

UNIVERSITY REPORT CARD

Why it's back to school for profs

This year's report card suggests professors could do better when it comes to engaging their students. Institutions are rising to the challenge by sending staff back to training workshops, writes

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When University of Toronto professor John Browne started teaching first-year students full time after about 30 years of working in administration, he needed a refresher. So he went back to school.

He attended university-run workshops on making small seminars exciting, managing course websites and incorporating technology in the classroom.

"I can no longer imagine myself teaching the way I used to teach, which was to stand up and just talk for an hour," says Prof. Browne, who teaches in both the faculty of arts and science, and medicine. "I think first-year students today really like the group work. I think they come into university a little fearful. Will they fit in? And they find out by talking with their peers, they can."

Say goodbye to professors who stand in front of a classroom lecturing for hours on end. With students demanding more for their high tuition fees, a growing number of Canadian universities are looking to make the classroom experience more dynamic. And to do this, they are drawing professors out of the lab and into teaching workshops.

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"What we are doing to improve teaching is just not telling our colleagues 'Look, your lectures have got to be more effective' because that's only one small part of it," says Ken Bartlett, director of the Office of Teaching Advancement at the University of Toronto. "We want to remind everyone that we're teaching human beings. It's the interac-

tion between the student and the instructor that really makes this a wonderful experience."

Most Canadian universities received B+ or above for overall educational experience from their students in the 2004 University Report Card survey, produced by The Globe and Mail in partnership with Strategic Counsel. But while these schools won unanimous praise for faculty members' knowledge of their subject areas, the grades dropped dramatically across the board on the question of effectiveness of teaching methods — a reminder to school administrations that there's room for improvement in the classroom.

At U of T, Canada's largest university, Prof. Bartlett — who is also a history teacher — says workshops are held throughout the year on galvanizing students in small group discussions, lecture techniques and working with technology. One held in August, just before students flooded onto campus, was on strategies for your first class. About 160 faculty members were fed practical information from what to wear on the first day of class to useful information to pass onto students. Essentially, Prof. Bartlett says, the workshops cover "anything that can actually improve the experience of the student in the classroom and improve the professor's ability to deliver the curriculum."

The classroom has changed over the years, Prof. Bartlett says. The use of technology has grown, large classes (some over 1,000 students) are not uncommon, and instructors have to keep up.

Web-savvy students, for example, are asking for more course material to be put on the Internet. Universities are hosting workshops for professors on how to create these websites and what to post on them. In a large class, a website can be a simple repository of course information, the syllabus, and a schedule of test dates, or it can be something more dynamic featuring on-line tutorials and chat rooms.

As for large classes, Debra Dawson, director of the Teaching Support Centre at the University of Western Ontario, says universities



DEBORAH BAIC/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Prof. John Browne works with his students during the morning session of his class Journey Through Middle Earth: "I can no longer imagine myself teaching the way I used to teach, which was to stand up and just talk for an hour."

are often criticized for them. Professors, however, are learning ways to create a more intimate atmosphere by dividing the class into smaller groups or making sure students attend tutorial sessions, she says.

"One of the neat things about the Internet and e-mail or even chat rooms is that it can be small again. So on one hand, you can be in a large class, but on the other hand, you might be engaged in a chat session with three or four other students when you're working on a project," Ms. Dawson says.

"What we do is provide a whole wide range of services and instruction in various aspects of delivery and teaching," Prof. Bartlett says of the workshops. "There is no template for good teaching. Each classroom is different. Each classroom is unique."

The focus on teaching excellence at universities has continued to gain momentum, with many insti-

tutions awarding teaching fellowships so professors have the time to develop new techniques. Teaching support centres have also grown.

Prof. Bartlett provides one-on-one consultation with instructors who want extra help with their techniques. He attends their classes and debriefs them.

"We've got a very, very active program because the university takes this extraordinarily seriously," he says. "One of the myths is that professors do not care about teaching. They do. Our colleagues are extremely interested in how they teach and how they can improve."

