THE FIRST YEAR
ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

A collaborative project developed through the
Centre for Teaching and Learning at Trent University

CENTRE FOR
TEACHING & LEARNING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The First Year Academic Experience Project

A 2016 Report

The Centre for Teaching and Learning embarked on a collaborative project to begin to develop a deeper understanding of the first year academic experience.

Purpose: Based on recommendations of first year instructors, the purpose of this project was to capture the perspectives of faculty/ instructors, student support staff and students in both first and second years in relation to their academic experiences in the first year of University learning at Trent. The project also led to the generation of a series of tentative recommendations for consideration with the broader goal of supporting student retention as well as quality teaching and learning experiences for both students and instructors.

Method of the Study: This project spanned 18 months and included surveys, a faculty focus group, and an environmental scan of 92 syllabi. Response rates: 122 of 232 faculty/instructors of first year courses (53%) completed the online survey; 16 student support staff completed their respective survey; 166 students in first year and 140 students in second year completed their respective surveys.

Components of the Report: The report includes a series of summaries pertaining to student success and retention, Trent's history and teaching philosophy, registration practices including admissions data, entrance averages, students admitted below entrance averages and programming available - both academic and non-academic. The report also includes a condensed literature review pertaining to student transition theory, student engagement, student motivation to learning, student retention, 21st century students, and the use of foundation courses.

Results Summary

Faculty: Faculty reported benefits of teaching first year courses, including: Enjoying student enthusiasm and eagerness to learn; having the opportunity to encourage students to think about new topics and inspiring ideas; teaching foundations that will prepare students for their academic experience; being a part of, and observing, student growth; recognizing and supporting the diversity of Trent's student population. Challenges were also reported by faculty of first year courses and included: the volume of administrative tasks such as email and learning management system tasks; feeling a sense of duty to prepare students for upper year courses; pedagogical limitations when working with large class sizes; difficulty building forms of engagement with students; challenges keeping the diverse range of students, including advanced students, interested in the subject; limited space, lack of flexibility in classroom resources/furniture, and reliance on over-flow rooms; dwindling student attendance patterns, and the variability of student preparedness. Themes from the focus group were analyzed using NVivo software. From this analysis we have learned that faculty of first year courses valued the opportunity to be the first point of contact with the discipline, and helping students make connections within the Trent community. Challenges identified through the focus group interview included (1) an overload of administrative tasks, expectations and processes, (2) coping with large class sizes and the related

challenges of engaging students in meaningful learning in this setting, and (3) the variability of student preparedness in first year classes.

Student Support Staff: The data gathered from student support staff highlighted the growing complexity and academic challenges for first year students seeking support. The staff reported frequent contact with first year students (50% reported daily contact and 32% reported weekly contact). The staff also reported that the main issues brought forward by first year students were first and foremost academic challenges. First year students were also experiencing life transition difficulties; conduct/ behavioural issues; emotional issues; social problems; mental health issues; a feeling of under-preparedness for university; and, difficulty navigating course requirements. The staff reported that many of the meetings with students involved difficult challenges that required considerable amount of time by the staff to address.

Students: Students in first year study reported a mix of both academic and non-academic highlights and disappointments. 1st year students reported the following academic highlights in rank order: enjoyment of their program of study; connections with highly effective professors, instructors and teaching assistants; identifying a specific academic accomplishment; and, being part of the campus community. Areas of academic disappointment included course disappointments, negative experiences with professors, and general academic difficulties. Student also noted disappointments related to the assessment and evaluation of their work. Results from first and second year students were relatively consistent.

Syllabus review: 92 first year course syllabi were submitted by departments and reviewed to capture basic course design. A total of 84 courses (91%) reported providing 25% of the students' grade by the drop-date, while there were several reports of this not being the case. The major theme focused on assessment practices. The most common form of assessment was overwhelmingly test taking: 96% of the first year courses have a final exam and 86% have a mid-term exam. Further, 37% of syllabi outline the use quizzes, and 14% specifically name online quizzes as an assessment strategy. Weight of final exams averaged at 31.4% within a range of 20-50% of the final weight of the course. When due dates of final assignments and final exam grades were combined, the average weight of work submitted in the final 2 weeks of class averaged at 49% with a range of 28-65% in total from course to course.

Recommendations: A series of recommendations and considerations are presented related to faculty, students, staff and administration. Faculty themes include concerns about levels of instructional support and challenges in the area of assessment. Student themes include access to support services and struggles with student engagement. Staff and administration themes include: the challenges of large class sizes and the need to increase personalized learning through seminars, labs and workshops as well as the availability of academic supports; considering ways to further foster a sense of belonging for students; and, exploring the potential of foundation courses that build student skills and knowledge for later learning.

PREAMBLE

The Centre for Teaching and Learning embarked on this collaborative project to develop a deeper understanding of the first year academic experience with the hope that this might incite further discussion on preserving and fostering quality teaching practices and learning experiences for first year students.

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1. Project Introduction

1.1 Goal of the Study

The First Year Academic Experience project design was developed in consultation with faculty who voluntarily participated in the First Year Caucus meetings (2015-16) and members of the Retention Committee (2015-16). The goal of the project was to conduct a '360 degree' scan of the first year learning experience from three perspectives (instructors, staff supports and students) as well as to conduct a syllabus environmental scan in order to better understand the complexities and varied perspectives of the academic experiences of first year students.

1.2 Project Background

In December 2014, the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) held a 'brown bag lunch and learn' meeting with instructors of first year courses. Fourteen people were in attendance and represented tenured and tenure track faculty, limited term appointment faculty and part-time teaching appointments. During this meeting, many concerns and challenges were raised as well as excitement about the positive rewards of teaching first year courses. The first year instructor group was motivated to continue meeting and named themselves "The First Year Caucus".

At the conclusion of this first meeting, the CTL offered to establish a survey to gather information on the context of teaching first year courses at Trent University. The participants agreed that this would be a good way to move beyond discussions, in order to support a strategic plan to help address some of the needs of first year students and instructors of those courses. The Retention Review Committee was also involved in discussions and supported the project.

1.3 Student Success and Retention

Trent is dedicated to student success. In efforts to better understand recruitment, admissions and retention, the Student Retention and Success Review was completed in July 2016. There were several aims of this report, and one of the dominant themes of the retention report was necessarily related to 'the student learning experience'. President's Groarke's response to the recommendations included the commitment to study the first year experience. This project was specifically aimed at examining the first year *academic* experience which may add insights into the broader discussion.

1.3.1 Retention Rates

The Student Retention and Success Review reported that retention has impacted Trent's enrollment growth goals. McMurray (2016) reported that Trent's "attrition rates over the last ten years are among the highest in the province. First to second year attrition is close to twenty percent…beyond 1st year, student attrition from 2nd to 3rd and 3rd to 4th year is also a major concern" (p. 11). Trent's Institutional Research office reports that tracking retention is a complex and detailed task. However, the office has observed an improvement in retention rates over the last three published years: 2012 (82.8%), 2013 (83%), 2014 (84.5%)*[1].

2. Methods

2.1 Phase 1 – Instructor Perspective

A co-developed 20 item survey (Appendix 1) was distributed to participants of the 'First Year lunch and learn' meeting for feedback. The survey was revised based on feedback provided by faculty, and then vetted through the Provost and Vice-President Academic. Once finalized, the survey was formatted using Qualtrics software (a powerful survey tool available to Trent employees through My Trent). The survey was administered in February 2015.

The survey was distributed to 232 instructors, based on institutional records of assigned first year instructors. It opened with the following statement:

> This survey is aimed at better understanding the challenges and benefits of teaching first year courses. The survey stems from a First Year Instructor meeting where the gathering of this data was seen as an important step to better understanding what the first year student experience is like. The Centre for Teaching and Learning gathered these questions from face-to-face meetings and from a document feedback process. This survey is specifically designed to gather data on first year courses and instruction. Thank you very much for taking the time to respond. We recognize that this takes time and we appreciate your participation.

Questions were organized into several formats:

- A selection from a list where the respondent could only select one answer
- A selection from a sliding scale where the respondent could only select one answer
- A selection from a list where the respondent could select all that applied
- Open response items

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[1] The data are based on the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) methodology and is defined as First-time, Full-time, Baccalaureate Degree-seeking freshman continuing to year 2. The data was provided by Trent's Institutional Research Unit.

The survey was completed by 122 instructors, all of whom had experience teaching first year courses (level 1000), resulting in a strong response rate of 53%. Once the survey was completed, the data were automatically collated in Qualtrics. The raw collated data were distributed at an open meeting of first year instructors and some related support staff.

Based on feedback, the survey data were further collated by the team at the CTL and the results were presented, again, to the First Year Caucus[2]. At this meeting the decision was made that a larger, multi-perspective project would help to capture the breadth of the first year academic experience from not only the faculty perspective but also from the perspectives of students and support staff. It was also suggested by the First Year Caucus, that a faculty focus group should be conducted to further explore themes and trends from the data. These suggestions were implemented. The focus group was hosted in June 2015 with 6 voluntary faculty members who each had extensive experience and knowledge of 1st year teaching at Trent. The focus group discussion centred on 3 questions (Appendix C):

1. What are the positives of teaching 1st year courses?
2. What are the challenges of teaching 1st year courses?
3. What is one wish you have for 1st year teaching?

2.2 Phase 2 – Student Support Staff Perspective

In July 2015, the second phase of the First Year Academic Experience project commenced. A survey was disseminated to members of the Trent community who provide student academic supports including: academic skills; academic advisors; spiritual affairs; First People's House of Learning; Wellness Centre, colleges; and, Academic Advising.

The survey was distributed to 34 academic student support staff, based on discussion with the AVP of Student Affairs. Sixteen of the academic student support staff responded. The student support staff survey opened with the following statement:

Welcome to the 1st year Experience Survey for Student Service Providers. The Centre for Teaching and Learning is working on a multi-phased report that captures the 1st year experience of our Trent students. Our objective is to access 1st year experience information from multiple perspectives to better understand and make recommendations for future directions and initiatives that impact 1st year students, staff and instructors. Phase 1 presents the perspective of Instructors and those who work with 1st year courses. Phase 2 (current phase) is focusing on persons who provide support to our 1st year students. Phase 3 will invite the student perspective.

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[2] Open invitation group of faculty and staff self-appointed to a working group interested in issues of first year coursework (see 1.1)

This survey consisted of 19 questions (Appendix C). Similar to the instructor survey, the survey was distributed through Qualtrics.

2.3 Phase 3 – Student Perspectives

The third phase of the report began in January 2016. Two surveys were created to capture student voice. The CTL was interested in gathering student insights from two vantage points; one - students who were currently enrolled in their first year at Trent, and two - students who completed first year at Trent and were now enrolled in 2nd year studies.

The students were given a survey with 4 questions specific to their academic experience.

Q. 1. Describe two ACADEMIC highlights of your first year experience at Trent. (courses, professors, programs, assignments, field trips, labs etc.)
Q.2. Describe ONE disappointment about your first year experience at Trent
Q.3, If you could change one thing about your first year experience at Trent, what would it be?
Q.4. And lastly, a question on a 5 point scale: Overall, my first year experience at Trent has been…
        Engaging (strongly disagree to strongly agree)
        Challenging (strongly disagree to strongly agree)
        Terrific (strongly disagree to strongly agree)

The survey was distributed through the Office of Student Affairs to all enrolled 1st and 2nd year students. 166 students from the first year cohort responded. 140 students from the second year cohort responded. The 2nd year student survey asked the same questions as the 1st year student survey however they were presented in the form of reflection. "Reflecting on your first year at Trent, please complete the following questions…"

2.4 Phase 4 – Syllabi Scan

The results from the three phases raised additional research questions. What do the first year course syllabi look like? What teaching formats are used? What types of assessments are used? With this in mind, an additional phase to the project was added in January 2016. From the 2015-2016 academic term (September 2015– April 2016), a total of 92 first year course syllabi were shared from 21 departments for further analysis.

