

Teaching Commons News For Graduate Students

It Is Heating Up, Both Outside and In

May has been an exciting month at the Teaching Commons. We kicked off the month with York's first Summit on the First-Year Experience in the Classroom: Rethinking Retention. The opening addresses by Dr. Rhonda Lenton, Vice-President Academic & Provost and Dr. Janet Morrison, Vice-Provost Students, were very welcoming. The plenary by Dr. Vincent Tinto gave all participants the necessary groundwork to engage in the workshops and panel discussion that made up the rest of the day. He inspired the audience and left them with concrete strategies and ideas for the future. This event was followed by the Second Annual Supporting Teaching At York (STAY) Symposium and Teaching In Focus (TIF) Conference, which are detailed below.

As events are winding down, we are preparing for next year's programming. We invite you to visit and explore our website: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/for-all-graduate-students/>. Please share your feedback and suggestions on how we can improve the website and make it easier for you to find and understand the information that you need. Please email your feedback to teaching@yorku.ca.

York Hosts the 2nd Annual STAY and TIF Conferences

The Teaching Commons hosted the second annual **STAY Symposium** - Supporting Teaching At York, on May 2nd. The symposium was designed to celebrate the efforts and the achievements of those who have completed the [Senior Teaching Assistant \(STA\) Program](#) as they showcased their dedication and contributions to enhance and enrich student learning. Nearly 90 participants were welcomed by Dr. Celia Popovic, Director of the Teaching Commons and Dr. Karen Krasny, Associate Dean, Academic Affairs, Faculty of Graduate Studies. The day was a tremendous success with many new and experienced TAs engaging with one another to develop their teaching practice for the benefit of York students.

The **Teaching In Focus (TIF) Conference** took place on May 22nd. Dr. Rhonda Lenton, Vice-President Academic & Provost, set the tone for the day by delivering a brilliant opening plenary, sparking many meaningful discussions among the participants, which included TAs, contract and tenured faculty at York. Her focus was on our students and how enrollment and retention are positively affected by a high quality of teaching. The afternoon plenary was delivered by Dr. Harvey Wiengarten, President and CEO of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) who also inspired constructive conversations by focusing on a shift from content to competencies in our teaching. The day was filled with amazing presentations by York faculty (both tenured and contract) as well as TAs. Everyone shared their practices and engaged in conversations, strategizing how to continually raise the quality of teaching at York to benefit our students.



What did participants say about the STAY Symposium?

"It got me reflecting so definitely a successful conference."

"Today was an excellent experience – run seamlessly with important and very useful educational sessions. Overall, the environment of the symposium was also overwhelmingly collegial, friendly and so positive."

"I encourage TAs from SCIENCE disciplines to join."

"It would be wonderful to hold a symposium over several days so that attendees could attend ALL of the seminars. There were seminars that occurred simultaneously that I would have liked to attend."

TA Certificate in Teaching (TACT) Course

This [SEDA](#) accredited course is for Teaching Assistants to learn more about teaching in postsecondary education. It comprises 5 three hour face to face sessions plus an additional online component (4 online modules). Through [SEDA](#) and your completion of TACT, you will become part of an international network of people engaged in teaching and learning in higher education. The accreditation you receive helps further develop your CV and can be used for your future aspirations. See our continuation of the interview with Holly Clayton on the next page of this newsletter for evidence.



The main highlights of the course, as identified by past graduates of TACT, include the opportunity to observe and be observed by a fellow TACT member, receive feedback on your teaching and develop your own teaching dossier. Over the duration of the course you will develop your teaching dossier, which will then be your final assessment for the course. It can be later refined and used to obtain future employment in teaching.

This **free course** will be run in both the Fall and Winter terms. (Please note you need only

register for one term). You **MUST** be teaching in the term during which you take TACT and have at least one year of teaching experience.

To express your interest in enrolling in the TA Certificate in Teaching (TACT) Course, please fill out the preliminary registration form(s) available at:

<http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/forms/view.php?id=126578> (for Fall 2014) by August 1, 2014 and <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/forms/view.php?id=127427> (for Winter 2015) by November 1, 2014.

Please note that filling out the above form(s) does not guarantee you a spot in the TACT Course nor is it a registration for the course. It merely indicates your interest in the course and allows us to email you the formal registration form with all of the requirements and information.

TA Orientation

All new graduate student TAs are invited to attend a TA Orientation session in the first week of September. During this 3 hour session you will be provided with resources and guidance to help you get started as a TA at York University.

In this session we will discuss topics such as your role and responsibility as a teaching assistant, how to effectively engage with your course director, strategies to design your curriculum and lesson plans.

