

Teaching Academy Peer Support Planning Document

Teaching Academy Peer Support – Background and Overview

The Teaching Academy is a group of teaching award winners at the University of Calgary. *The purpose of the Teaching Academy is to establish a network of colleagues who can collectively develop teaching and learning expertise at the University of Calgary.* This purpose is driven by some foundational beliefs regarding the scholarship and practice of teaching. The members of the Teaching Academy believe that:

- Knowledge and understanding of excellent teaching is informed by research, but driven by practice;
- Teaching expertise is shared across disciplines and across campus;
- Teaching is a developmental skill that can be deliberately strengthened;
- Opportunities for feedback and teaching development need to be offered in a low-risk and encouraging manner; and
- Development of U of C teachers and Teaching Academy members is a worthwhile pursuit that leads to enhanced teaching practices, both at the University of Calgary and more broadly within post-secondary education.

The Teaching Academy also functions according to the following principles of practice:

- **Interdisciplinarity**, and welcoming of perspectives and practices from all scholarly disciplines;
- **Inclusion** of all teaching colleagues at the University of Calgary;
- **Accessibility**, or offering multiple modes of, and avenues for, engagement in teaching development; and
- **Respectfulness** and collegiality, particularly within the context of the peer support network.

The Teaching Academy members decided that, in order to contribute to and enhance the collective teaching expertise at the U of C, it was important to develop and offer some kind of peer mentorship opportunity with respect to university teaching practices. Through a process of iterative consultation, feedback, and decision making, the Teaching Academy has established the Teaching Academy Peer Support initiative.

The **Teaching Academy Peer Support (TAPS)** initiative is a “medium-structure” framework for peer-to-peer teaching support at the University of Calgary. The University of Calgary’s Teaching Academy drives this initiative, and as such, each Teaching Academy member selects specific support types to engage in as a means to provide peer support. This initiative is inclusive of all Teaching Academy members, and is a sustainable support model that members participate in and contribute to as they are able.

Participants in TAPS are paired with Teaching Academy members based on the most appropriate support type (see Figure 1 for an illustration of this). For example, a Teaching Academy member may be

most interested in providing one-to-one mentorship, and consequently would be paired with participants who are best suited for that type of support.

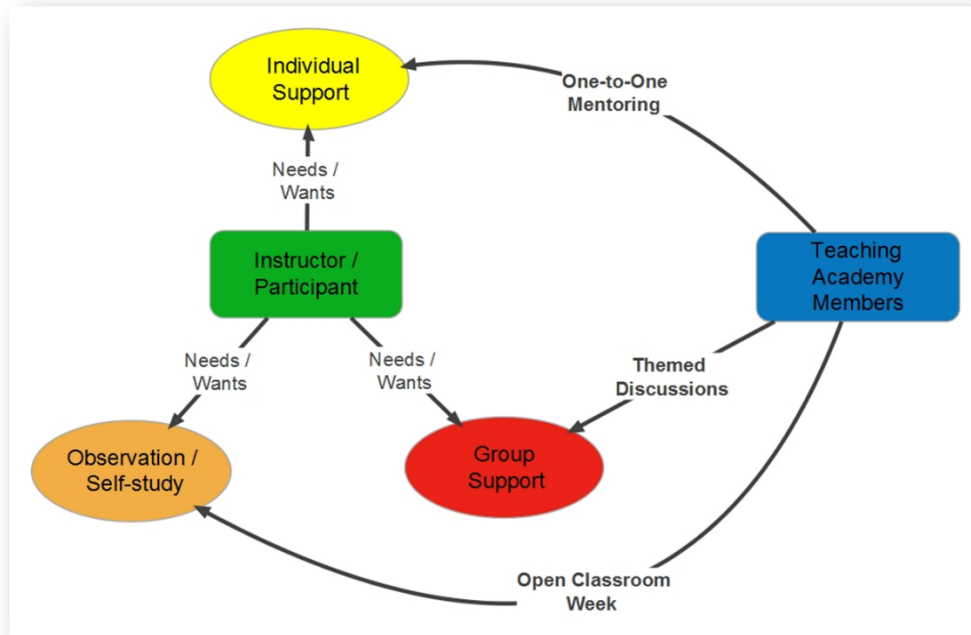


Figure 1: Framework for offering peer-to-peer teaching support

Teaching Academy Peer Support – Goals

Several broad goals for a peer teaching support initiative were identified by the Teaching Academy. These goals are to:

- Meet the teaching and career needs of individual instructors;
- Provide developmental support to teachers;
- Improve the quality of classroom experiences for both teachers and students;
- Engage in a reciprocal learning experience;
- Function as inclusively as possible (including all of our colleagues at the U of C who are interested in improving teaching practice); and
- Develop and foster supportive teaching networks across campus.