2.5 Self-reporting and Surveys

The first three phases of the project relied on data collected through self-report. Podsakoff and Organ (1986) reported that although self-reporting is prone to biases, it is an effective method of data collection for capturing participants' perspective of how organizations function. Data was also collected via retrospective self-reporting for the second year students. According to Lam and Bengo (2003), retrospective self-report is an effective measure of a participant's

perspective and personal accounts of an experience if the questions require minimal effort in responding. The questions were therefore designed to be general open ended questions that the respondents could answer with minimal recall demands. Woo, Kim, and Couper (2015) reported that using web-based surveys are ideal for students in tertiary education since internet access is near universal for this population and response rate are relatively high. For more on the rapid growth of electronic survey use with university students, see Couper and Miller (2008).

2.6 Scope of the literature review

The literature review component of this project was purposely short and succinct. It is not considered to be a sophisticated and exhaustive review of the current literature on first year learning experiences. Boote and Beile's (2005) work contributed to the decision to use a brief-literature review format. Rationale for selection of articles was developed as follows: The articles reviewed were selected based on their contributions to the field of study and how generalizable they were to this project. Specifically, both published and grey sources retrieved methodologically through psycINFO, psycARTICLES, and Scholar's Portal. Grey sources within this document refer to open source information with no associated ISBN or ISSN. The published literature included was retrieved from the library catalogue system at Trent University. Although no date limit was used for the search, only articles published within the last 16 years were included. The rationale for this was the focus on the "21st century student" in a modern context within the academy. Navigation through the databases was done using a series of keywords associated with the six common frames focused throughout this review. Examples of keywords include: university transition, first year student, modern student, retention, motivation, and engagement. The synthesis in this report provides context for the project.

2.7 Project Research questions

The following research questions were used to guide the project and to frame the summary of findings.

Phase 1: Instructor Perspective

1. What are the benefits of teaching first year courses?
2. What are the challenges?
3. What might help to further improve the first year learning (or is this teaching) experience?

Phase 2: Student Academic Support Staff Perspective

1. Have the needs of 1st year students changed significantly?
2. What are the main challenges 1st year students present?
3. What might help to further improve the first year learning experience?

Phase 3: Student Perspective (Present & Past)

1. What do student report as academic highlights of 1st year?
2. What do student report as academic lowlights of 1st year?
3. What might help to further improve the first year learning experience?

Phase 4: Syllabi Scan

1. What do the first year course syllabi look like?
2. To what extent do the course syllabi influence 1st year learning experiences?
3. What are some course design considerations for 1st year courses?

3. University context and supports

3.1 Landscape of Trent University and teaching philosophy

Since its founding in 1964, Trent has held a reputation for personalized learning, teaching excellence and community engagement. This character is still present, however the university has grown in size over 50 years with approximately 8000 students attending Trent in Peterborough and at the newer Durham GTA region campus in 2015-16. Faculty continue to be invested in the student experience and make meaningful connections to their students. Discussions with faculty of the First Year Caucus suggest that – due to an increase in class sizes and the decline of scheduled labs, seminars and workshops based on reductions in staffing, combined with an increasing complexity of the needs of students enrolled at Trent[2], it is becoming more and more difficult to achieve the outcomes of first year courses. This was a key impetus for engaging in the First Year Academic Experience Project.

3.2 Trent University 1st year students

Based on reports from Trent's Institutional Research Office, in the 2015-2016 academic term (fall & winter) Trent had 2,314 first year students (67.4% female, 32.6% male). Of the 2,314 first year students, 87.9% were non-first generation Canadian and 12.1% were first generation Canadian. Reportedly 94.8% were Canadian/ permanent residences, and 5.2% international students. Of the 2,314 first year students, 1.525 (65.9%) were enrolled in full time equivalent (FTE) and 789 (34.1%) were less than FTE.

3.3 Admissions

Trent application, applicant, offers and accept data were also gathered for the 2015-2016 academic year as a pulse of data, and sorted into three streams; 101 students (direct from high school) and 105 (not direct from high school). For the 2015-2016 academic year, Trent received 7,630 applications from 6,044 applicants in the 101 stream. Trent received 4,522 applications from 3,506 applications from the 105 stream. Trent received 380 applications from 273 applicants from the 'other' group. The following offers were reported; 6,911 offers to 101 students, 3,325 offers to 105 students, and 186 offers to 'other' students. The following were the acceptance per stream reported; 1,399 accepts from 101 students, 1,107 accepts from 105 students, and 146 accepts from the 'other' students. Overall, the number of first year students at Trent for the 2015-2016 academic year was 2,314.

3.4 Entrance averages

Data was collected for the 101 stream students only, from Trent's Institutional Research Office. Of the 1,399 direct from high school students, the following entrance average data (GPA) was reported:

Table 1
Entrance averages for 101 students reported for the 2015-2016 academic term. [3]

GPA	Count	%
<50	0	0.0%
50-60	4	0.3%
60-70	95	6.8%
70-80	558	39.9%
80-90	552	39.5%
90+	167	11.9%
unknown	23	1.6%
Total	**1,399**	**100.0%**

3.5 Below minimum admissions

Universities admit students below minimum admission requirements on a regular basis. Reasons for doing so include recognizing extenuating circumstances that may have impacted student grades, taking life experiences and extra-curricular activities into consideration, or meeting program and overall enrolment targets. The academic outcomes of these students vary; some become suspended from the university, and others go on to successfully complete their program and graduate with a degree. High school academic averages are generally a significant predictor of academic success in university (Astin, 1997; Hall & Wiley Gahn, 1994; Hoffman & Lowitzki, 2005; Mattson, 2007; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001), though it is worth looking at other factors when considering students below minimum average requirements for admission (Abrams & Podojil Jernigan, 1984; McGrath & Braunstein, 1997). First semester and first year university grades are significantly linked with retention rates (Gifford, Briceno-Perriott & Mianzo, 2006; Mattson, 2007). Research from the 90's reported that 75% of students who dropped-out of post-secondary studies did so within the first two years of their studies. Tinto (1993, 2016) has been studying retention for decades and noted that there are three factors that need to be fostered to keep students enrolled: 1. Self-efficacy (belief that they can be successful), 2. Sense of belonging, 3. Perceived value of the curriculum (Tinto, 2016).

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[3] Students with an entrance average below 70%, were offered admission based on mid-semester averages, and prior to final average submissions. The 2015 year was somewhat atypical as a result of several GTA high schools being on strike for extended periods hence the unknown variable.

3.6 Trent's Launch Program hosted by Student Affairs

Launch is a one-day program that runs prior to Orientation Week to help prepare and support students beginning their first year of university who were admitted to Trent below the minimum admissions average. The program is academically focused, with sessions to familiarize students with what they can expect in a university course, including a mock lecture. Students also meet with an upper-year student who can answer any questions students may have about their transition to university or what they can expect in their first year. Student continue to meet with their upper-year student throughout your first year for additional support and guidance.

In the 2015-2016 academic term, 30 students were invited to participate in the pilot Launch program. Although 117 students in total were admitted with an average below 70%, 30 students were extended invitations based on capacity of staff for such programming in a pilot year. Participation in the program was recommended, but it was not required to keep their admissions offers to Trent. Of the 30 people invited into the Launch program, 9 accepted. The 9 students successfully completed first year at Trent and are reportedly registered to continue into second year. The Launch program staff recognized that a limitation to the program was that there were no requirements to attend the program. If Trent determines that it will continue to admit a small cohort of students below the minimum GPA, the Launch program may become compulsory for candidates to keep their offer to come to Trent.

3.7 Non-Academic Supports for 1st year students (Peterborough & Durham)

Trent University offers a number of programs and services to support new students as they transition to the post-secondary environment. Although the focus of this project is the academic experience of first year, it is important to acknowledge and recognize the vast suite of services, supports and people who are here to provide necessary resources outside of the classrooms. Several of these service are provided at both the Peterborough and Durham campuses. Student Affairs prepared the summaries below.

3.7.1 Student Affairs Durham Campus

Durham campus Student Affairs, in partnership with the Trent Durham Student Association (TDSA), is responsible for coordinating all transitional programming for new students to the Durham campus. Three main transitional programs are interwoven prior to and through the start of new students' first-year, summer orientation, September orientation, and the First-Year Experience Certificate.

In the summer prior to their first year at Trent, students and their supporters are invited to attend a one-day summer orientation program geared to assist new students with course registration and to familiarize them with the campus and student services.

September orientation is a two-day event delivered in the first week of classes. Students build a sense of community and belonging, connect with academic and other services and supports, find opportunities to get involved, and get excited about university life.

The September orientation leads into the First Year Experience Certificate. This certificate program provides new students the opportunity to engage in additional learning through small-group interactions designed to provide them with information based on their first six weeks of their university career. Workshops are based around the themes of social engagement, academic strategies, financial responsibility, and stress relieving techniques.

Each of the three transitional events are supplemented through online community building using social media and a dedicated e-newsletter geared to new students. Students are also then given information about transitioning into other involvement experiences as they continue to engage in the campus community during their academic careers through initiatives such as the Leadership Program, student-based clubs, and volunteer opportunities.

3.7.2 Student Transitions and Careers

The Office of Student Transitions and Careers is responsible for coordinating orientation programming for new students on the Peterborough campus. (As previously note, Durham has separate events). In the summer prior to their first year at Trent, students and their supporters are invited to attend a one-day Summer Orientation program geared to assist new students with course registration and to familiarize them with the campus and student services. Students also have the opportunity to attend a weekend program near the end of summer which is intended as an opportunity for students to make connections with other incoming students as well as student leaders and staff, while also increasing their academic preparedness. Finally, Orientation Week is a full week of orientation programming delivered in the first week of classes. Through the dozens of events delivered during this week, students build a sense of community and belonging, connect with academic and other services and supports, find opportunities to get involved, and get excited about university life. The Office of Student Affairs completed a student survey in 2015 and reported that an estimated 73% of student who responded, participated in one or more of the following activities: Summer Orientation, 'Bring It On', Orientation Week and/or Summer Campus Tour & Mini-Orientation. Two programs require formal sign-up processes; Take the University Challenge (hosted by Academic Skills Advisors) had 790 students participate, and Draw the Line – Sexual Assault Prevention (Student

Affairs Staff) had 1500 students participate. Trent's Orientation Week on the Peterborough campus runs from Labour Day Monday to Wednesday of said week. Classes begin on the Thursday. Optional events continue throughout the week.

In addition to orientation programming for new students, Student Transitions and Careers offers retention programming for students who are at risk. Under the Rebound Program, students in first and second year who are struggling academically or with other aspects of their university experience are connected to highly-trained upper year Guides who support them with goal-setting and help to connect them with campus resources. In the 2015/16 academic year, 100% of participants in the Rebound Program said they would recommend Rebound to another first year student. The Rebound Guides also played a critical role in the success of the Launch pilot program in 2015, which required conditionally accepted students to meet with their Guide at least 4 times over the course of the fall semester.

Career services are also offered through the Office of Student Transitions and Careers. While career development is often not a priority for students in their first year of study, meeting with a career counsellor can be very helpful to students who question their fit in their academic program or struggle to see how their studies connect to the "real world". With only one career counsellor on staff at Trent, only a small fraction of students (primarily those in fourth year) receive this support, but a goal of this department is to increase the career development content of all programming offered by Student Transitions and Careers.