To **register**, click on the time of your choosing below, or visit our website:

<http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/professional-development/ta-orientation/>

- September 2nd [10am to 1pm](#) or [2pm to 5pm](#) in TEL 1014
- September 3rd [10am to 1pm](#) or [2pm to 5pm](#) in TEL 1014
- September 4th [10am to 1pm](#) or [2pm to 5pm](#) in TEL 1014

If you are a **Foundations TA** in **LA&PS** please stay tuned for more information on a special session organized specifically for you.

What do participants say about the TACT course?

“My perception of learning has certainly evolved because of the exposure to different styles of teaching, course experiences from other faculties and some critical concepts.”

“TA’s have a chance to practice and train their teaching skills more systematically.”

“I hadn’t realized I was already doing some of the things I should continue to do and change some to improve my students’ experience.”

What do participants say about TA Orientation?

“I was given info on valuable resources that I can provide to students as well as ideas on how to resolve issues that may arise.”

“It is useful to recognize that being a TA is a type of teaching – before this I thought we were best for grading.”

“I have a better idea of how/what to prepare.”

An Interview with Holly Clayton – Continued...



In the May edition of this newsletter we included the first half of an interview with Holly Clayton, a second year PhD student in Psychology at York University who has received a teaching ticket for next year. Holly credits her experience with programs at the Teaching Commons for developing her teaching practice and helping her to receive this teaching ticket. Here is what she had to say about both the TA Certificate in Teaching (TACT) course and the Senior Teaching Assistant (STA) Program she completed:

TC: In what way do you feel the TACT program contributed to your teaching practice?

Holly: I had never reflected on my own teaching before I was involved in TACT. I learned that reflective practice is a very important aspect of teaching, and immediately became more aware of what I was doing and whether or not my teachings were well received by my students. I really enjoyed having the opportunity to observe another TA, and having another TA observe me. I also learned various strategies for getting students more involved in tutorials, many of which I had never thought to implement before. However, the most valuable thing I learned in TACT was how to develop a teaching dossier. A teaching dossier is an invaluable document to have when applying for teaching positions. It was great to have practice creating one, and especially valuable to have received feedback on it. Once you have one started, it is easy to add to it at the end of each school year. I intend on expanding my teaching dossier to include the experiences I have as a course director at York.

TC: Why did you enroll in the STA program and what was your most valuable learning experience with the STA program?

Holly: I enrolled in the STA program because it seemed like the sensible thing to follow up TACT with, especially since I had my eye on a teaching ticket. I made a lot of friends in the TACT program, and several of these people were enrolling in the STA program. The most valuable aspect of the STA program was having the opportunity to interact, and learn from, other STAs in various disciplines. I now have a network of people outside my discipline that I can turn to for teaching related advice and support.

TC: In what way do you feel the STA program contributed to the on-going development of your teaching practice?

Holly: I really enjoyed having the opportunity to mentor other TAs through my professional development workshops. I gave workshops on “Making Meaningful Connections with your Students” and “Time Management for Neuroscience TAs”. Each of these topics compelled me to critically think about my own teaching practices. It was also great lecturing experience – you only had 1 hour with the group – so you had to be very careful about time management. You also had the opportunity to test out small group exercises, which I think are a great way to break up a talk into something more tangible, so that participants have something to take away from your lesson.

Course Design for Graduate Students

Wednesday July 16, 2014, 10am – 4pm, TEL 1014

This course is specifically for graduate students who will be a course director for the first time or are looking to improve their skills in course design. You will be introduced to the basics of course design, taking you through the content, activity assessment and evaluation development process. The focus will be on a practical approach based on sound theory and evidence.

To register please visit: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/forms/view.php?id=121963>

How can I get involved with the TC?

If you are interested in TACT, the STA program, or any of our other programs for graduate students visit: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/for-all-graduate-students/>

Visited our website lately?

Feedback on our website is most welcome. Please send your comments to us by emailing teaching@yorku.ca

Did you know?

You can easily access the upcoming TC events and programs by visiting our calendar <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/ta-sessions/>



TAGSA Pre-Conference at Queen's University

The first **TAGSA pre-conference** is being held at the STLHE conference at Queen's University on June 17, 2014.

This TAGSA (Teaching Assistant and Graduate Student Advancement) pre-conference focuses on topics specific to teaching as a TA. Titles include: "Supporting innovative practice in teaching and learning among GTAs: Fuller's Stages of Concern model"; "Not a 'Real' Teacher: Undergraduate TAs' Conceptions of Teaching"; "Teaching Assistant (TA) Orientations: Are we laying a transformative foundation?"; "Evaluating for transformation, transforming in our evaluation: How do we envision support for Graduate students and TAs?"; "Teaching Assistant (TA) Competencies: Provoking change" and finally, "Second Teachers in the Classroom".

For more information please see:

<http://www.queensu.ca/stlhe2014/program/pre-conference-workshops/tagsa>

All student participants are invited to a welcome reception...

