

# Teaching Commons News For Graduate Students

## Distinguished Professor, Dr. Vincent Tinto Visits York University

There was a ripple of excitement through the halls of the Teaching Commons when news spread that the Distinguished Professor of Syracuse University, **Dr. Vincent Tinto** was to give the keynote address at York University's first, **Summit on the First-Year Experience in the Classroom: Rethinking Retention on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2014**. For those steeped in research on transition and student experience, Dr. Tinto's arrival is particularly thrilling. His research on student retention and the impact of learning communities on student growth and attainment is world renowned.



Sponsored by the Office of the AVP & Provost, in collaboration with the Teaching Commons and the Division of Students, the Summit was developed to support recommendations from pan-University First-Year Experience consultations. The day includes two working sessions for Summit participants to explore ways to integrate curricular/pedagogical approaches to student transition with the Five Senses model developed by Alf Lizzio (2006). The day culminates with Dr. Tinto facilitating a discussion on ways to implement best practices for teaching and learning in first-year courses.

Following the Summit, participants will have the opportunity to reconnect on issues related to the development and implementation of teaching strategies designed to support students as they make an important transition into university-level study. A small number of spaces were set aside for Graduate TAs nominated by their supervisors. To read more about the outcomes generated by the First-Year Experience Working Group, visit <http://www.yorku.ca/vpstdnts/initiatives/firstyearexperience/>

## The STAY Symposium – A Celebratory Achievement

The excitement builds as STAs put the finishing touches on the highly anticipated **2<sup>nd</sup> Annual STAY Symposium on Friday, May 2nd 2014**. This year is particularly special since this cohort will be the first STA group in the Teaching Commons' young history to have completed the TA Certificate in Teaching (TACT)—the STA program's pre-requisite course. It was the ultimate vision of the TC to bring together like-minded individuals who are interested in exploring and sharing teaching and learning innovation across York University. The 2014 STA group is the true embodiment of this vision. In only two years since this program's inception, this class can add TACT and the year-long SEDA accredited STA program to their growing CVs.

Where do they go from here? The future looks extremely bright for this group. Holly Clayton, for example, just received her first teaching ticket to course direct within her discipline. In our interview with Holly, (featured on pg. 2) she credits the TC for the opportunity to develop the skills needed for such a teaching role. What is most inspiring about this STA group is the strong bond that has developed among the participants. Many STAs have indicated they will continue their professional

development and connection with the TC by forming independent study and reading groups. Others will apply for one of 10 FGS appointed Teaching Commons Tutors (TCT) positions. To learn more about the TCT experience read our feature article on page 3.



## An Interview with Holly Clayton – a Teaching Ticket Recipient

Holly Clayton (pictured right) is reviewing important statistics concepts with the students in her PSYC 2020: Statistical Methods I & II class for their upcoming final exam. Holly is a second year PhD student in Psychology at York University researching “Proprioceptive Abilities in Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome Patients”. She has over 4 years of teaching experience as a TA for Introductory Statistics courses in Psychology.



Holly is delighted to have received a teaching ticket for next year. She will be the Course Director for PSYC 2021: Statistical Methods 1, beginning in January 2015. With her additional commitment to teaching via the programs offered by the Teaching Commons, including TACT and the STA Program, we decided to interview Holly:

**TC:** In what way do you feel your training and experiences contributed to your ticket?

**Holly:** I was able to use a letter of reference from the Teaching Commons to apply for course directorship, so the Psychology program knew that I had pursued professional development on my own accord. I think that being enrolled in these programs (TACT and STA) definitely gave me an edge over other applicants. However, I truly believe that my teaching practice improved as a result of my experiences at the Teaching Commons. I had never thought to reflect upon my own teaching before TACT. I now reflect, in some form or another, after every lesson (writing in my journal, or talking to a colleague) about what worked and what didn't, so that I can continually improve my teaching from one lesson to the next. As an STA, I also learned many new ways to engage students during a lecture, and was able to test these new techniques out during my workshops, as well as during the tutorials I hold for the Statistics class.

**TC:** What advice would you give new TAs at York, especially if they aspire to become Course Directors at some stage of their academic careers?

