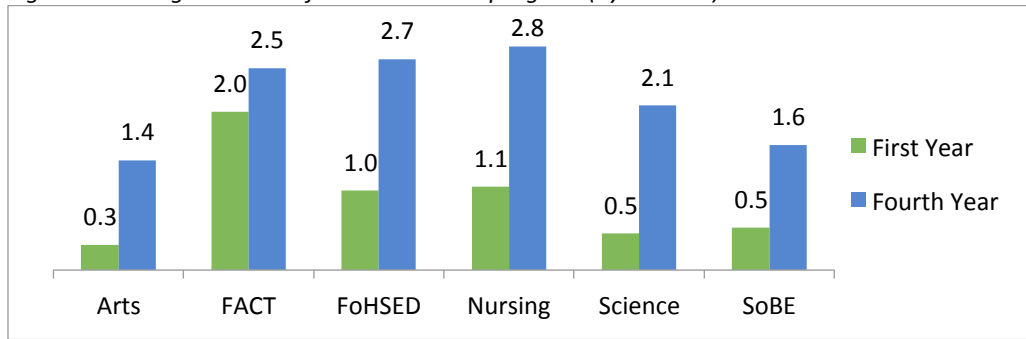
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**87%** of TRU respondents would  
recommend their institution to others  
(91% Canadian average)

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*Note.* Includes second and third year baccalaureate campus respondents, 2014 CUSC Survey of Middle Year Students.

Figure 1: Average number of HIPs done or in progress (by Division)



Note. Includes first and fourth year baccalaureate campus respondents, 2014 NSSE.

**Student Expectations.** Given that the students are more likely to say that their institution as “fallen short” of their expectations and are less likely to recommend TRU to others, how can we ensure that we are aware of and engendering appropriate student expectations and then fulfilling our commitments to new students?

Survey results from 2014 indicate that students are less likely to recommend TRU to others than students at other Canadian institutions, and that TRU has “fallen short” of their expectations more often. It is imperative to gain an understanding of what exactly these expectations are, and how TRU can improve in meeting expectations and improving student recommendations.

### Student Comments – Faculty Proficiency with Technology

Student comments relating to expectations were diverse, making specific recommendations difficult to make. However, several comments highlighted the expectation for instructors to be **proficient in the use of classroom technology**. It is clear that the availability of online notes and learning outcomes is a key expectation of the students. In addition to expectations for proficient use of technology, students expressed the expectation to be engaged in learning and that tests should align with the learning outcomes that were provided by the faculty member.

Figure 2: Single most important reason for attending university

To prepare for a specific job or career	43%
To get a good job	27%
To increase my knowledge in an academic field	11%
To prepare for graduate/professional school	7%
To get a good general education	6%
To develop a broad base of skills	2%
Other	2%
To make new friends	1%
To meet parental expectations	1%

Note. Includes first year baccalaureate campus respondents, 2013 CUSC Survey of First Year Students.

### Entrance, Graduate & Exit Surveys

Some centralized student surveys such as the CUSC Survey of First Year student and the NSSE provide information about the expectations and plans of new students. However, there is no centralized method for gathering the feedback of graduates and students leaving TRU programs. Implementation of some sort of feedback gathering system (whether for all students or a sampling) would shed light on this important issue.

**For Consideration**

Questions for the SEM working groups to consider include the following:

- How do expectations vary across our diverse TRU student population?
- How can we align student expectations about faculty use of technology with the actual practices of instructors?
- How can we ensure support instructors in using engaging teaching methods, aside from assessing the course through evaluations?
- How can we, as an institution, gain a better understanding of the expectations of incoming students and whether we are meeting these expectations?
- How can we gather information from graduates and leaving students to better understand their experiences at TRU?