3.7.3 Colleges

The Colleges at Trent aim to build a community that promotes learning, embraces diversity, and leads to friendships that last a lifetime. It is a place for informal connections between students, faculty and staff. Members of the community are brought together through a unique blend of traditions, events, workshops, places to hang-out, and support services - all designed to create a sense of belonging and success for students right from the beginning of a student's first year.

Helping students develop a strong sense of belonging is a key factor in transition and retention initiatives. The colleges support this through community building, fostering meaningful personal connections with caring peers and university personnel, and targeted programming. The colleges promote academic success by facilitating the navigation of degree requirements, uptake of academic skills development, creating a culture of engagement, and offering public recognition of students' successes.

One-to-one support offered by the colleges provides an opportunity for early identification of students in distress. Similarly, a strong sense of community increases the likelihood that

someone will notice when a student is experiencing difficulties and lend support before problems escalate.

The Colleges team includes the College Head, Academic Advisor, and Academic Skills Instructor who are there to help create pathways of success for students. They work collaboratively with a team of students who help answer questions, provide guidance and assist with running events.

College Heads provide leadership, student support, create programming and activities to support the colleges and their students with a community that students can call home from their first day on campus. Programming includes student skills development, and prevention/early intervention programming to identify students at risk and to equip students with the tools and knowledge to help themselves and their peers to succeed.

Academic Advisors: Academic advising at Trent is an on-going educational partnership between advisor and advisee that is dedicated to student learning, development, and success. Academic advising facilitates students' understanding of the meaning and purpose of higher education and fosters their intellectual and personal development toward achieving academic success and lifelong learning (NACADA, 2004). Academic advisors connect with students in person, online, through email or over the phone navigating students' academic concerns from degree requirements to understanding the academic calendar.

Academic Skills Instructors provide in person and online instruction in writing and study skills to support students with their academic success. From learning strategies for writing, studying, and to time management, academic skills instructors have workshops and resources to address a wide variety of needs in order to support students in their academic pursuits.

3.7.4 Housing Services

Housing Services at Trent University is responsible for the residence life and education functions of the student experience at the University, the residence assignments and admissions, housing facilities, and student behavioural concerns at the institution.

Through the development of learning experiences in all facets of the work within Housing Services, 93% of students surveyed in the first six weeks of the academic year report feeling satisfied with their residence experience. In addition to student satisfaction, retention is a priority for Housing Services with students residing on campus more likely to be retained to the institution than their counterparts off campus. Housing Services staff work with a variety of campus partners to ensure students are connected to the institution and resources to achieve student success.

Within the Housing portfolio, nine living-learning communities have been developed to provide groups of self-identified students with more intentional learning within their residence environment, related to their academic major or a specific area of interest. Assessment on the current communities describes a positive experience for students and interest in continuing to connect with faculty outside of the classroom environment. Currently 100% of respondents recommend living within a living-learning community while in residence.

The College Residence Councils provide an opportunity for residence students to engage in a government representing their peers, influencing decisions on housing facilities, budgets, programming, and policies. Further, these student are provided learning opportunities and training to utilize the skills gained experientially in other facets of their student and professional lives.

Student concerns are addressed in collaboration with the student. Using a proactive harm-reduction approach professional and student residence life and education staff at Trent University engage students through learning experiences, personal one on one conversations, and processes to ensure that students feel safe and supported within their community. Behavioural concerns are addressed using a restorative approach to ensure students feel a part of the community and understand the impact of behaviours on those around them. Housing staff respond to student concerns and work with students to create plans to address issues, and make referrals to partners to ensure students are supported in a way that meets the needs of the student and community.

3.7.5 Student Wellness Centre

The mission of the Student Wellness Centre is to provide holistic and integrated support in meeting the bio-psycho-social needs of students studying at Trent University. The Student Wellness Centre consists of Health, Counselling, and Accessibility Services. The shared mandate of our interdisciplinary team supports student success and personal well-being through the provision of timely and effective clinical interventions and accommodations.

3.7.6 Counselling Services

Respecting the dignity and value of all people inclusive of age, gender, ethnicity, physical qualities, sexual identity, and ability, confidential personal counselling is available to all students free of charge. Many students seek support for specific concerns related to anxiety, depression, grief, identity, and relationship challenges. Other students come to the Centre with difficulties such as low motivation, poor self-image/esteem, stress, loneliness, and adjustment issues, all of which can interfere with academic performance and emotional well-being in a serious way. Through discussions and goal-setting, counsellors can help students to understand

themselves and their concerns more fully and to learn effective coping strategies. Group therapy and workshops on selected topics are offered throughout the year. Limited psychiatric services are also provided to Peterborough students.

3.7.7 Student Health Services

Student Health Services is available to provide primary health care to all current students. A full range of confidential medical services is available, including services related to the following: immunizations, allergy injections, wound care, physical exams, STI information/testing and counselling, PAP testing, birth control, pregnancy tests, emergency contraception, health/wellness counselling (nutrition, healthy weight, smoking cessation), acute and chronic illness, mental health assessments, medical referrals, and first aid. Dietician and Naturopathic Doctor services are also available to students but are fee for service.

3.7.8 Student Accessibility Services

Within its resources, Trent University endeavours to ensure the accessibility of its Peterborough and Durham campuses and programs to all students, including those with disabilities. The University has Student Accessibility Services (SAS) Offices and an accessibility services team providing support and advocacy on behalf of students with physical, sensory, or learning disabilities for both Peterborough and Durham students. Some of the services provided by this office include transcription services for those who are visually impaired or print-disabled, assistance with obtaining note-takers for hearing-impaired students, coordination of alternative exams for students with learning disabilities, and liaison with faculty members and support agencies in the community. In the 2015-16 academic year, 1058 students were registered with SAS. In total the SAS facilitated 3250 appointments, and accommodated 4558 exams through the Centre for Academic Testing.

4. Literature Summary: Factors to Consider for 1st Year Student Learning

4.1 Introduction

The first year learning experience is currently and predominantly studied within six common frames: student transitions into university; student engagement; student motivation; student retention rates; first year foundation courses; and, the 21st century learner. For the purpose of this succinct literature review, a summary of research within each of these frames will be presented. This literature review is not an exhaustive representation of the research in the field, rather it is a selective review that highlights key themes and findings. The articles reviewed here were selected based on their contributions to the field of study and how generalizable they might be to the content of Trent University.

Ontario universities are currently experiencing changes in the academic territory in which they operate; while facing pressure to become more accessible to a broader range of members of society. More and more, universities are being expected to effectively allocate necessary resources to ensure that the needs of a diverse group of learners are being met (Clark, Moran, Skolnik, & Trick, 2009). Many argue that when a university admits a student, it has an obligation to appropriately support the student throughout their university experience (Darlaston-Jones et al., 2001; Nelson & Kift, 2005). The meaning of "appropriate level of support" is debatable, but since accessibility is increasingly becoming a priority within the province of Ontario (Clark et al., 2009), universities are faced with growing challenges for first year teaching. Clark et al. reported that there is a need for designing transition and support programs that give a broader range of learners, with diverse backgrounds, the opportunity to succeed in their first year of study.

A student's transition into university studies is often challenging as they are required to adjust to an environment of increased academic demands. Kantanis (2000) explains that first year students will certainly experience dilemmas, and possibly confusion, in regards to their new roles and responsibilities in university. Research by Parkin and Baldwin (2009) reported that the first year learning experience and challenges within this first year learning experience often impact a student's decision to leave school and that approximately 50% of the students who leave early (withdraw) from school, do so during or at the end of their first year of university (Parkin & Baldwin, 2009; ACT, 2011). Previous research suggested low retention rates were solely the result of students simply not meeting the standards of a university education, however, more recent studies suggest this perception may be inaccurate, particularly within the context of the 21st century classroom (Barefoot, 2000).

Interestingly, Parkin and Baldwin (2009) reported that as much as dropping out may reflect the student failing in the education system, it too may reflect the education system failing the student by not attending explicitly to their learning needs. Research on this issue suggests that student transitions, student engagement, student motivation, student retention, and the specific considerations of the nature of current student populations are all important factors to consider (Fisher & Engemann, 2009; Parkin & Baldwin, 2009; Padgett, Keup, & Pascarella, 2013).

4.2 Student Transitions Theory

One theory related to first year student experiences is focused on the phenomenon of transitions. In its simplest form, a 'transition' is a movement or a change from one position to another. It is experienced by individuals as both short and long-term processes of adjustment, development and change (Latham & Green, 1997; Kantanis, 2003). This is due to the challenges (e.g., rearranging their emotions, roles and relationships) met by individuals during these transitory periods (Schlossberg, 1981). As such, individuals experience transitions differently. Generally, one's experience depends on the type of transition, the context in which the transition occurs, and the personal characteristics of the person experiencing the transition.

Transition types can generally be categorized into one of three groups: anticipated, unanticipated, or a non-events (Schlossberg, 1981). An anticipated event is an occurrence that is expected by the person experiencing it, while an unanticipated event is the opposite. A non-event is an expected event that does not come to fruition; a university applicant who is anticipating an offer to university, who ends up being rejected by all institutions that they applied to, faces a non-event. A non-event can still cause individuals to experience a transition and therefore cause changes in roles, routines and relationships. The degree of change to an individual's typical routine will determine the impact on the individual. There are various ways in which a person's ability to transition successfully can be impacted. Schlossberg refers to these factors as: situation, self, support, and strategies (Schlossberg, 2016). 'Situation' includes the timing and length of the transition, as well as the individual's capacity to control the event. 'Self' refers to personal traits of the individual, including age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Social 'supports' that help an individual to cope with transition include networks of family and friends, as well as institutional support. The student's response to the event, whether to change or control the event, stems from their 'strategies'. Schlossberg breaks these strategies down into three subcomponents where the strategy works to: modify the situation, control the meaning of the problem and to aid in stress management afterwards. Each person experiences transition differently, and has various capacities to deal with the challenges of transition (Huon & Sankey, 2002).

The transition process into university can often be stressful for students and even cause some to withdraw (as cited in Darlaston-Jones et al., 2001). Research indicates that the first two years of university are the most vulnerable for students; 75% of students who drop-out of post-secondary studies do so during this time (as cited in Darlaston-Jones et al.). In Huon and

Sankey's (2002) study of first-year university students, over 40% expressed that they had contemplated withdrawing from their studies. Both internal and external forces determine whether a student will remain in their studies until completion (Darlaston-Jones et al.). Though some of these factors are out of the control of the institution, there are areas where institutions are able to help in retaining students, the main being the social and academic experiences that these students live through (Darlaston-Jones et al.). Involving students both academically and socially can support the transition process.

4.3 The Construct of Student Engagement

Engagement is an important aspect of the schooling experience, both academically and socially. In a broad sense, student engagement can be described as a student's attitude toward schooling and their participation in school activities, including coursework in order to achieve learning outcomes (Krause, 2005; Willms, 2003). Though there is conflicting research on whether engagement is directly connected to academic grades (Carini, Kuh & Klein, 2006; Willms, 2003), research suggests that school engagement does contribute to student satisfaction, persistence (Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2011), and a student's life after school, including economic success, health, and general well-being (Willms, 2003). Some research shows that engagement has a positive relationship with academic achievement (Carini et al., 2006; Gunuc & Kuzu, 2014).