RECEPTION: Student Welcome Event

Tuesday, June 17, 5:00 - 5:30pm, Location: Isabel Bader Centre for Performing Arts, Room TBA – for an update, check the website:

<http://www.queensu.ca/stlhe2014/program/meetings-and-special-events>

Are you a student attending the STLHE conference? Are you interested in learning more about STLHE and in meeting other students and participants at STLHE? If so, join members of the STLHE community for a Student Welcome Event where you will have the opportunity to meet other students and members of STLHE from across Canada, who are interested in teaching and learning. At this welcome event, members of the STLHE Board including the President, President Elect, Conference Chair, and Chair of Student Advocacy will introduce students to STLHE, highlight some of the sessions and conference activities that might be of specific interest to students, and facilitate some community-building activities.

The Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (**STLHE**) will hold its 33rd **conference** at Queen's University in Kingston, June 17 – 20, 2014.

To register for a half day or the full TAGSA pre-conference and/or part of or the entire STLHE conference, fill out the registration form located at:

<https://www.cvent.com/events/stlhe-2014-conference-registration/registration-40785f06cf0644b2a93edb9a57fbfaa7.aspx>

A List of Select Higher Education Related Conferences

AAEEBL 5th Annual Conference

July 28 – 31, 2014, Hynes Convention Centre, Boston, MA, USA

Register by **June 20** to save \$100!

Visit the conference webpage: <http://www.aeebl.org/?page=2014annualconference>

Circle Conference 2014 at Washington University in St. Louis

"Integrating Cognitive Science with Innovative Teaching in STEM Disciplines"

September 11 – 12, 2014, The Knight Centre

Submit your application by Monday **June 16**, 2014, available from the conference webpage: <http://circle2014.wustl.edu/application/>



Attending an HE related conference?

If you are attending a Higher Education (HE) related conference, please consider submitting a summary of your experience, we would love to share this with the wider community via our website.

See our conference page, <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/conferences/> for a list of forthcoming teaching related conferences.

Here is a link to a listing of Higher Education Conferences Worldwide: <http://www.conferencealerts.com/topic-listing?topic=Higher%20Education>



Transforming Assessment Webinars

The Transforming Assessment webinars are part of a series of free events covering a range of e-assessment topics. Further information on this and future events, recordings of past sessions, project information and participation/technical help on using the virtual classroom system can be found on our website at transformingassessment.com

'Assessment Decision-Making: how does technology influence (e-)assessment design?'

Wed June 4 *GMT* 07:00AM

Presenters: Phillip Dawson, Monash University and Sue Bennett, University of Wollongong, Australia

When designing the assessment for a course or unit, teachers make a variety of decisions. The OLT-funded 'Assessment Decisions' project team have interviewed 30 university teachers about how they make decisions about assessment. Many teachers spoke with us about technology's influence. At a micro level, features of particular technology tools sometimes influenced task design: awarding bonus marks because a column exists on the LMS, or tracking group participation because a wiki allows it. At a macro level, influences like university LMS rollouts sometimes acted as impetuses for change. This presentation will outline how technology influenced assessment design and present our online 'assessment decision-making framework' which has been developed to assist teachers in improving their assessment. For session details, time zone conversions and RSVP instructions, see <http://bit.ly/webinar4june2014>

'Learning Analytics for large scale distance and online courses'

Wed June 25 *GMT* 07:00AM

Presenters: Belinda Tynan, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) and Kevin Mayles, Open University, UK

This session will detail the model and approach used by the Open University, UK to Learning Analytics. The outcomes derived from an organizational level approach to embedding analytics as students begin their journey, on a day-to-day basis and in reflection to support students in being successful in their learning journey will also be discussed. For session details, time zone conversions and RSVP instructions, see <http://bit.ly/webinar25june2014>

External Links of Interest

Evaluating Critical Thinking and Problem Solving in Large Classes: Model Eliciting Activities for Critical Thinking Development.

<http://www.heqco.ca/en->

[CA/Research/Research%20Publications/Pages/Summary.aspx?link=135&title=Evaluating%20Critical%20Thinking%20and%20Problem%20Solving%20in%20Large%20Classes:%20Model%20Eliciting%20Activities%20for%20Critical%20Thinking%20Development](http://www.heqco.ca/en-CA/Research/Research%20Publications/Pages/Summary.aspx?link=135&title=Evaluating%20Critical%20Thinking%20and%20Problem%20Solving%20in%20Large%20Classes:%20Model%20Eliciting%20Activities%20for%20Critical%20Thinking%20Development)

Who Gets to Graduate?

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/18/magazine/who-gets-to-graduate.html?_r=1

For information about our programs, resources and much more, visit our website at <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca>



Food for thought...

Have you ever considered the skills needed to succeed in the course(s) you TA or teach?

Do you spend time teaching these skills or are you more focused on content?

How could you incorporate skills such as critical thinking, problem solving or even perseverance in your teaching?

What do you do to support your students in developing the necessary skills required for the course(s) you TA or teach?