Universities are increasingly hiring younger professors as older instructors retire. Enthusiastic as they may be, Martin Singer, Concordia University's provost, notes that many have never actually taught a class.

The university runs workshops to address the basics, everything from effective lecturing to marking pa-

pers. Professors who are not satisfied with their teaching styles can videotape their lectures and receive pointers from their colleagues, Dr. Singer says.

"The quality of teaching of the young professors is very different. Their enthusiasm levels are great. Their skills, in some cases, are terrific and in some cases, they need to be honed."

Ms. Dawson echoes these sentiments.

Western, in London, Ont., offers a one-week summer course for new teachers. It's popular. The course has room for 35 people, but Ms. Dawson had a waiting list of 15 people this summer. New faculty practice "micro-teaching," where they lecture for 10 minutes in front of their peers and receive pointers.

"People see teaching as a rewarding experience," she says. "Research tends to be more long term. On a day-to-day basis, you get a lot back from teaching."

Teaching workshops are not limited to new professors.

The University of Calgary started a faculty certificate program this fall to help instructors improve their craft. This came after a student union survey identified the quality of teaching as a top priority.

"We have some highly respected teachers," says Randy Garrison, director of the university's Learning Commons and a professor in the faculty of education. "But we have some teachers that, of course, do need work, which is why we're here."

As Prof. Bartlett puts it, dynamic teaching has a lasting impact on young students.

"We are teaching people. We want them to learn a certain body of information, a certain set of skills. But at the same time we want them to be excited about life-long learning . . . and all of those other things that come with a university education."

Education

Overall educational experience	Quality of teaching	Faculty members' knowledge of subjects	Effectiveness of teaching methods	Availability of faculty outside classroom hours
Large				
B+ University of Alberta	B	A	B-	B
B+ Concordia University	B	A	B	B+
B+ University of Ottawa	B-	A	B-	B+
B+ University of Toronto	B	A	B-	B
B+ York University	B	A-	B-	B
B University of British Columbia	B-	A-	C+	B
B Université Laval	B	A-	B-	B+
B University of Montreal	B	A-	B-	B
B University of Quebec at Montreal	B	A	B-	B+
Medium				
A Brock University	A-	A+	B+	A
A University of Guelph	A-	A+	B+	A
A McMaster University	B+	A+	B+	A-
A Memorial U. of Newfoundland	B+	A	B+	A-
A Queen's University	A-	A+	B+	A
A University of Waterloo	B+	A	B	A-
A University of Western Ontario	A-	A+	B+	A
A- McGill University	B+	A+	B-	B
A- University of Saskatchewan	B	A	B	A-
A- Simon Fraser University	B+	A	B-	B+
A- University of Victoria	B+	A	B	A-
B+ Carleton University	B	A-	B-	B+
B+ Dalhousie University	B+	A	B-	B+
B+ University of Manitoba	B	A-	B	B+
B+ U. of Quebec at Trois Rivières	B	A	B-	A-
B+ Ryerson University	B	A	B	A-
B University of Calgary	B	A	B-	B+
Small				
A University of Lethbridge	A-	A	B	A
A Nipissing University	A	A+	A-	A+
A St. Francis Xavier University	A-	A+	B+	A
A Trent University	A	A+	A-	A
A Wilfrid Laurier University	A-	A	B+	A-
A- Laurentian University	B	A	B	A-
A- U. of New Brunswick at Fredericton	B	A	B	A-
A- University of Regina	B	A	B	A-
A- Saint Mary's University	B+	A	B	B+
A- Sherbrooke University	B+	A	B+	A-
B+ University of Windsor	B	A-	B-	B+
B University of Moncton	B-	B+	B-	A-

BERNARD BENNELL/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

The methodology

This year's University Report Card includes the opinion of 27,811 undergraduates, all current full- or part-time students who are also members of the studentawards.com on-line database.

An on-line methodology continues to be the best way to collect the opinions of students, who almost universally uses the Internet frequently. A number of strict controls were built into the process to help to ensure that those included in the sample represent Canadian undergraduates.