Engagement is typically framed as having two dimensions, the psychological dimension being the extent to which students identify with the values of school and feel that they belong and are accepted in school, and the behavioral dimension being student participation in both academic and non-academic school activities (Kahu, 2013; Willms, 2003). The behavioural aspect includes attendance and preparation for class, as well as participation in extra-curricular activities, including interactions with peers and teachers (Willms, 2003). Students who do not engage become categorized as being disaffected and isolated (Willms, 2003). Research suggests that students who are high-risk academically benefit even more from engagement (Carini et al., 2006; cited in Asmar et al., 2011). Though the psychological and behavioural facets of engagement are the most frequently researched, Krause and Coates (2008) emphasize the importance of looking at engagement with a broad lens which recognizes engagement as a process that includes a variety of dimensions that change throughout the students' first-year experiences. The process of engagement not only varies at different times of the school year, but also looks different for students of various demographic groups (Krause & Coates, 2008).

The results of the 2014 National Survey on Student Engagement indicate that commitment to a university culture in which students, staff, and faculty share the responsibility for student success can assist in the student engagement process (NSSE, 2014). The interpretation of the survey results also point to the importance of academic advising. Academic advisors act as an important link between students and their academic experience in university and can promote student engagement (NSSE, 2014). Krause and Coates (2008) recommend that first-year university students meet with an academic advisor or academic department member within

their first two months of university. As the first-year of university unfolds very quickly, the earlier that engagement is fostered, the more students and the institution stand to benefit. First-year student engagement is often triggered and impacted by orientation events, as these events mark the entrance of the student to the university environment. Important components of a successful orientation program include: opportunities to connect with peers and faculty, the understanding of student supports available across campus, and preparedness for both academic and social undertakings (Larmar & Ingamells, 2010).

Student engagement is often referred to as the student's attentive interest and motivational capacity in regards to the materials they are learning or being taught, allowing them to learn and progress to higher levels of their education (Hu & Kuh, 2002). Research suggests that moderate, or ideally high, student engagement is critical for students to have successful learning experiences in university level courses (Barnes, Macalpine, & Munro, 2015; Fisher & Engemann, 2009). There are unique challenges to engaging students in first year courses as a result of class sizes typically being larger than students' previous experiences in secondary school, and the pedagogy is usually new to students, such as large lectures with limited direct interaction with the instructor (Cuseo, 2007). As such, some researchers believe it is important for researchers and educators to actively explore engagement practices within the first year courses (Krause & Coates, 2008). A study of the transitional experience by Yam (2010) at an Australian University, explored tutoring strategies to improve student engagement with a sample of 38 first year students. Using survey data, the researchers reported that students identified several influential characteristics of instructor interaction that increased their engagement: when instructors provided constructive feedback, were approachable, helpful, and motivating. The researchers note that these characteristics reflect a student-centered approach to teaching which not only led to engagement, but also to success in transitioning to university (Yam, 2010). Similarly, Bovill, Bulley, and Morss (2011) found that active learning and timely feedback were two key characteristics of engaging first year students. Other key factors identified by these same researchers included high relevance of the material and an appropriate level of challenge. Research by Steen (2015) explored discussion board use as a means of increasing student engagement in a sample of 109 students at the University of South Australia, where the course designers indicated that they would use the discussion board as a learning tool with these students. The study suggested that some students may be discouraged from actively participating in discussion boards even though they are meant to promote engagement of students. On this topic, Stein suggested that faculty need to provide timely feedback and manage the workload if discussion boards are to be effective (Steen, 2015).

Research suggests that successful transitioning into university requires institution-wide efforts aimed at promoting first year engagement (Barnes, Macalpine, & Munro, 2015; Kift, 2008; Nelson, Duncan, & Clarke, 2009). Specifically, Nelson, Duncan, and Clarke (2009) suggest that a "sense of belonging, engagement, and connectedness with their university experience" (p. 11) is necessary for a successful transition. However, more recent research suggests an alternative three stage approach, focussed on student-community engagement, to transitioning students into the realm of higher education (Penn-Edwards & Donnison, 2014).

The first stage (pre-enrollment) keeps students in a mixed community-school environment. The second stage has the student enrolled into a full-time academic institution. The final stage sees the student as a graduate and helps situate them into employment (Penn-Edwards & Donnison, 2014). This model is based on the notion that deep community-academic partnerships will promote student engagement and help ease the transition into first year and beyond (Penn-Edwards & Donnison, 2014). This is an interesting contrast to approaches proposed by Kift (2008) and Nelson, Duncan, and Clarke (2009) who support coordinated efforts within the institution that work to identify disengaged at risk students. Nelson et al. (2009) explored engagement behaviours of a sample of 1524 students, identifying those at risk (39.9%; based on a criterion of failing their first assignment). They contacted roughly half of these students and provided supports to help keep the students engaged (i.e., feedback / advice and referrals to both learning and personal support services). The at risk students who were contacted achieved significantly higher grades than those who remained disengaged, suggesting that support and engagement are related to academic success (Nelson, Duncan, & Clarke, 2009).

When exploring different strategies for engaging students, Schaufeli and colleagues (2002) propose that researchers need to aware of first year student burnout. Their analyses revealed a negative correlation between student burnout and engagement scales. Research has found subjective (perceived) workloads and negative temperaments were able to predict high levels of burnout in a sample of 149 college students (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003). Interestingly, the presence of social support, positive temperaments, and extracurricular involvement were able to predict low levels of burnout in the students (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003). This suggests that these factors might be useful targets for interventions.

4.4 Student Motivation to learn

Student motivation refers to the desire of the student to actively engage in the process of learning. Ames (1990) characterizes a student's motivation to learn as the quality involvement in learning and long-term commitment to the process of learning. The importance of student motivation is demonstrated by students' willingness to work towards positive educational outcomes (e.g., passing a course or receiving a scholarship). Therefore, although motivation to learn often refers to the action itself, in reality it is predicated on the the particular goals that help students work towards their desired outcomes. It is of no surprise that not all students want the same outcome from their education. Some see education as a required step towards a particular job (external goal), while others may want to learn simply for the pursuit of knowledge (intrinsic goals). Regardless of one's reasons for pursuing post-secondary education, high student motivation has been linked to a positive university learning experience.

Astin (1984) developed a theory which proposed that the amount of energy invested into an institution by a student, has a positive relationship with the likelihood that they will not leave that institution. This energy is more commonly known as motivation. The motivations of students often work to develop expectations regarding their interest and success with their

education. When these expectations fail to align with reality, students begin to lose motivation and issues such as low retention rates start to manifest (Crisp et al., 2009). Boekaerts (2003) identifies that students might develop culture specific motivations towards academic achievement as well. As such, it is important for educators to be aware of what motivated students to enroll in their courses and programs and to use this awareness to develop proper student support programs and learning materials.

The sense of community or connectedness that students feel towards their university is an important factor to consider in regards to student motivation. Previous research suggests that this sense of belonging felt by students is related to a wide-range of factors affecting students' first year experiences. Pittman and Richmond (2008) found that positive developments of first year students' sense of belonging was also linked to positive changes in perceived scholastic competence and self-worth. Similarly, research has found that a student's understanding of their learning experiences and motivations can help to improve their academic achievement (Watson, McSorley, Foxcroft, & Watson, 2004). Freeman, Anderman, and Jensen (2007) found significant relationships between first year students' sense of university belonging and their sense of social acceptance. This research has also found significant relationships between class belonging and their perceived academic self-efficacy, encouragement of student participation, intrinsic motivation, and organization (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007). When students' motivational attitudes were included in their predictive model, Morrow and Ackermann (2012) found no significant relationship between sense of belonging and second-year retention nor was there a relationship between belonging and intent to persist at their institution. However, all motivational attitude variables remained significant. Positive motivational (instrumental value) attitudes (e.g., motivated to get a good job) were linked to students being more likely to persist. In contrast, those students without distinct motivational goals were less likely to persist. Unsurprisingly, a greater likelihood of returning to second year was observed for students who held positive beliefs (attitudes) towards personal development (i.e., increasing their creative thinking ability) (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012).

4.5 Student Retention

Student retention is complex. Pitkethly and Prosser (2001) argue that institutions may want to consider first exploring why retention may be an issue before establishing student success strategies. Specifically, they argue that it is necessary for post-secondary institutions to recognize and appreciate the unique experiences of post-secondary students in order to addressing issues of student retention. Retention is often referred to as the success of the student throughout their program (Wild & Ebbers, 2002). However, this fails to consider the possibility for failure (sometimes referred to as withdrawal or attrition). In reality these are two aspects that must be considered as a continuous development rather than dichotomous state of success or failure. As such, retention is an ongoing concern for tertiary institutions since, retention is important for the continuation of academic programs, the financial stability of the

institution, and important for the institution to be considered an effective learning environment (Fike & Fike, 2008).

Parkin and Baldwin's research in Canada shows that approximately one out of every six students will not complete their studies and 14% of students will not complete their first year (Parkin & Baldwin, 2009). Work load, lack of motivation, and not feeling a part of the community (sense of belonging) are all common reasons for why students may have decided to withdraw. The researchers argued that the majority of students who do make the decision to withdraw do so early on in their academic career and rarely return. More on Parkin and Baldwin's research can be found in *Research Note #8 By: Parkin and Baldwin (www.millenniumscholarships.ca) Persistence in Post-Secondary Education in Canada: The Latest Research.*

Successful transition of first year students to upper year studies is a primary concern for most universities (Nelson, Duncan, & Clarke, 2009; Barnes, Macalpine, & Munro, 2015). Research by Nelson, Duncan, and Clarke (2009) sought to identify at-risk students in a sample of 1524 first year students and examined the influence that support services had on their academic success. Students identified as being 'at risk' were given advice or provided support if they could be contacted by the researches, otherwise they were not. Comparisons between the at risk groups found greater persistence rates (course completion) with students who received support, than students who did not (Nelson, Duncan, & Clarke, 2009). The authors note that although they addressed retention rates by focusing on student support, the retention rate was not attributed to any single factor. Nonetheless, the commitment of the institution to the student was identified as a central factor influencing the retention of students (Nelson, Duncan, & Clarke, 2009). Furthermore, as previous research has shown that attrition is quite high for first year cohorts at universities, this is a critical period for the institution to initiate support and consideration (Nelson, Kift, & Clarke, 2008).

Research by Crisp and colleagues (2009) explores student expectation going into higher education in a sample of 33 first year students. The researchers argue that by helping students develop realistic expectations of the university experience, they will increase student satisfaction and increase student retention. Students were found to hold unrealistic expectations (e.g., expected workload), which offers support for this claim. Other research has been found to provide additional support (Larkin, Rowan, Garrick, & Beavis, 2016). This research highlights a gap between what students expect from their institutions and what they actually experience. However, other research argues that the emphasis on expectation might be misplaced. For instance, research by Van der Meer, Jansen, and Torenbeek (2010) identified that students' time management skills, rather than unrealistic expectations, may develop into issues regarding student retention. Many students reported difficulty self-regulating their academic-related behaviours (Van der Meer, Jansen, & Torenbeek, 2010).

4.6 The Context of a 21st Century Student

The characteristics of a learner changes over time much like that of best teaching practices or even broad cultural changes. To reflect this development the ubiquitous term "21st century learner", which stems from futurists, has recently come into existence (Stevens, 2011). This term can be generalized to specific contexts. In regards to this document, we explore various aspects of the 21st century learning literature in regards to the 21st century schooling experience.

The first-year experience of the 21st century student is a mix of high level educational demands coupled within an environment of uncertainty and unknowns. As previously noted, a common experience within the 21st Century student consists of large class sizes and novel lesson formats (Cuseo, 2007). Recently, new formats have emerged in the form of online education and online support tools. Researchers have identified the importance for institutions to develop an understanding of how to teach the 21st century 'digital native' student (Prensky, 2001a; Cowling, 2015). Advances in this area have yielded an increased number of first year courses that include technology such as online seminars, flipped classes, blended learning, and online classes (Padgett, Keup, & Pascarella, 2013; Sriarunrasmee, Techataweewan, & Panichkul Mebusaya, 2015). Many of these technologies brought into course design are meant to improve accessibility to courses and materials, as well as provide support for a wider range of student learning styles/preferences. The success of these developments has been mostly supported by recent literature, however some studies are pushing back against these developments (see Beland & Murphy, 2015). Overall, educational researchers are advising furthering exploration into these new technological-pedagogical developments as necessary for understanding the impact on 'dropout' rates (Sriarunrasmee, Techataweewan, & Panichkul Mebusaya, 2015).