Teaching Academy Peer Support – Intended Outcomes

The Teaching Academy members articulated specific outcomes that are intended as a result of participation in the TAPS initiative. The outcomes are sorted according to support type categories:

Over-arching outcomes (common to all support categories)

Participants should be able to:

- Engage in dialogue about teaching and learning;
- Demonstrate enhanced self-efficacy in teaching practices;
- Articulate conscious awareness and expertise about teaching practice;
- Create artefacts and evidence of teaching development;
- Contribute to a University of Calgary teaching best-practices network; and
- Locate themselves within the University of Calgary’s teaching community.

Outcomes for one-to-one mentorship (individual support)

Participants should be able to:

- Foster self-awareness through reflection;
- Identify areas of strength and/or development, both collaboratively and individually;
- Create a learning development and action plan; and
- Assume accountability for moving individual teaching practice forward.

Outcomes for themed discussions (group support)

Participants should be able to:

- Foster self-awareness through collaborative discussion and dialogue;
- Engage in meaningful dialogue about common experiences in teaching practice across disciplinary boundaries;
- Create individual and collaborative meaning from the stories and narratives of others; and
- Establish a self-sustaining community of practice (long term).

Outcomes for open classroom offerings / open classroom week (observation/self-study)

Participants should be able to:

- Demystify teaching and recognize it as a developmental and intentional practice;
- Appreciate that teaching is a public, shared practice;
- Identify alternatives for educational delivery in university classrooms / labs / online environments;
- Describe the “student experience” in different types of educational settings and identify implications for personal teaching practice; and
- Identify strategies to implement as part of teaching practice.

The outcomes in each category are developmental, and are ordered intentionally to suggest the ways in which development might occur through ongoing participation in the initiative.

Teaching Academy Peer Support – Support Type Structure

Each aspect of the Teaching Academy Peer Support initiative has a unique structure and mechanisms for delivery.

One-to-One Mentoring

The one-to-one mentorship initiative is a peer support model that is designed for individual engagement in teaching development. It is open to and inclusive of all teaching colleagues at the University of Calgary; it can be useful for professionals who are new to teaching, and for those who are continuing their development as established instructors. Participants in one-to-one mentorship self-select, meaning that they make contact with the Educational Development Unit in order to initiate a mentoring process. A representative from the EDU has an intake conversation with the participant in order to determine their developmental needs. The EDU representative then recommends a one-to-one mentorship pairing, based on the participant's intake interview and each Teaching Academy member's strengths.

The Teaching Academy member and the participant work collaboratively to create a learning development plan, which outlines projected learning outcomes for both the mentor and the participant. The plan also includes action points that both parties are able to commit to, as well as projected timelines for completion. The learning development and action plan thus becomes an artefact that both the mentor and the participant can use as evidence of teaching development.

An EDU designate checks in with the mentor and participant at pre-determined intervals in order to gauge progress.

Themed Discussions

The idea of themed discussions was developed by the Teaching Academy members in order to provide systematic, group-level teaching and learning support at the University of Calgary. The purpose of the themed discussions is to provide regular opportunities for teaching colleagues on campus to engage in group dialogue about teaching issues, pedagogical approaches, particular teaching challenges, or developmental processes.

Discussions are scheduled throughout the academic year, and are structured in a lunch-and-learn format. Each discussion is hosted by Teaching Academy members and facilitated according to pre-determined themes pertaining to teaching and learning. It is the Teaching Academy's intention that this type of group support will eventually evolve into a self-sustaining community of practice.

