



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study presents information gathered from a survey on the teaching practices employed in the classroom within U21 Universities. The study has also produced a tool, 'The Teaching Practices Survey Instrument' (available to U21 members) designed to explore teaching practices; to gain insight into changes in the way that classes are delivered over time; and to probe attitudes towards teaching, learning, and institutional support for these activities. The U21 survey is a customised version of a tool originally produced by the University of British Columbia. In 2015 this tool was used to collect data from teaching staff at 8 Universitas21 institutions in East Asia, Europe, Oceania and North America.

The study noted 5 key findings around:

- Concerns around increasing class sizes
- The need for teaching support
- Belief student centred pedagogies are important for student learning
- Concerns regarding workload expectations
- The perception institutions do not value teaching as highly as research.

SUMMARY REPORT

Overview

There has been a considerable interest in researching effective teaching practices and promoting the use of evidence to inform these practice in higher education (Ambrose et al., 2010; Bain, 2004; Buskist & Groccia, 2012; Nilson, 2010). Despite this, many post-secondary institutions are largely unaware of what teaching practices are employed in the classroom as

institutions rarely collect information on teaching practices (Tagg, 2008). Such dearth of information both limits the ability of institutions to measure educational effectiveness and positions teaching and learning support units in a challenging situation, as effective support should ideally be tailored to fit the institutional teaching culture.

This summary report contains information regarding a survey, originally implemented at the University of British Columbia, designed to explore teaching practices; to gain insight into changes in the way that classes are delivered over time; and to probe attitudes towards teaching, learning, and institutional support for these activities. In 2015, the U21 Educational Innovation cluster made available customized versions of a survey to member institutions and collected data from teaching staff at eight Universitas21 institutions in East Asia, Europe, Oceania and North America.

A common survey consisting of two sections and 30 questions, primarily multiple choice and/or Likert scales. The survey also included three open-ended questions that explored perceptions around main challenges and enablers of teaching. The study was conducted with institutional ethics approval, and across all institutions a total of 2017 teaching staff completed the survey. Reports were created for each participating institution and a report containing the compiled results was generated for U21 (<https://universitas21.com/sites/default/files/2018-04/TPS%20compiled%20results.pdf>).

Survey Development and Implementation

The version of the survey implemented in 2015–2016 was originally developed and validated at the University of British Columbia (UBC). The survey was initially run in 2008 as a part of the Lasting Education, Achieved, and Demonstrated (LEAD) initiative. In 2013, representatives from UBC's Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology and Science Centre for Learning and Teaching did a comprehensive review of iterations of the survey implemented at other institutions as well as similar survey tools. This team also connected with other institutions to gather information on the effectiveness of various question structures and what data was prioritized by academic leaders. This information was compiled and used to inform the development of revised survey in 2014.

The result was an instrument consisting of two sections and 30 questions, primarily multiple choice or Likert scales, about teaching practices and perceptions. The first section of the survey included a series of questions related to instructors' classroom practices and expectations for students based on their largest enrolment, lowest level course. The second section contained questions around perceptions of specific teaching practices, access and knowledge of support or professional development resources, and perceptions of institutional support for teaching. The survey also included the following three open-ended questions:

1. Briefly describe what you consider to be the biggest challenge to your teaching.
2. What changes could be made at UBC to help you teach more effectively?
3. Briefly describe one factor that has improved your teaching.

The survey underwent multiple revisions as a result of validation activities. UBC implemented the survey in the Fall of 2014 and applied additional minor revisions based on this large-scale implementation.

Universitas21 institutions were then offered the opportunity to have the survey implemented with UBC managing the data collection and analysis. All participating institutions were provided the opportunity to customize the survey for language (i.e. using the phrase "teaching staff" instead of "faculty") and institutional structure (i.e. teaching appointments). Institutions were also invited to submit questions of interest to their institution. A unique instance of the survey was created for each institution. It is important to note that the survey was offered in English at all institutions and was revalidated with new populations.

All data was collected anonymously through an online survey tool between May and September. Each institution employed inclusion criteria and recruitment methods appropriate for their institutional culture. Some institutions invited all staff with teaching responsibilities through an email from a prominent university leader, while others used posted a link on a university web site with high traffic. The surveys were generally available for a period of 3 weeks, although some institutions chose to extend this period in an effort to increase responses. No incentives for participation were provided by either U21 or any of the participating institutions.

