



University of Toronto TORONTO ONTARIO M5S 1A1

OFFICE OF THE VICE-PROVOST, STUDENTS

TO: University Affairs Board

SPONSOR: David Farrar, Vice-Provost, Students

CONTACT INFO: Phone (416) 978-3870 / Email <david.farrar@utoronto.ca>

DATE: February 15, 2005 for February 22, 2005

AGENDA ITEM: 3

ITEM IDENTIFICATION:

The Student Experience: First Report by the Vice-Provost, Students, Arising from Stepping UP

JURISDICTIONAL INFORMATION:

The University Affairs Board is responsible for consideration of policy of a non-academic nature and matters that directly concern the quality of student and campus life. The Board has the mandate for monitoring matters within its area of responsibility including campus and student services.

PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN:

No previous action has been taken on this item.

HIGHLIGHTS:

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), developed by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, is used at over 400 U.S. universities annually to assess how well students are learning and what they get out of, and put into, their undergraduate experience. NSSE was identified as an appropriate tool to assist the University through a process of institutional change as we work to meet the objectives outlined in Stepping UP. The survey is based on decades of U.S. research into the outcomes of a quality education and integrates both the curricular (in class) and co-curricular (out of class) experiences in ways envisioned by the academic plan.

The Canadian version of the survey revises the terminology where necessary and includes an additional 10 questions developed by the Canadian consortium of participating institutions. The survey results are both broad and deep and open up many avenues for further exploration, research and discussion.

The primary motivation in bringing the National Survey of Student Engagement to U of T was not to compare ourselves to other institutions but rather to help us identify and measure the results of specific and strategic initiatives over time. To this end, staff in the Office of the Vice-Provost, Planning and Budget and the Office of Student Affairs have been analysing the results in the context of the University's academic planning framework Stepping UP.

The attached report "Measuring UP" summarizes some of the key NSSE results in relation to the student experience objectives presented in the academic plan and identifies areas where NSSE data could be explored further to help isolate problems and design effective interventions. In short, the report is the first attempt in a longer process of making meaning of our survey results.

The U of T Benchmark Report (Appendix A) confirms much of what we already know – and are addressing – through Stepping UP. Our students report that the University of Toronto, broadly, provides a level of academic challenge commensurate with our peer institutions in Canada and the U.S. We set high expectations for our students and students work hard to meet those expectations. On the other benchmarks, there is work to be done. Our undergraduate students are less involved in the kinds of active and collaborative learning modes identified by NSSE as preparing students for the "messy, unscripted problems they will encounter daily during and after college." Our students are not interacting with faculty – inside or outside the classroom – as much as they could. We can do more to enrich the educational experience, to encourage students to participate in those opportunities and to remove the barriers to participation. And we need to design interventions that help students develop supportive relationships with staff and faculty and, in particular, with their peers and to develop a connection to the University community.

There are values and assumptions built into the NSSE Benchmark Report which may not be shared by the University of Toronto community. Not all questions are included in the benchmark scores. In particular, the responses to the questions developed by the Canadian participating institutions are not included and there are a number of other questions of interest which are not incorporated into the benchmarks. With these cautions in mind, the NSSE Benchmark Report can and will serve as a critical catalyst for change. It demonstrates broadly and tangibly the effects on student learning of factors such as limited resources, enrolment levels, financial aid and space constraints, and will help us in identifying best practices.

FINANCIAL AND/OR PLANNING IMPLICATIONS:

The report will be used to assist the University in meeting objectives outlined in *Stepping Up: 2004-2010 at the University of Toronto*, a framework for planning at the divisional level. Budget allocations arising from the plans of academic and administrative divisions will be brought forward for approval at the appropriate time as part of the budget process. Reviews of policies and any revisions that arise out of the academic plan will be conducted in accordance with an appropriate process and will be brought for approval to the appropriate Board or Committee.

RECOMMENDATION:

The report is presented for information.