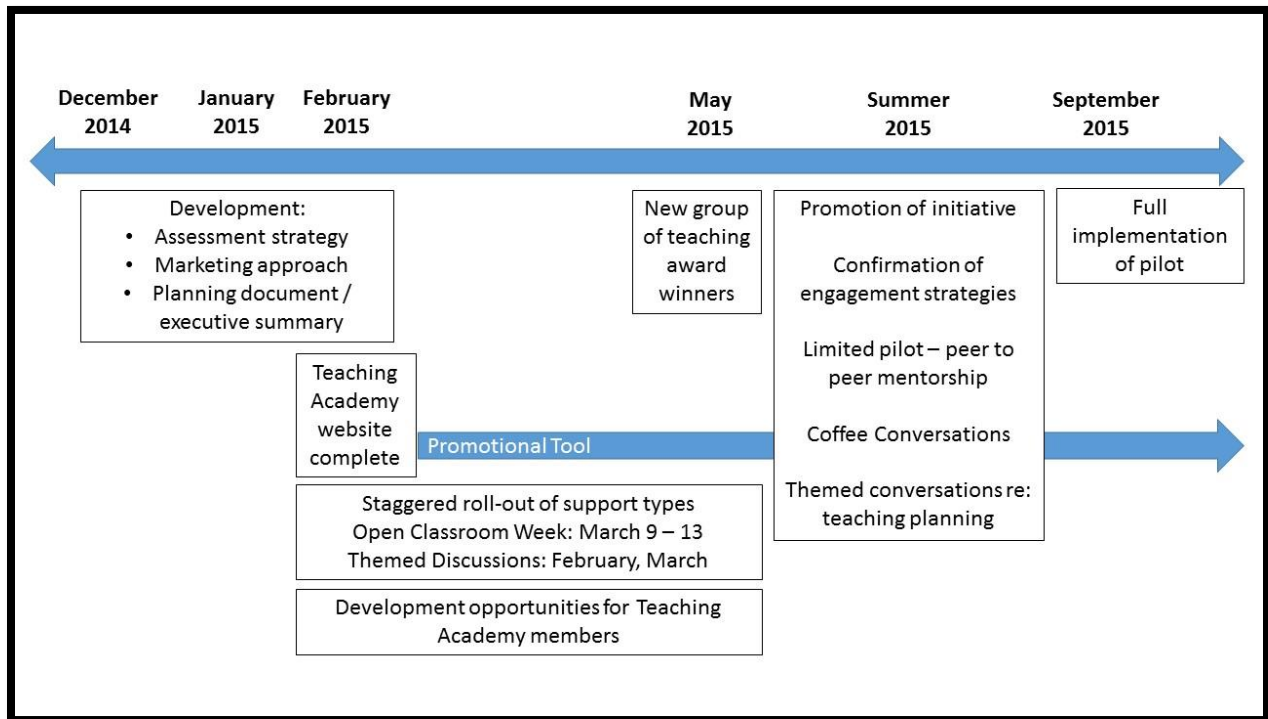
Open Classroom Week

Open Classroom Week is a form of teaching and learning support that is offered for those who want to engage through observation of teaching practice. The purpose of Open Classroom Week is to provide opportunities for all U of C teaching colleagues to observe classroom settings, teaching practices, technology applications, and learning experiences across a variety of disciplines and contexts. Open Classroom Week allows instructors to see what others are doing in their classrooms, seminars, labs, tutorials, and online environments, and provides opportunities to engage in conversations about teaching with their colleagues.

Teaching Academy members will open their classrooms to observation by other campus instructors for a one week period during each academic term. Instructors who wish to observe a class (or several classes) are asked to register and declare their intent by way of the Educational Development Unit’s registration system. Upon conclusion of their observations, the Educational Development Unit will follow up with participants in order to provide additional resource materials and/or referrals. The participants may also choose to attend a capstone themed discussion after each Open Classroom Week that will explore the notion of making teaching practice public.

Teaching Academy Peer Support – Timelines

The following calendar illustrates projected timelines for TAPS implementation, up until September 2015.



Teaching Academy – Member Development

Workshops, discussions, and development opportunities will be hosted by the EDU periodically in order to facilitate the ongoing development of Teaching Academy members. These opportunities will take a variety of formats and structures, but will be tailored and offered exclusively to Teaching Academy members so that they may contribute as fully and effectively as possible to the TAPS initiative. These development opportunities will be hosted by the Educational Development Unit, but will also highlight the experience and expertise of Teaching Academy members.