**Holly:** Pick a class you really like and TA it a few times so that you know the subject really well; become an expert. Choose the course director you work with carefully. I was really lucky to be placed with Dr. Heather Jenkin during my first TAship, who has very rich teaching experience at York, and I have TA'd for her every year since; she became my teaching mentor. Develop a strong rapport with the course director, because you will need at least 1 letter of reference from a course director to get a teaching ticket. Ask them to be your teaching mentor and hint that you'd like as much teaching experience as possible. Over time, Heather has given me a much larger role in the classroom. I became involved in curriculum development and maintained the Moodle environment. She even asked me to lecture for her a few times. If you get an opportunity to lecture – take it. Lastly, enroll in both TACT and STA. Do this early enough in your graduate career so that you have lots of time to apply for the teaching ticket.

Stay tuned for the second half of the interview in our next edition, where Holly describes in more depth how the TACT and STA Programs helped to further develop her teaching...

**Will you be a course director this coming academic year? Are you looking for ideas, techniques or approaches to designing your course?**

### Course Design for Graduate Students

May 8, 9am – 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=73161>

## What does the Teaching Commons offer Graduate Students interested in Teaching?



## How can I get involved with the TC?

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

## In Profile - Teaching Commons Tutor, David Cappadocia

Ph.D. Candidate from Kinesiology and Health Science-Neuroscience and Biomechanics stream, David Cappadocia, is no stranger to the Teaching Commons. Since 2012, David has successfully completed the inaugural year of the TA Certificate in Teaching Course (TACT), and the SEDA accredited Senior Teaching Assistant Program (STA). This past year David applied and was awarded one of ten Faculty of Graduate Studies appointed Teaching Commons Tutors (TCT) positions.



TCTs play a vital role in the Teaching Commons. In addition to offering on-line and face to face support as a TA of TACT, TCTs mentor incoming STAs by observing and providing feedback to their workshops. When we asked David about why he applied to become a TCT he replied, "I am very passionate about improving teaching and learning at York University and was very excited to have the opportunity to keep working with the Teaching Commons after completing the TACT and STA programs." David feels both TACT and the STA program provided him with "the theoretical frameworks and practical experiences that have really informed [his] teaching practice," which in turn helped him mentor the current TACT and STA participants. In fact, he feels the highlight of his TCT experience was "seeing all of the wonderful professional development seminars that the STA's have developed. They have all worked so hard on their seminars, and I can't wait to see what they have prepared for the STAY symposium."

What advice would David give to those applying for a TCT position? "Being a TCT is a really rewarding job for anyone that is really passionate about teaching and learning. It puts you in a really privileged position where you can help others with their teaching practice, and at the same time, reflect on and improve your own. Being a TCT gives you the opportunity to work with some fantastic people in the Teaching Commons. Become a part of that community and you will not only learn a lot, but also build strong relationships and friendships that will last past your graduate school experience." When we asked David how this role has contributed to the on-going development of his teaching practice he concluded, "It has really helped me reflect on my own teaching philosophy, specifically how I can engage my students and help develop their critical thinking skills".

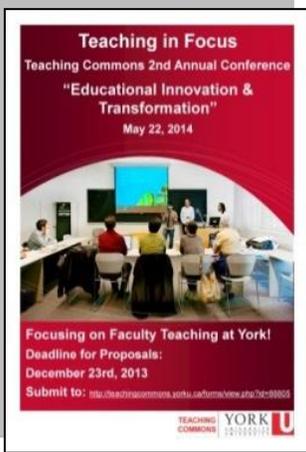
## Interested in becoming a TCT?

If you are a full-time graduate student who has successfully completed TACT, and the STA program, the Teaching Commons and Faculty of Graduate Studies are accepting applications.

For more information please contact,

[teaching@yorku.ca](mailto:teaching@yorku.ca)

## Teaching in Focus (TIF) Conference



Spring is a time of transition and renewal. What better way to usher in a new season than to re-invigorate your teaching practice by attending the highly anticipated **2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Teaching in Focus (TIF) Conference on May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2014**. This peer reviewed conference celebrates teaching and community building through the scholarship of teaching and learning. The theme of this year's conference is **Educational Innovation & Transformation**. This conference is for ALL who teach at York. Dr. Rhonda Lenton, Vice-President Academic & Provost of York University and Dr. Harvey Wiengarten, President and CEO of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) will offer keynote addresses. In the spirit of this issue's focus on student transition and engagement here is this month's feature.

