

## **CONTINUOUS LEARNING AT MOUNT ALLISION UNIVERSITY**

### **A Response to the External and Internal Review Reports**

#### Background

During the 2009-10 academic year and arising out of the *Academic Renewal Plan*, the Provost initiated external and internal reviews of the Continuous Learning ("CL") division at Mount Allison University. The former was undertaken by Dr. Marilyn Miller (University of Regina) and her report was received in early November. An internal review committee, chaired by Rob Summerby-Murray and Eileen Herteis, took Dr. Miller's report and used it as the basis for an internal consultation process that generated a second report and recommendations in early April. The two reports have been considered by both Deans' Council and the Senate Committee on University Planning and elements of them have been discussed at Faculty Council on several occasions.

This document is not intended as a full summary of the external and internal reports and should be read in conjunction with them:

<http://www.mta.ca/administration/vp/reviews/indexunitreviews.htm>

#### Overview of Key Issues

There was unanimity in both reviews that the mission and mandate of CL is not clear. Successive senior administrations have not provided clear direction for the unit that could form the basis for a strategic plan and the current *Strategic Statement* does not address it at all. Unsurprisingly, then, CL course offerings are inconsistent (e.g., some field courses are run by CL and some by directly by a department) and indeed somewhat random (i.e., dependent on an individual faculty member's interest and willingness to offer a course).

Most of CL's activity consists of Spring/Summer session and correspondence courses. Offerings in Moncton in particular have fallen off in recent years and lack of enrolments has led to frequent cancellations. Increasing numbers of regular, full-time students are using CL classes as a safety net. (One must always be attuned to the possibility of CL classes cannibalising enrolments in "regular" classes.)

An additional challenge rests in the fact that there is not currently enough activity to support a full-time Director of CL. As a result, the incumbent has been assisting the Registrar's Office with part-time transfer and mature students for the past several years. (This issue was first raised by the Director herself.)

The current budget model does not remit tuition revenue back to the unit or to the academic departments for courses taken by full-time students during the Fall and Winter terms. Accordingly, it does not provide an incentive for either CL or an

academic unit to increase their outreach to non-traditional learners. (It is important to note that CL does generate a surplus annually, net of the Director's salary and the indirect costs of the unit.)

Both the external and internal review reports recommended that CL should be refocused on an expanded array of outreach activities (with examples provided). Current CL outreach activities include: the Tantramar and Mount Allison Advantage programs; Lunch and Learn. Outreach activities are also undertaken by Conference Services and Student Affairs.

### Student Needs and Department Engagement

There are two distinct categories of students that have been served by CL in the past: non-traditional learners (mature students, transfer students, part-time students etc.) and those students who wish to take courses delivered in non-traditional ways (concentrated courses, evening courses, online /asynchronous courses [i.e., self directed], Spring/Summer courses etc.). While these categories sometimes overlap, often they do not and it is important that they not be conflated.

While some Departments and Programs do work with CL to plan course offerings, particularly for the Spring/Summer term, in general there is little ownership of CL courses by Departments and Programs. A majority of them appear to have a reactive rather than a proactive relationship with the unit, in that they will respond if the Director suggests putting on a course but may not suggest it themselves. They are, however, actively engaged in approving the hiring of part-time and correspondence instructors. Symptomatic of this lack of ownership, the review process itself seems not to have connected with a majority of faculty and students at Mount Allison; indeed, there was a marked lack of engagement on the part of those not already involved with CL.

Students have legitimate reasons for wanting to take courses delivered in ways other than the traditional 13-week course offered in a classroom between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. in the Fall or Winter term. Are we certain that we understand and are responding to students' needs? Academic Departments and Programs should consider these students when planning their course offerings and should be encouraged to offer courses delivered in non-traditional ways.

### Principles

1. Resources are and will continue to be tight and should be allocated to activities that are central to Mount Allison's core mission and identity. Just because we could undertake an activity, however worthy, does not mean that we should. All activities, particularly non-core activities, should be measured

- against the twin benchmarks of quality and sustainability (and should not result in a loss of revenue or otherwise result in a net cost to the institution).
2. CL, while important and valuable in principle, is not core to Mount Allison's identity, brand, or place in the market. Accordingly, putting significant additional resources into CL at the present time to develop its outreach mission should not be a priority.
  3. Nevertheless, Mount Allison has a responsibility to support all of its students, including but not limited to non-traditional learners. Its current role as a safety valve for regular, full-time students with scheduling or program difficulties is a real issue and evidence of a current need that is being met by CL. As a result, there is no justification at present to dismantle CL.

### Recommendations

1. That all Mount Allison credit courses, regardless of delivery mode, should be the direct responsibility of the appropriate Academic Department or Program, working under the direction of the Dean. This includes Spring/Summer courses, concentrated courses, and field courses.
2. That, effective immediately, CL should become part of the Registrar's Office and the Director should report directly to the Registrar.
3. That the Director's role should continue to include its current administrative responsibilities, as well as liaison with and assistance for academic Departments and Programs with respect to non-traditional course offerings. A position review should be conducted by the Registrar at some point in the next few years, ideally in conjunction with a workflow study of the Registrar's Office.
4. That the Senate Committee on CL should be disbanded and reconfigured into an Experiential Learning Committee, which would deal with all EXPL requests, domestic and international. The Committee should no longer be chaired by the Provost.
5. That Mount Allison should stop offering courses in Moncton and Miramichi and withdraw from the University Programs on the Miramichi consortium.
6. That some of the TD Innovation Funding should be allocated to CL for the creation of on-line versions of a number of high-demand 1000-level courses, with the goals of reducing the number of "manila envelope" correspondence courses. (Objective: 1-2 annually.)

7. That Mount Allison should enhance and expands its programs to facilitate the successful transition between high school or college and university (as outlined in the PETL PSE Action Plan). For example, should the Tantramar Advantage program be expanded to include high schools in Moncton and Amherst? Remedial writing and mathematics programs, as well as transition programming, should be developed through the Centre for Engaged Learning. Responsibility for these programs should rest with Student Affairs, in consultation with the Registrar's Office (including the Director of CL), the Academic Deans and the Provost.
8. That the Registrar and the Director should consider whether the name of the unit should be changed in order to reflect the change in mandate and orientation.

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