Recent research by Gallardo-Echenique, Bullen, and Marques-Molias (2016) explored tool use and study habits of a sample of 204 first year students from four post-secondary institutions in Canada and Spain. They identified that students often use a variety of methods including email, face-to-face discussions, and Facebook to communicate with peers and professors. This suggests that it is common for today's students to use a mix of methods that they find helpful and for which they have easy access. This is further supported by Sriarunrasmee, Techataweewan, and Panichkul Mebusaya (2015) who discuss E-learning and social networks as learning tools for a sample of 84 first year university students. The relationship between these technological-pedagogical developments and successful transitions to university learning are an area of flourishing research.

4.7 The role of foundation courses

There are various approaches to addressing first-year academic transition issues within universities. Universities invest in many short-term and long-term transition efforts, such as week-long orientation sessions, personal intervention techniques, learning communities, peer mentoring programs, and year-long foundational programs or courses. First-year foundation courses that are aimed at helping students develop academic skills and engage in academic and

social aspects of university have proven to be successful in terms of retention and graduation rates for the students involved (Grayson, 1997; Williford, Chapman, & Kahrig, 2001). First-year foundation courses take on many formats and can also be termed "first-year experience" or "first-year seminar" courses. The commonality of first-year foundation courses offered throughout North America is that they are designed with the explicit purpose of improving retention rates (Porter & Swing, 2006). As low retention rates can be attributed to transition issues, improving retention rates generally implies that students are making better transitions. Students who are engaged in university life both socially and academically are more likely to continue with their studies (Darlaston-Jones et al., 2001). These results suggest that students may require supports to address both their social and their academic needs and foundation courses may help address this (Prebble et al., 2004).

4.7.1 History

A first-year foundation course can be described as an entry-level university course that provides students with foundational skills, knowledge and attitudes in an effort to help them to succeed in their university experience. While the themes and components of such programs can vary, the overarching goal is to retain students (Porter & Swing, 2006). That being said, there are many other benefits to students and institutions other than retaining students, and these will be explored in a later section. First-year foundation courses have been in existence in the United States dating back to the1800's (Schnell & Doetkott, 2003). While they were criticized in the 1960's due to their perceived lack of academic rigor, they surfaced again in the 1970's due to a system-wide focus on student success, and then expanded throughout the 1990's as universities began to pay close attention to the first-year experience of students, after research determined that the first-year of university provided students with a necessary foundation for achievement in upper years (Schnell & Doetkott, 2003). First-year foundation courses now tend to be designed with student development theories in mind (Schnell & Doetkott), though some researchers argue that student development theory may not be structured in ways that address the needs of a diverse group of 21st century students (Abes, 2009).

4.7.2 Formats

First-year foundation courses offered at universities vary by format and focus. Although many universities offer foundation courses, specifically in the UK, it is difficult to find empirical evidence to support what format is optimal. Some of the main focusses of first-year foundation courses are transition, special academic, discipline-based, and remedial (Porter & Swing, 2006). A course with a transition theme normally focusses on academic skills and student engagement. A special academic themed course is typically interdisciplinary and focusses on a specific topic or project, while a discipline themed course usually addresses student needs specific to an academic program. On the other hand, a course with a remedial theme is designed for students who have been identified as being at a high-risk of leaving university and/or less likely to achieve academic success (Porter & Swing, 2006).

While the general focus of the courses vary by institution, there are some common elements of first-year foundation programs. Five common elements amongst institutions in the United

States are academic skills and engagement, university policies, social engagement, social networks, and health education (Porter & Swing, 2006). These elements address general first-year student issues. Academic skills and engagement of students tend to be elements of most first-year foundation courses (Porter & Swing, 2006). Huon and Sankey (2002) recommended an early start on developing long-term learning skills and competencies in both general and subject-specific areas. Many students express difficulty in navigating the university environment, including understanding academic calendars, timetables, and policies (Hinton, 2007). Some first-year foundation courses address these concerns by making students aware of university services and supports, as well as providing a full examination of university procedures and policies ("Ohio University: First Year Experience Course", 2016; "University of South Carolina: University 101 Programs", 2016). Having a sense of purpose in their studies is important to first-year students (Huon & Sankey). Since some students enter their first year of university without a declared major, universities include this type of advising as part of first-year foundation courses. Ohio University's "University Experience" course is specifically designed for this group of students to help give them a sense of direction in their studies ("Ohio University", 2016).

A health education focus within some first-year foundation courses, reportedly helps to show students the importance of bringing balance to their first-year university experience (Porter & Swing, 2006). First year foundation programs take on different formats, with unique emphases, at each university in order to address the specific needs of their students. While plenty of studies have been conducted to measure the effectiveness of these courses in terms of retention and graduation rates within the United States (refs), the same level of research has not been conducted on the Canadian equivalents.

The goals and expected learning outcomes of first-year foundation programs can be tied to Porter & Swing's (2006) "themes" or formats of various first-year foundation courses. Courses with a transitional theme have the obvious goal of assisting students with transitioning into university life. The learning outcomes of such courses include: improved academic skills and engagement of students in the academic and social aspects of university (Jamelske, 2009; Porter & Swing).   A special academic course typically has the goal of helping students to develop critical thinking skills, and being able to transfer skills in an interdisciplinary manner. A discipline themed course would offer students foundational skills associated with their chosen discipline.

For science disciplines, these courses may include components such as using lab equipment and writing a lab report. In a remedial first-year foundation course, the goal is to address the specific skills that students require in order to have a chance at being successful in university studies. Research indicates that support services specifically aimed at-risk university students can help to improve academic performance; the time invested by students utilizing services such as academic skills is correlated with higher academic averages (Abrams & Podojil Jernigan, 1984). The issue in offering a remedial first-year foundation course is that no two students will have identical needs. It is also difficult to decide who is deemed "at-risk". It can be problematic if this determination is based on admission average alone. Many variables impact

a student's admission average, including the balance of academic and elective courses taken, the diversity of teachers grading the courses, and other events that have occurred in the student's life. High school admission averages are not always an accurate predictor of university success (Abrams & Podojil Jernigan). Regardless of the determined theme of the first-year foundation course, institutional goals for these programs are often tied to learning outcomes desired for students participating in these courses.

Specific learning goals for students taking first-year foundation courses include:

- Critical thinking and reflection skills ("Emily Carr University", 2016; "Ohio University", 2016; "Quest University", 2016; "The University of King's College", 2016; "The University of Toronto", 2016)
- Knowledge of desired academic goals in the form of an academic plan ("Ohio University", 2016; "Quest University", 2016)
- Improved academic skills, such as writing and studying skills ("Ohio University", 2016)
- Formation of peer support networks ("Emily Carr University", 2016; "Ohio University", 2016; "The University of Toronto", 2016)
- Integration into the social aspects of university life ("Ohio University", 2016).

The development of critical thinking and reflection skills could lead to students becoming engaged citizens, which is an aim of the foundation programs and courses at Quest University and The University of Toronto. There are also other learning outcomes that are often developed as a consequence of taking a first-year foundation course, such as increased confidence and improved sense of control over the learning process (Grayson, 1997).

4.8 Conclusion

The first year learning experience has been predominately studied within the frames of student transitions into university, student engagement, student motivation, student retention rates, the 21st century learner, and the role and types of first year foundation courses. This research is complex and as university communities are increasingly becoming more diverse, institutions are adopting a more multi-faceted approach to addressing student needs and issues (Fried, 1997).

What is the general finding? While still not fully developed, the research on first year student academic experiences points to several key factors that affect their decisions to 'stay' or 'leave'. Factors that support student decisions to 'stay' include; motivation through practical goal setting; at least moderate to strong engagement both academically and socially; the ability to transition from direct contact to more indirect contact with teachers; the receipt of constructive and regular feedback from instructors; direct support from student services; and, a general reduction in stressors such as financial issues.

It is crucial to keep in mind that no two students have the same life experiences prior to entering university and no two students will have the same first year learning experience. While it becomes natural to group first-year university students into one category in order to address their needs, close attention needs to be paid to the differences that these students bring to the university community.

5. Data Collection and Results

5.1 Instructor results from survey

Data Collection:

The instructor survey was distributed to 232 instructors, based on institutional records of assigned first year courses. 122 instructors responded resulting in a strong response rate of 53%.

This next section of this report presents a series of tables and graphs with collated data from the instructor survey.

Participants were asked to report on their roles in relation to first year students (table 2). The majority of respondents were TUFA (Trent University Faculty Association) full-time faculty members. Part-time faculty, teaching assistants, workshop leaders and demonstrators were also represented (45% of respondents).

Table 2 *Role with 1st year course*

Role in 1st year course	# of respondents	%
Instructor – TUFA	60	55
Instructor – CUPE	18	16
Teaching Assistant – CUPE	22	20
Teaching Assistant – OPSEU	2	2
Workshop Leader – CUPE	6	5
Lab Demonstrator	2	2
TOTAL	114	100%
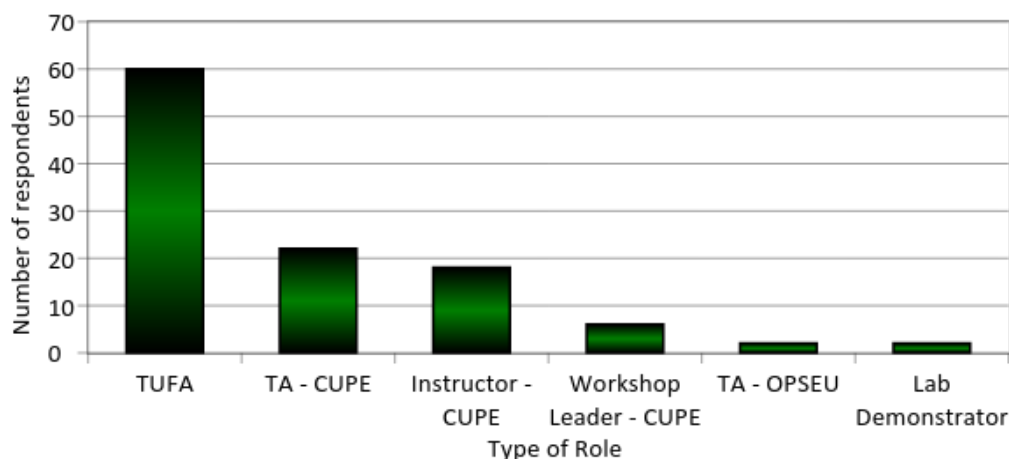
Figure 1. Reported role within 1st year course

Participants were also asked to report on the number of participants in their classes (table 3). The size of classes was relatively evenly spread amongst the categories with the means representing: 0-49 students (x=11%), 50-99 (x=18%), 100-149 (x=19%), 150-199 (x=13%), 200-249 (x=15%), 250-299 (x=8%), and 300+(x=15%).