### Feature Presentation: Student Transition and Engagement

**Presenter:** William Gleberzon, Course Director in Departments of History and Humanities

#### Transforming Pedagogy

Many university academics identify their teaching philosophy as pedagogy, which is derived from the Greek word for "child." Another term applied to teaching older adults, andragogy, is derived from the Greek term for "male." However both terms are inappropriate for teaching at the tertiary level. Although the derivations of each term may be unknown by those who use them, their subliminal associations correlates teaching adult university students with teaching philosophies and techniques identified with teaching children and males. Dr. Gleberzon will advance the term, anthragogy with the rationale for using it to identify teaching at post-secondary institutions. The presentation will also explore the impact of a major pedagogical change in public schools on the tertiary level of higher education.

**Presenter:** Logan Donaldson, Professor, Department of Biology, Faculty of Science  
**A First Year Learning Community in the Life Sciences**

This presentation will provide an overview of how to implement an enrichment program for life science students. This program, called Science 1st was funded for three years by the Academic Innovation Fund. Recently, Dr. Donaldson has been reaching out to other universities with the objective of seeking larger scale funding and participation.

**Presenter:** James Elwick Assistant Professor, NATS Division / STS program  
**Of Classes and Clocks, or, Tacit Knowledge in the Lecture Hall?**

For the past 30 years historians of science have insisted that science involves at least as much tacit and craft knowledge as it does ideas. Unfortunately the setup of the average lecture hall -with nary a cyclotron, scalpel or even hot plate in sight makes it difficult for non-science students to experience any hands on experience for themselves. Lacking a lab of one's own, or even equipment, what are some options for getting a relatively large class of such students to experience some basic form of scientific practice? This paper is about a then new and idealistic lecturer's attempts to improvise a solution.

Registration for the 2014 TIF Conference is now full; however to put your name on a wait list visit <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/forms/view.php?id=119503>

### Did you know?

You can easily access the upcoming TC events and programs by visiting our calendar

<http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/ta-sessions/>

### Food for thought...

For those who teach first year undergraduates:

To what degree do you believe students' pre-university learning experience prepares them for their current university experience?

Have you considered whether first-year students in your discipline are prepared for the rigour of the course you are TA'ing or teaching?

What might be anticipated gaps in their learning? i.e. critical thinking skills, ability to synthesize vast amounts of information.

How might learning more about students' pre-university learning experience help you facilitate their transition into first-year?

## Highlights of Forthcoming Workshops and Events

**Course Design for Graduate Students** – May 8, 9am - 4pm, TEL 1014

**Copyright at York: Tools & Tips to Support Your Teaching** - May 6, 12 – 1pm,  
TEL 1014

**Copyright at York: Tools & Tips to Support Teaching Online or Blended Courses**  
May 21, 1 – 2pm, TEL 1014

Please remember all our courses are free of charge and are open to all Graduate Students (see <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/for-all-graduate-students/> ).

## External Links of Interest

To read more about the outcomes generated by the First-Year Experience Working Group, visit: <http://www.yorku.ca/vpstdnts/initiatives/firstyearexperience/>

In anticipation of those accredited by SEDA visit: <http://www.seda.ac.uk/>

## For those interested in Student Experience and Student Transition

Braxton, J. (2000). *Reworking the student Departure Puzzle..* Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Crosling, G., Thomas, L., & Heagney, M. (2008). *Improving Student Retention in Higher Education: The Role of teaching and Learning.* New York: Routledge.

Johnston, B. (2010). *The First Year at University: Teaching Students in Transition.* Glasgow: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.

Pascarella, E., & Terenzini, P. (1991). *How College Affects Students.* San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers.

Thomas, L., Cooper, M., & J. Quinn. (2003). *Improving Completion Rates Among Disadvantaged Students.* Sterling USA: Trentham Books.

## Works by Dr. Vincent Tinto

Tinto, V. (1997). *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (2012). *Completing College: Rethinking Institutional Action.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

## What do participants say about our workshops?

“I really enjoyed all of the workshops I attended and got a lot out of them. Thanks to the Teaching Commons for organizing them! Thank you and kind regards.”

“This was a very sufficient training session.”

“I am going to prepare my next tutorial using the time distribution shown in this workshop.”

“The lab that I TA is almost parallel course to the lecture and requires a lot of its own design. I will be able to apply today’s topics immediately to better structure my own labs.”

The TC continues to offer numerous courses, workshops, and certificate programs for Graduate Students at all levels of their teaching and professional development. See [http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/ta\\_support/](http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/ta_support/) for details.

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