Data Analysis

Across all institutions, 2063 responses were received. However, 46 were considered incomplete and excluded from analysis. Weighted descriptive statistics were generated for all multiple choice and Likert-scale questions, with each institution weighted equally regardless of number of responses. Three researchers independently reviewed open-ended responses and empirically developed coding schemes based on emergent themes. These schemes were then compared and combined to develop a content analysis protocol to determine pervasive issues impacting the ability of teaching staff to improve teaching practice and student learning. Further information regarding the descriptive analysis is available in the [Compiled U21 Results](#).

In this summary report, key findings are reported using a framework of emergent themes that evolved during the analysis of the open-ended questions. Five themes emerged consistently across the three open-ended questions. They are:

1. Concerns around increasing class sizes
2. The need for teaching support
3. Belief student centred pedagogies are more effective for student learning
4. Concerns regarding workload expectations
5. The perception institutions do not value teaching as highly as research

Quantitative data is referenced in support of these themes.

Key Findings

1. Concerns around increasing class sizes

Across all institutions, class size emerged as one of the main concerns expressed by participants. Class size was frequently mentioned as a challenge, with a few participants even expressing concerns for student safety. For example, in response to the prompt about the biggest challenge to teaching, one participant replied “Increasing class sizes - we can't run field schools or field labs, or even many discussion groups the way they need to be run for maximum experiential learning and for actual safety in the field.” While the average class size reported across institutions was 123, class size varied considerably both within and across

institutions with a reported average low of 54 and a high of 240. Participants noted the increased complexity and associated increased workload, as well as how large class sizes are perceived to “force” specific teaching practices. Several participants noted the impact of class size when trying to actively engage students, with one stating “Class size makes teaching into a performance. Students in large groups are unwilling to speak out.” Despite the substantial concerns expressed regarding class size, participants were general convinced improving the effectiveness of one’s teaching was still possible without a smaller class size, with 78% of participants expressing agreement with this statement.

2. The need for teaching support

Increasing the support provided for teaching also emerged as a common concern expressed by participants. However, the type of support varied between institutions. In some cases participants requested increased resources, materials, or access to technology, with some noting personal financial implications “I’m expected to pay for any class materials I use - including photocopying.” Other participants focused on the opportunity to access professional develop or other related support, often indicating this was critical to improving practice, with participants providing feedback such as “Every time I have had the opportunity to attend a pedagogy course ... I have been feeling more confident and empowered.” or “Undertaking a professional qualification in T&L opened up a new world of expert practice in education.” Many participants report engaging in professional development events, the most popular being workshops or seminars with 69% of all participants report having participated in these. 53% of participants report participating in peer evaluation of teaching activities and 51% in observing a colleagues teaching.

3. Belief student centred pedagogies are important for student learning

The vast majority of participants (90%) agreed with the idea that active learning techniques are an effective way to promote learning. However, on average, only 37% of classroom time is dedicated to active learning practices, while an average of 44% of classroom time is spent on lecturing. Participants mentioned the challenges both large class sizes and limited resources pose for those trying to implement active learning. Participants often cited student centred pedagogies as having a positive impact on their teaching (“Shifting away from purely lecture-

based instruction and incorporating more peer-to-peer interactive tasks during "lecture" time."), but expressed concerns with not having resources to support the increase in workload they associated with these practices.

4. Concerns regarding workload expectations

Much like class size, workload emerged as one of the main concerns expressed by participants across all institutions. Many participants indicated wanting "more time for focusing on teaching instead of having to 'balance' multiple academic roles, which results in not having sufficient time to prepare as well as I'd like for teaching." Across institutions, teaching staff reported spending an average of 116 hour per class per term on common non-teaching activities (preparing for class, marking and communicating outside class with students). Although the workload varied dramatically across institutions and teaching appointments, there was consensus that teaching staff feel they're being asked to do more than they can reasonably accomplish and, as a consequence, teaching is suffering.

5. The perception institutions do not value teaching as highly as research

Ultimately, the themes above help form teaching staff perceptions of whether the institution values teaching. Across institutions, 54% of participants expressed a belief that their university leadership recognized the importance of teaching, with that number increase to 58% when asked about their local academic unit. Participants expressed the perception that teaching was not as valued as research through comments such as: "in a research-intensive university... there's certainly lip service given to teaching, but... one knows that tenure and promotion decisions will ultimately be based on research." and this perception impact the ways in which teaching staff use their limited time. "Research is considered the most important factor for progression... I feel that passion for teaching is not rewarded and it challenges my desire to put effort in it." Participants were slightly more likely to report teaching as a priority over research (77% v. 67%). However, this could be due to sampling bias.

Additional Information

If you would like additional information about the Teaching Practices Survey, including the most recent version of the questionnaire, [click here](#)