Table 3 *Number of enrolled students in your 1st year course (2014-2015)*

# of Students Enrolled	Reported ratio of students in their course	Mean percentage of classes with students in this range
0-49	12	11%
50-99	20	18%
100-149	21	19%
150-199	14	13%
200-249	17	15%
250-299	9	8%
300+	17	15%

Participants were also asked to report on the amount of time they spent on three course-related activities: assessment (table 4), preparation for classes (table 5), and administrative duties (table 6). 50% of respondents reported spending between 1 and 4 hours per week on their first year course teaching, and 66% reported spending between 1-4 hours per week on assessment and evaluation. 80% of respondents spend between 1 and 4 hours per week on administrative duties. Of course, the time spent on each of these tasks may be related to the role that the respondent has in the first year classes, but this does provide an overall composite of the amount to time being dedicated to first year courses.

Table 4 *Number of hours reported as spent on Assessment and Evaluation and Course Content & Materials*

Number of hours Instructors spent on Assessment & Evaluation	Number of hours/ weekly spent on Assessment & Evaluations	% of reported hours in instructors spent on Assessment & Evaluations
1-2 hours	27	25%
3-4 hours	45	41%
5-6 hours	19	17%
7-8 hours	7	6%
9-10 hours	4	4%
10+ hours	8	7%
M = (2.45)		

Table 5 *Number of hours reportedly spent on Course Content & Materials*

Number of hours Instructors spent on preparing course Content & Materials	Number of hours/ weekly spent on Content & Materials	% of reported hours in instructors spent on Content & Materials
1-2 hours	25	29%
3-4 hours	30	21%
5-6 hours	21	25%
7-8 hours	16	7%
9-10 hours	4	18%
10 + hours	14	5%
M = (2.87)		

Table 6 *Number of hours reportedly spent on Course Administrative Tasks*

Number of hours per week Instructors spent on Course Administrative Tasks	Number of hours/ weekly spent on Course Administrative Tasks	% of reported hours in instructors spent on Course Administrative Tasks
1-2 hours	63	57%
3-4 hours	25	23%
5-6 hours	6	5%
7-8 hours	7	6%
9-10 hours	2	2%
10 + hrs	7	6%
M = (1.92)		

Participants were also asked to report which university services they used *during* their courses (table 7). Respondents could report more than one service. Responses are presented in

highest to lowest frequency: Student Accessibility Services, campus bookstore, Academic Skills Centre, IT support, Trent Online, Centre for Academic Testing, Counselling. Other services accessed were also noted by respondents and included in table 7.

Table 7 *University services utilized during the course by the course instructor*

Which University services does your course utilize?	Responses (total # of responses: 390)
Student Accessibility Services (SAS)	83
Bookstore	70
Academic Skills Centre	65
Information Technology	52
Trent Online	49
Centre for Academic Testing (CAT)	48
Counselling (part of SAS)	12
Centre for Teaching & Learning	9
Career Centre	2
Other: Blackboard Learning System (6); First People's House of Learning (2); Librarian (1); Trent Community Research Centre (1); Nursing Lab (1)	

Participants were also asked to report on their teaching format for 1st year courses (table 8). The most common teaching formats in rank order: lecture, seminars, labs, online, workshop, field work and clinical.

Table 8 *Teaching Format Used in 1st year Courses – multiple responses per participant*

Format used for teaching.	Responses who used this format (total # of respondents 109, responses 217)
Lecture	99
Seminar	65
Lab	17
Online	16
Workshop	15
Field Work	4
Clinical	1
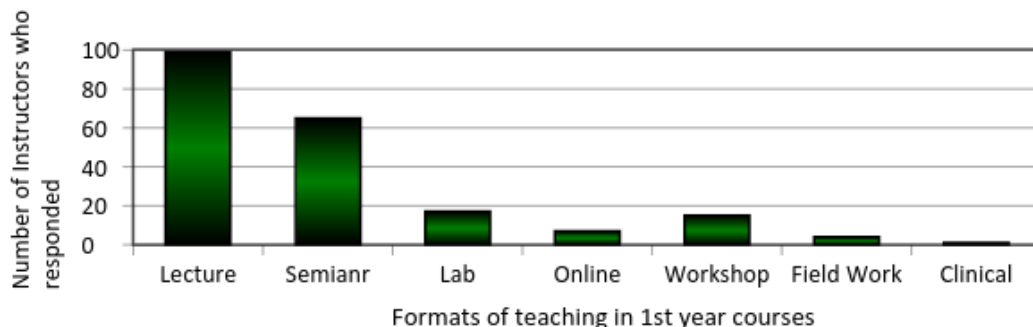
Figure 2 Format of teaching used in 1st year courses

Participants were asked to report on their teaching strategies used in 1st year courses (table 9). There were a total of 109 responses. 84% reported using lecture, 74% reported using small group discussions, and 74% reported using whole group facilitated discussions. A further 66% reported using current events, individual prompted reflections (55%), small group problem solving (55%), video for analysis/ discussions (51%), question and answer periods (48%), and debates (37%). Less common were use of equipment/ hands-on materials (30%), flipped instruction (24%), use of social media (16%), on campus meetings (8%), surveys (7%), field trips (5%), use of apps/ tablets (5%), outdoor excursions (5%), and guest speakers (2%).

Table 9 *Teaching strategies used in 1st year courses - multiple responses per participant (n=109)*

Teaching strategies used in 1st year courses	Number of responses of who uses this type of teaching strategy	% of respondents who use this type of teaching strategy
Lecture	92	84%
Small Group Discussions	81	74%
Whole Group Facilitated Discussion	73	66%
Use of Current Events	67	61%
Individual prompted reflection	60	55%
Small Group Problem Solving	60	55%
Use of Video for Analysis / Discussion	56	51%
Q & A Periods	53	48%
Debates	41	37%
Use of Equipment and/or Hands-on Material	33	30%
Flipped Instruction	26	24%
Use of Social Media	18	16%
On campus but out of class / meetings	9	8%
Survey Questions	8	7%
Field Trips	6	5%
Use of Apps on Tablets or Handhelds	6	5%

Outdoor Excursions	5	5%
Guest speakers	5	5%

Other:
Elder/traditional teacher (1), patient actors for role plays (1), demonstrators (1), experiential learning (1), Socratic method (1), student led presentations (1), group assignments (1), practice exams (1)

When asked about challenges faced in teaching first year courses (table 10), the main themes reported are as follows: There were 50 responses reporting challenges that involve student motivation, engaging students and issues with students being underprepared for class. Another 16 responses reported large class sizes to be a challenge. 13 responses found a lack of administrative support. 11 responses reported on the challenges of teaching to the range of students in their classes. 10 responses related to technical challenges. The remaining responses occurred 5 times or less each: not being aware of campus supports, difficulties with teaching space, Teaching Assistant challenges, and feeling underprepared to teach first year classes.

Table 10 *1st year Instructor reported challenges - multiple responses per participant*

1st year course instructors reported challenges	Number of responses
Motivating, Engaging Students	30
Under preparedness by students	20
Size of Classes	16
Administrative Support	13
Teaching to various types of Students	11
Tech: Distraction for students	5
Tech: Not working	5
Students unaware of University Resources	5
Spaces	5
TA Challenges	4
Lack of Resources	4
Instructor feeling underprepared to teach	2

Qualitative review:
Major challenges clustered by theme from comments:
- Motivating and engaging students and lack of student participation
- Under-preparedness of students; teaching students who are not prepared for university standards
- Class size, making connection with such a wide variety of students/ meeting their needs and/or interests

Participants were also asked to report on positives/ highlights of teaching first year courses (table 11). The highest response rate was related to the enthusiasm and eagerness of students to learn (28 responses) and seeing student's think about new topics / inspiring a field of study (14 responses). Responses also included positive feelings about teaching good foundations for university careers (9 responses), seeing student's grow and progress (9 responses), and enjoying the diversity of students (7 responses). Of lower report but still included in terms of themes of highlights were: the challenge of exciting students, sharing joy and learning material with students, the topics they get to teach and discuss, a feeling of this being a rewarding experience.

Table 11 *1st year Instructor reported positives/ highlights - multiple responses per participant*

1st year course instructors reported positives/highlights	Number of responses
Enthusiasm and eagerness of students to learn	28
Seeing student's think about new topics / inspiring a field of study	14
Teaching good foundations for university careers	9
Seeing student's grow and progress	9
Diversity of students	7
Challenge of exciting students	2
Sharing joy and material with students, designing course	2
The topics I get to discuss & teach	2
Rewarding experience	1
Availability of resources on demand	1
Support from course Lead	1

Participants were asked to comment on challenges of teaching first year courses, in an open field comment box (table 12).

Table 12 *1st year Instructor challenges reported – in open field comment box – batched by theme*

Challenges
Seminar-lecture model/ Class size barrier to engagement
Preparedness of students
Use of undergraduate markers/ TA's/ consistent marking
Student Accessibility Services and Centre for Academic Testing booking systems
First year student burnout
TA hours exceed GTA's allotment
Curriculum
Availability of resources on demand
Support from course Lead
Keeping strong students engaged

Participants were asked to contribute any suggestions for 1st year courses in an open field comment box (table 13).

Table 13
1st year Instructor suggestions reported – in open field comment box – batched by theme

Suggestions
Implement required writing skills Honorariums for guests/ keynote speakers Seminar/ tutorials of no more than 20 students More teaching/ professional development opportunities Ensure ESL students truly meet TOEFL standards

5.2 Instructor Survey Results Summary

The instructor perspective captured through the online survey identified both highlights and challenges of teaching first year courses at Trent. Faculty reported that the positives of teaching first-year students included having the opportunity to be involved in the introduction of students to university and to the students' first encounter at the university level for their discipline. Faculty also reported seeing the value and responsibility of supporting students in making connections with peers, departments and the institution overall. The key themes were clustered and sorted. In rank order, the positive highlights of teaching first year courses are:

1. Enjoying student enthusiasm and eagerness to learn;
2. Having the opportunity to encourage student thinking about new topics and inspiring ideas;
3. Teaching foundations that will prepare students for their academic experience;
4. Being a part of, and observing, student growth;
5. Recognizing and supporting the diversity of Trent's student population.

On the other hand, faculty also reported on, and discussed, several challenges to teaching first-year courses including:

- the volume of administrative tasks such as email and learning management system tasks;
- departmental expectations such as preparing students for upper year courses;
- teaching pedagogy limitations when working with large class sizes;
- difficulty building forms of engagement with students;
- challenges keeping advanced students interested in the subject;
- limited space such as lack of flexibility in classrooms and reliance on over-flow rooms;
- dwindling student attendance patterns, and the variability of student preparedness.

5.3 Instructor focus group summary

Focus group results

Q.1. What are the positives of teaching 1st year courses?

Faculty reported that the positives of teaching first year students included having the opportunity to be the 'introducer' to the discipline and the students' first university encounter, as well as supporting students with making broader connections.

Example participant comments included:

Theme 1: First encounters with the discipline. Faculty reported that being the one to be responsible for leading the first introduction to the students' discipline of interest was perceived as a positive. They appreciated the responsibilities that come with this role.

> *"I have a captive audience for 8 months and I take that as a serious responsibility. For me it's about getting them to start thinking about environmental issues, in a way that is critical, deep, trying to shift their values around these things." (faculty member)*
>
> *"It's so important to help establish a positive encounter with the subject by teaching them the norms about how to learn about these topics at a university level. We are teaching them what university is, and it provides them a map of our programs" (faculty member)*
>
> *"Teaching first year is rekindling the love of a subject area and sharing that experience over again" (faculty member)*

Theme 2: Helping students make connections. Faculty reported that a positive part of their teaching responsibilities in first year courses is to help and support first year students with making connections with fellow students.