This year, the rankings approach of previous years has been replaced with a rating method, based on letter grades. As in past report cards, a mean score for each university is calculated for each question, based on the responses of students who attend that school. But, in 2004, universities have been assigned a letter grade that matches their mean scores — out of a maximum of 5.0 — for each variable.

The letter grading is based on the following grid:

- A = 4.4
- A- = 4.2
- B+ = 4.0
- B = 3.8
- B- = 3.6
- C+ = 3.4
- C = 3.2
- C- = 3.0
- D = Less than 3.0

This approach to grading was developed from analyzing the distribution of mean scores from an in-

dex variable, developed from an aggregate score based on each of the measurements of satisfaction about the university experience examined in the survey. The grid was then applied to the mean score of responses received from each university, for each variable, and grades were assigned based on the mean score received.

Because sample sizes are significantly smaller when comparing one university to another, there may not be statistically significant differences separating universities that receive different letter grades (i.e. 'A' versus 'A-'), although their mean scores are different.

"This change in the way the data is presented represents further evolution of the University Report Card for students and parents," said Tim Woolstencroft, managing partner of The Strategic Counsel, which analyzed the data.

This year, universities are also grouped into three size ranges:

- Large:** Enrolment over 25,000
- Medium:** Between 12,500 and 25,000
- Small:** Under 12,500

"With the change from first-to-last rankings to letter-grade scores, the report card can be used to see the overall picture of any one university, and also to compare universities of similar size with each other," Mr. Woolstencroft said.

As in previous years, the ratings are based solely on student opinion, derived from answers to the more than 100 questions.

Student services

Overall quality of student services	Health services	Academic support	Food	Recreation and sports	Student residence
Large					
B+ University of Alberta	B	C+	C+	B+	C+
B+ University of British Columbia	B-	C+	C+	B	C
B+ Université Laval	B	B-	B-	A-	C
B+ University of Montreal	B-	C+	C+	B+	C
B+ University of Quebec at Montreal	C+	C+	B-	B+	B-
B Concordia University	B-	B-	D	C-	D
B University of Ottawa	B	C+	D	B+	B
B University of Toronto	B-	B-	C-	B	B
B- York University	C	C+	C+	B-	C
Medium					
A University of Guelph	A-	B	A-	A-	B+
A- Brock University	B+	B	C+	A-	A-
A- McMaster University	A-	B	B	B+	B
A- Memorial U. of Newfoundland	B	B	B-	A-	C
A- U. of Quebec at Trois Rivières	B-	C+	C+	A-	A-
A- University of Western Ontario	B+	B	B-	A-	A-
A- Queen's University	A-	B	C	C+	B
B+ University of Calgary	B-	C+	B-	A-	C
B+ University of Manitoba	B-	B-	C+	B	B-
B+ University of Saskatchewan	B	B-	B-	B+	C+
B+ University of Victoria	B+	B-	B-	A-	B-
B+ University of Waterloo	B+	B-	B-	B+	B
B Carleton University	B	B-	C	B+	B-
B Dalhousie University	B	B-	C-	B	B-
B McGill University	B-	C	C-	B	B
B Ryerson University	B-	C+	C	B	B-
B Simon Fraser University	B-	C+	C-	B-	C
Small					
A Sherbrooke University	A-	B-	B-	A-	C+
A- Nipissing University	B-	B+	C+	B	A+
A- St. Francis Xavier University	B	B	C+	B+	B-
A- Wilfrid Laurier University	B+	B	B-	B	B+
B+ Laurentian University	B	B-	C	B+	B
B+ University of Lethbridge	B-	B-	C+	B+	C
B+ University of Moncton	B+	B-	C-	B+	B-
B+ U. of New Brunswick at Fredericton	C+	B-	C-	B-	B-
B+ University of Regina	C+	B-	B+	B	B-
B+ Saint Mary's University	B+	C+	C-	B	B-
B+ Trent University	B	B	C-	B	B
B University of Windsor	B	C+	C-	B-	C

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On the Web

More stories and the complete, interactive survey results available at: globeandmail.com/reportcard