

Examiner Bulletin



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Blended Learning: New Directions?

Faculty-College Steering Committee

As you know by now, the College has established a steering committee to improve the communication around the implementation of blended learning. This committee is the result of discussions the Local had with management during the fall semester, regarding ongoing issues that faculty have had with blended learning since it was rolled out in 2010. The Local indicated in those discussions that we are prepared to work with the College to address these issues.

Some faculty have asked me what the Local's involvement in the committee means in regards to our position on blended learning and academic freedom. While everyone understands that the increased use of technology in education is here to stay, faculty have been clear from day one that we are best-placed to make decisions on what to blend, when to blend and how to blend.

Consequently, Local 240 has always opposed the College's definition of blending that includes a *mandatory, indiscriminate reduction of face-to-face time*. We know from experience that flexibility is the key to the successful integration of technology into our classes. We will continue to stand together with our sister locals across the province in demanding academic freedom that puts students first.

Further, we know the work involved in developing curriculum using a blended format, and we will continue to fight for adequate prep time on your SWFs, so you have the time you need to produce curriculum that will make Mohawk the college of choice for students.

Having said that, let's take a closer look at the committee, its purpose as outlined in the VPA's letter, and how we think it will be most effective in resolving the problems that blended learning has posed for faculty since its rollout.

What led to the establishment of the Committee?

From the beginning, faculty have expressed their concerns to the College about the lack of communication about the objectives, definition, and implementation of blended learning. Faculty have been frustrated by what they see as an autocratic approach to the implementation of the blended initiative. The Local met with Senior Management to see if there was an appetite to adopt a more inclusive communication strategy and decision-making process, and we were pleased to see that the College appeared interested in what we were saying. We want to be part of the solution, so we agree that working together is a positive development for faculty.

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What is the purpose of the committee?

Primarily, our objective is to improve communication between faculty and management on blended learning and ensure that we are all working toward the same goal: student success. The College hopes that the committee will help to make the road to blended learning less rocky than it has been, thus far.

What is the role of the Learning Technologies Change-Management Liaison Officer?

The College sees the liaison officer as having an academic role with reporting responsibility to the Chief Innovation Officer for operational purposes and to Cheryl as the College lead. To be

successful, the Liaison Officer needs to serve as ombudsman, bridging the gap between faculty and administration, so that we can work together effectively on behalf of our students. Sam Maga, former President and current Vice President of Local 240 has taken on the position, and we are confident that Sam will do his utmost to bring faculty issues to the table.

Okay, let's get specific. Below, on the left, are the five responsibilities of the Liaison Officer, as identified by the College. On the right are the Local's recommendations to help the Liaison Officer succeed in meeting those responsibilities.

Responsibilities of Chief Liaison Officer (VPA Cheryl Jensen Letter)	The Local's View
<p>1. Communicate the College's position on blended-learning to the College community. This may include written communication as well as speaking with staff at the program and department level as required.</p>	<p>Communication is a two-way street, so the Chief Liaison Officer should also present faculty's position on blended learning to the College. <i>How much the College is willing to listen to, and act upon the input of faculty will be our measure of the committee's success.</i></p>
<p>2. Provide the Mohawk Executive Group through the VPA with information pertinent to the success of the initiative. Along with the Associate Deans, this person will identify all issues that arise in the course of implementation and provide advice as to how to address any challenges that may arise.</p>	<p>We believe it is important to discuss what information will qualify as 'pertinent'. Faculty must play a central role in providing pertinent information from the frontline.</p>
<p>3. Provide support to full time and non-full time faculty members needing assistance with technical elements of converting curriculum to a blended format. This support will include directing faculty members to other support mechanisms where appropriate.</p>	<p>Given the additional time required to prep an online hour, support from the College must include adequate preparation time on SWFs to do the job. Technical support is crucial, but must be complemented by adequate support for the academic work associated with blended learning.</p>
<p>4. Support the blended learning initiative with other stakeholders such as the Mohawk Student Association, OPSEU Local 240 representing academic staff, staff working in the Center for Teaching and Learning and academic managers.</p>	<p>We would like to discuss with the College what exactly that support looks like. We also assume that Local 241, as the representative of support staff, will be included in the consultation.</p>
<p>5. Chair the Steering Committee that will meet regularly to receive progress reports to the committee as well as provide opportunity to raise any issues impacting success of the initiative.</p>	<p>Because the Local Executive Committee (LEC) plays a critical role in raising issues that impact the success of blended learning, it will become an important source of input for the committee.</p>

Why is this initiative important to you?

While we haven't changed our position on the big issues, we must deal with the day-to-day struggles that individual faculty members face in meeting the increasing demands of their work. If we cannot meet the immediate needs of a faculty who are trying to keep their heads above water every week of every semester, garnering their support for the greater struggle for academic freedom will be that much harder to achieve.

That is why we are prepared to work with the College to do what we can to improve your working conditions, even as we continue to fight, along with College faculty locals across Ontario for the issues that, in the long run, will create a better work environment for faculty and a better learning environment for our students. Obviously, our continued participation in the committee hinges on College's commitment to meeting faculty needs. That is our challenge to Management.

Questions or suggestions?

Please let us know what you need to help you meet the challenges of the 'brave new world' of blended learning. Good luck as you kick off the winter semester.