> *"…my personal passion is making connections. I am constantly struck by the loneliness on campus – I just feel that that first year, first term is the opportunity to make them be part of the Trent community. A lot of what I do is trying to get them to meet people – meet the people beside you or behind you. Every class there's group work, so that they can make the connections with each other, I don't want that loneliness on campus. It's my opportunity to get them to meet each other and include each other. Connections are important - how it affects our everyday. Connections with each other and hopefully connections with me." (faculty member)*

> *"If students know at least one or two people, that they can email or phone, they are more likely to succeed. Have someone they can contact at the last minute because they won't contact us. In my head, I assume everyone is living in residence like I was and they can contact somebody. It can be really isolating for them living off campus. Ways for them to be included in a community and build that community in the classroom is not as obvious."*
>
> *(faculty member)*

Q.2. What are the challenges of teaching 1st year courses?

Faculty reported and discussed several challenges to teaching first year courses including administrative tasks, department expectations and processes, class sizes and meaningful engagement, and variability of student preparedness.

Theme 1. Administrative tasks. Faculty reported that the administrative tasks were a marked challenge to teaching first year courses.

> *"There is seemingly endless administration tasks. Teaching is only a small part and it takes a back seat to delivery"* *(faculty member)*
>
> *"First year teaching burns out the good instructors because of all the administrative tasks with little support"* *(faculty member)*

Theme 2: Department expectations and processes. Faculty discussed a variety of departmental challenges associated with teaching the first year courses.

> *"Other faculty in our department expect that the first year course will fix everything that was lacking in the high school training of our students"* *(faculty member)*
>
> *"No one in our department wants to teach the course but we are leery about posting it externally"* *(faculty member)*

Theme 3. Class sizes and meaningful engagement. Discussion highlighted large class sizes and lack of student engagement as significant challenges as reported by participants.

> " Enrollment has grown so much. Students are now forced into overflow rooms and they are not getting the same experience. They just stop coming to class. We cannot engage classes this large" (faculty member)
>
> "I think another challenge for me is finding ways to really increase student engagement. There's mixed levels of that in the course and in the seminar. I try various strategies to try to engage [students], but it still feels like there's mixed levels of participation and sometimes I wonder if people are just learning in their own way and that's ok and sometimes I wonder if I'm failing as an instructor because there are mixed levels of participation. On good days, it is great, but this is definitely a challenge." (Faculty member)
>
> "Larger classes make pedagogical innovations tricky", you have to think it through 14 different ways; small errors in the lab become huge with lots of students in a lab" (faculty member)

Theme 4. Variability of student preparedness. Faculty reported challenges with the varying degree of student preparedness.

> "One of the challenges that I would definitely identify is the varying degrees of written and oral communication." (faculty member)
>
> "Varying levels of student's abilities - that is significant. There is 20% of the cohort here that are exceptional; they are here for seriousness, purpose, and engagement. There are 30% that are completely missing. 70% is not a good cut off for some students and they just disappear. The first year I taught here at Trent, everyone showed up. Now I would not be surprised to have 10 students not show up for the final exam" (faculty member)

Q.3. What is one wish you have for 1st year teaching?

Faculty discussed several wishes for first year courses including the following:

> "More flexible classrooms for active/effective teaching and learning OR smaller class sizes"
>
> "My one wish would be to have a process of selecting who gets to teach first year courses to get our strong and dynamic instructors [in those courses]."
>
> "That faculty are prepared. They don't just show up and lecture"

> *"Properly resource these first year courses. Budget by academic year [to increase funding for first year courses relative to upper year courses]."*
>
> *"I wish 1st year courses were regarded also as an end in themselves. We treat them too much like the foundation of majors even though most students who take a particular first year course have no intention of majoring in it"*

5.4 Phase 2 – Student Support Staff Perspective

Survey results

The survey was completed by 16 current student support staff.

Q.1. Types of supports and services offered to 1st year students.
- Summer orientation, new student orientation, students-at-risk programming, college programming, housing, etc.
- Advising regarding course selection, degree options, educational planning, negotiating challenges, developing problem-solving, goal-setting, decision-making skills; transition to university support; referrals to other supports
- Development of time management, writing, reading, and critical thinking skills
- Leadership, Orientation, Volunteer Opportunities, Workshops, Math Skills, Initiative Fund
- Transitional Support to 101 and 105 students. Tutoring and mentorship, retention programming and events, academic success planning, cultural programming, food bank, financial literacy training, career services
- Housing accommodation (on campus) and service finding off campus accommodation, student employees provide a variety of supports to students - peer helping, addressing concerns and conflicts, planning events to engage students in collegiate community, etc.
- Crisis intervention and support
- Pastoral support, local community information

Student support staff were asked about the nature of services they offer and the format of these services and interactions (table 14).

Table 14 *Types of interactions with 1st year students.*

Answer	%	Count
Formal Meetings/ Scheduled	75.00%	12
Formal Meetings/ Unscheduled	56.25%	9
Informal Drop-In	62.50%	10
Special Events	81.25%	13
1 to 1 support	81.25%	13
Group Support	68.75%	11
Other:	18.75%	3

Participants also reported on the frequency of their interactions with first year students (table 15) and whether these interactions were recurring (table 16). Half of the respondents indicated that they have daily interactions with first year students. Well over half of the respondents indicated meeting with individual first year students on multiple occasions.

Table 15 *Frequency of interactions with 1st year students.*

Answer	%	Count
Daily	50.00%	8
Weekly	31.25%	5
Fortnightly (every 2 weeks)	0.00%	0
Once a Month	0.00%	0
Yearly/ Annually	0.00%	0
Never	0.00%	0
Other:	18.75%	3
Total	100%	16

Table 16 *Reoccurring appointments with 1st year students.*

Answer	%	Count
Yes, if so frequency	68.75%	11
No	31.25%	5
Total	100%	16

Respondents also reported on the amount of time they spend with first year students compared to other students. Most student services participants indicated that they spent less than 50% of their time with first year students. However, almost half of the respondents spend between 26 and 50 % of their time with first year students (see table 17).

Table 17 *Estimated time you spend with 1st year students compared to other year students. Time spent with 1st year students expressed as a percentage*

Answer	%	Count
1-25%	50.00%	8
26%-50%	43.75%	7
51%-75%	0.00%	0
76%-95%	0.00%	0
96%-100%	6.25%	1
Total	100%	16

Of particular interest, the common issues that first year students brought forward in these interactions with student services, were complex (table 18).

Table 18 *Reported common Issues brought forward by 1st year students – batched by themes*

Common Issues - Themed
Academic challenges
Life transitioning difficulties
Conduct/ behavioural issues
Emotional issues
Social problems
Not prepared for university
Mental health concerns
Difficult navigating course requirements

Participants were asked to categorize and rank the type of questions they are asked by student in degree of complexity (table 19). The responses reflect a wide the range of complexity and frequency.

Table 19 *Presenting challenges difficulty scale*

Student bring forward questions that are:	Almost Never		Sometimes		Regularly		Often		Almost Always		Total
Easy to answer questions	6.25%	1	31.25%	5	37.50%	6	18.75 %	3	6.25%	1	16
Moderate challenges that can be addressed	0.00%	0	25.00%	4	37.50%	6	37.50 %	6	0.00%	0	16
Difficult challenges that require additional attention and time	18.75 %	3	31.25%	5	25.00%	4	25.00 %	4	0.00%	0	16
Extreme challenges beyond the scope or capacity of the team	62.50 %	10	37.50%	6	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	16

Participants were also asked to report on the percentage of students they would perceive to be in *academic* distress (table 20). The results show 88% of the respondents believe a quarter of the students they encounter present as being in academic distress.

Table 20 *Percentage of 1ˢᵗ year students who are in academic distress*

Answer	%	Count
0%	6.25%	1
25%	87.50%	14
50%	6.25%	1
75%	0.00%	0
100%	0.00%	0
Total	100%	16

Participants also reported on the percentage of students they would perceive to be in non-academic distress (table 21). The results show that 75% of the respondents believe that 1 in 4 students they see present as being in *non-academic distress* and 19% reported that 2 out of 4 students presented in non-academic distress.

Table 21*Percentage of 1ˢᵗ year students who are in distress for reasons other than academics*

Answer	%	Count
0%	0.00%	0
25%	75.00%	12
50%	18.75%	3
75%	6.25%	1
100%	0.00%	0
Total	100%	16

When asked what the most commonly reported positive comments from 1ˢᵗ year students (table 22) were, the responses were clustered by theme and rank ordered. There were essentially 3 clusters of comments.

Table 22 *Positives comments 1ˢᵗ year students make about their experience at Trent University to staff*

Reported positives about Trent clustered & ranked

- A) Feeling welcomed in a supportive environment
- B) Academics
- C) Inclusive community

Participants were asked to report what were the most commonly reported difficulties for 1ˢᵗ year students (table 23). The responses were clustered into four themes and rank ordered by frequency.

Table 23 *Reported difficulties 1ˢᵗ year students report about their experience at Trent University to staff*

Reported difficulties about Trent clustered & ranked

- A) Difficulty accessing information & services
- B) Transitioning to, and preparedness for, University
- C) Stressors (financial, workload, peer)
- D) Course challenges/ Enrollment management

When asked to reflect on one wish for something participants could change about the 1ˢᵗ year experience for students (table 24), several interesting points came forward.

Table 24 *Staff reported one wish they could change about the 1ˢᵗ year experience at Trent University*

A) Class format (Ensure first year courses have seminars, labs, workshops – smaller learning communities
B) First year foundation course
C) Student service resource awareness (students need to know what is available & how to access)
D) University prep skills
E) Strategic faculty assignments (ensuring the most suited faculty are teaching 1ˢᵗ year courses)
F) Grading policy considerations (standardizing grade criteria between departments)
G) Improve suspension, probation and fresh start processes
H) Housing at Durham Campus

5.5. Student Academic Support Staff Perspective Results Summary

The student academic support staff perspective yielded interesting findings. The data from this staff group perspective highlighted the growing complexity and challenges many of our first year students face while pursuing their academic endeavors. Staff reported frequent contact with our first year students (50% reported daily contact and 32% reported weekly contact). Several of these encounters were recurring (68.75% of the meetings were recurring appointments). In relation to upper year students, approximately 94% of the participating staff reported spending up to 50% of their time with first year students. The staff reported that the main issues brought forward by first year students included; academic challenges, life transition difficulties, conduct/ behavioural issues, emotional issues, social problems, mental health issues, under preparedness for university and difficulty navigating course requirements. The staff reported that many of the meetings with students involved difficult challenges that required considerable amount of time by the staff to address. The data supports the notion that there were varying degrees of presenting complexities. 87.5% of staff reported that 25% of the students they see are experiencing academic distress.   75% of staff reported that 25% of the students they see are in distress outside their academics as well.

The staff also reported the positive feedback about Trent they hear from students in their meetings. Clustered in rank order, the responses included feeling welcomed in a supportive environment, positive academic experiences, and experiencing an inclusive Trent community culture. The staff reported that common first year student concerns included; difficulty accessing information and services, transitioning and preparedness to university, other life stressors and course challenges/ enrollment management difficulties.

5.6 Phase 3 - Student Perspective – 1st year students

5.6.1 Survey results - 1st year students

The short survey was completed by 166 registered 1st year students during the 2015-2016 academic term. For open responses, the unit of analysis was an utterance: Each full thought was coded using Nvivo Pro 11 software.

Question 1: Report 2 academic highlights from your 1st year at Trent

1st year students were asked to report two academic highlights from their current 1st year at Trent. The responses fell into 6 nodes or categories: Academic accomplishment, Academic supports, Campus community, College life, Professors/ instructors/ TA's, and Program/ discipline specific.

Table 25 *Frequency per category of academic highlight reported by 1st year students (multiple responses)*

Node	%	Count
Program/ discipline specific	39%	76
Professors/ instructors/ TA's	31%	61
Academic accomplishment	12%	22
Campus community	12%	23
Academic support	7%	14
College life	1%	2
	100%	198
n= 166		

To further elaborate on the meaning of each of these categories, an illustrative quote from first year students are provided for each category.

Program: "Being able to delve into my field of study with such pace is both exhilarating and intimidating all the same. Nonetheless, when passionate about a subject one can't help but become excited go such a higher stage of learning*" (1st year student)*

Professor: "Two of my profs were absolutely amazing and very helpful with transitioning into the university world. They were understanding and explained everything in great detail to make sure that all their students had the best first semester experience they could have*" (1st year student)*

Academic accomplishment: "Getting to do a Lab in the Crime Scene House in FRSC1010" *(1st year student)*

Campus Community: "There was such a wonderful, encouraging and excited feeling about campus. It really was walking around with other people who (no matter how sleep-deprived or stressed) were

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genuinely happy to be there. That simply is not comparable to anything: that feeling that the community is full of love for their university, and each other" *(1st year student)*

Academic Support: "The academic advisor is both knowledgeable and helpful. I had so many questions and concerns about my timetable and they were able to both talk me through and assist me with organizing the schedule that worked best for me!" *(1st year student)*

College: "O week! It was a great way to meet people and get over the initial awkwardness of being in a new place" *(1st year student)*

</div>

Question 2: Report 1 academic challenge from your 1st year at Trent

1st year students were asked to report one academic challenge from their current 1st year at Trent. Using Nvivo Pro 11 software, the responses were collected into 8 nodes or categories: Workload, Professor/ instructor/ TA issues, Lack of space, Lack of prep or skills, Financial, Course disappointments, Assessment evaluations issues, and Academic difficulties.

Table 26 *Frequency per category of academic challenges reported by 1st year students (multiple responses)*

Node	%	Count
Course disappointments	26%	25
Assessment & evaluation issues	15%	17
Professor/ instructor/ TA issues	16%	15
Academic difficulties	13%	12
Financial	8%	8
Workload	7%	7
Lack of prep or skills	5%	5
	100%	95
n= 166		

To further elaborate on the meaning of each of these categories, illustrative quotes from first year students are provided for each category.

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Course disappointments: "This course had little to no support available, especially for writing formal lab reports. No lab every other week was a disappointment, as I'm sure many students could have used this time to get assistance" *(1st year student)*

Assessment & evaluation: "I did badly in some classes even though I put so much time and effort into them and didn't feel like I knew how I could have done better" *(1st year student)*

Professor: "When profs don't let you discuss your midterm or assignments... How are you supposed to know where you went wrong or how you can improve from just a percentage?" *(1st year student)*

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> **Academic difficulties:** "I was disappointed by how I took so long to adapt to the behaviour necessary to do well in my courses. This resulted in some poorly completed assignments at the beginning. However, gathering more experience allowed me to work on these shortcomings and begin succeeding" *(1st year student)*
>
> **Financial:** "The cost of required textbooks when you don't use them" *(1st year student)*
>
> **Workload:** "Not all courses/seminars had reviews, I would have liked the opportunity to voice my opinion in every course especially around the amount of make shift work" *(1st year student)*
>
> **Lack of skills:** "Feeling too insecure/insignificant to talk to TA's and profs about marks" *(1st year student)*

Question 3: If you could change one thing about your 1st year experience at Trent, what would it be?

1st year students were asked to comment on one thing they would change about their 1st year experience at Trent. Using Nvivo Pro 11 software, the responses were collected into 6 nodes or categories: Improvements to campus services (not food); Improvements to food services; Financial; Focus on academics; Getting more involved; and, More academic choice.

Table 27 *Frequency per category of one change about Trent reported by 1st year students*

Node	%	Count
Get more involved	25%	31
Improvement to campus services (not food)	13%	16
More academic choices	10%	13
Increase focus on academics	9%	11
Improve food services	4%	5
Less Financial burdens	2%	3
	100%	124
n= 166		

When asked to rate their overall experience in terms of satisfaction, students ranked their level of agreement with three aspects of their experience: was the first year engaging; was the first year challenging; and, was the first year terrific. 82% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their first year experience was engaging. 85% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their first year experience was challenging. And 68% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their first year experience was terrific.

Question 4: Overall, my first year experience at Trent has been…

Table 28 *Overall reported satisfaction about Trent reported by 1st year students*

Question	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Total
Engaging	2.15%	2	2.15%	2	13.98%	13	52.69%	49	29.03%	27	93
Challenging	1.08%	1	5.38%	5	8.60%	8	50.54%	47	34.41%	32	93
Terrific	2.13%	2	4.26%	4	25.53%	24	39.36%	37	28.72%	27	94

Summary of Results from 1st Year Students

Students in first year reported a mix of both academic and non-academic highlights and disappointments. 1st year students reported the greatest academic highlight was their program of study at 39%, followed by their professors, instructors and teaching assistants at 31%. 12% of students reported a specific academic accomplishment and 12 % also reported the campus community to be the highlights for them at Trent. Interestingly, there were overlap on themes in the academic disappointment categories; 26% course disappoints, 16% professors, instructors and teaching assistants, and 12% general academic difficulties. Interesting to note, 16% of the respondents reported a disappointment related to assessment and evaluation of their work. When students were asked what they would change about their 1st year experience, 25% reported wanting to get more involved, 13% reported wanting improvements to campus services, and 10% reported wanting more academic choice. When asked to rate their overall experience, students were asked about their satisfaction, they ranked their level of agreement with three aspects of their experience: engaging; challenging; and, terrific. These results were extremely positive with 82% of respondents agreeing that their first year experience was engaging and 85% agreeing that their first year experience was challenging.

5.6.2 Survey results - 2nd year students (retrospective)

The survey was completed by 140 registered 2ND year students during the 2015-2016 academic term. The questions on this survey were the same as the first year survey, however, each question prompted the student to respond by 'reflecting on their 1st year at Trent' or 'looking back to last year'. Responses from second year students were coded using the same categories as responses from first year students.

Question 1: Report 2 academic highlights from your 1st year at Trent

2nd year students were asked to report two academic highlights from their previous 1st year at Trent. Using Nvivo Pro 11 software, the data responses were collected into 6 nodes or categories: Academic accomplishment, Academic supports, Campus community, College life, Professors/ instructors/ TA's, and Program/ discipline specific. The responses fell into 6 nodes

or categories: Program/ discipline specific; Professors/ instructors/ TA's; Academic accomplishment; Campus community; Academic support; and College life

Table 29 *Frequency per category of academic highlight reported by 2nd year students about 1st year*

Node	%	Count
Program/ discipline specific	36%	59
Professors/ instructors/ TA's	30%	50
Academic accomplishment	23%	38
Campus community	6%	10
Academic support	4%	6
College life	1%	2
	100%	165

To further elaborate on the meaning of each of these categories, illustrative quotes from second year students are provided for each category.

Program: "Taking physics courses. The physics department obviously puts a lot of time and energy into figuring out the best ways to teach. They were well organized and well taught. I switched majors because I loved it so much!*" (2nd year student)*

Professor: "My highlight from my first year was attending English classes that solidified my passion for the language, reading, and writing. Specifically, the courses I took were "Truth, Lies, and Storytelling" and "Revolution". Both of these classes and professors inspired me to switch my major to English and to pursue my passion.*" (2nd year student)*

Academic accomplishment: "Suddenly understanding that I was being asked to critique articles, rather than just repeat/agree with what they said like I did in high school." *(2nd year student)*

Community: "The community atmosphere in INDG 1000Y seminar. I also liked that so many of the students in my seminar were engaged with the material so we could have really thought-provoking discussions" *(2nd year student)*

Academic Support: "The overwhelming support from Teaching Assistants!" *(2nd year student)*

College: "Knowledge of having an academic adviser in my college to help me with struggling courses. The first time I went in to speak with my adviser they lifted the weight off of my shoulders by allowing me to understand the system rather than just figuring everything out for me" *(2nd year student)*

Question 2: Looking back, report 1 academic challenge from your 1st year at Trent

2nd year students were asked to reflect and to report one academic challenge from their previous 1st year at Trent. Using Nvivo Pro 11 software, the data responses were collated into 7 nodes or categories: Workload, Professor/ instructor/ TA issues, Lack of space, Lack of prep or skills, Financial, Course disappointments, Assessment evaluations issues, and Academic difficulties.

Table 30 *Frequency per category of academic challenges reported by 1st year students*

Node	%	Count
Professor/ instructor/ TA issues	23%	21
Course disappointments	18%	17
Assessment & evaluation issues	11%	10
Academic difficulties	11%	10
Lack of prep or skills	3%	3
Financial	3%	3
Workload	2%	2
n=140	100%	93

To further elaborate on the meaning of each of these categories, illustrative quotes from second year students are provided for each category.

Professor: "Profs are hard to follow sometimes and do not always seem approachable." (*2nd year student*)

Course disappointments: "I thought coming into university that my major would be psych but my experience with was miserable I feel like I didn't learn anything and the content was too dense to even get into!" *(2nd year student)*

Assessment & evaluation: "Exams that were fully multiple choice. These exams do not allow for the student to explain their logic to their answers and are very right or wrong based, especially with more complex topics" *(2nd year student)*

Academic difficulties: "I was very surprised at how much my grades dropped from high school to university. I don't think I was mentally prepared for that at all, but I pushed through and learned what I needed to do to stay afloat." *(2nd year student)*

Lack of skills: "It was much easier for me to slack off and skip class so I took advantage of that, not having done it in high school, though this is more of a personal disappointment rather than one with the academics themselves." (*2nd year student)*

Workload: *"*Readings built up quickly, and some of my seminars were too large for me to really participate" (*2nd year student)*

Financial: "The cost of textbooks" *(2nd year student)*

Question 3: If you could change one thing about your 1st year experience at Trent, what would it have been?

2nd year students were asked to report what would be the one thing they would change about their 1st year experience at Trent. Using Nvivo Pro 11 software, the data responses were

collected into 5 nodes or categories: Improvements to campus services (not food), Improve food services, Financial, Focus on academics, and Get more involved.

Table 31 *Frequency per category of one change about Trent reported by 2nd year students reflecting on 1st year*

Node	%	Count
Get more involved	58%	34
Improve food services	20%	12
Increase focus on academics	12%	7
Improvement to campus services (not food)	8%	5
Less Financial burdens	2%	1
n=140	100%	59

When asked to rate their overall experience, students were asked about their satisfaction, they ranked their level of agreement with three aspects of their experience: was the first year engaging; was the first year challenging; and, was the first year terrific. 84% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their first year experience was engaging. 77% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their first year experience was challenging. And 62% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their first year experience was terrific.

Question 4: Overall, my first year experience at Trent has been…

Table 32

Question	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Total
Engaging	0.00%	0	4.00%	3	12.00%	9	60.00%	45	24.00%	18	75
Challenging	1.33%	1	2.67%	2	18.67%	14	50.67%	38	26.67%	20	75
Terrific	1.35%	1	12.16%	9	24.32%	18	36.49%	27	25.68%	19	74
n=140											

5.7 Student Perspective (Present & Past) Results Summary

Students in first year:

The 1st year students reported several highlight of their first year courses at Trent. Clustered and in rank order were; program or discipline specific highlights, instructor/ faculty/ TA interactions and learning, a sense of personal academic accomplishment, involvement in campus communities, academic supports, and participating in college life.

The survey also provided insight into the reported challenges of their first year courses at Trent. Clustered and in rank order included; experiencing course disappointments, experiencing instructor/ faculty/ TA issues, difficulty with assessment and evaluation issues, overall academic

difficulties, financial stressors, heavy workloads, lack of space, and a general lack of preparation or skills for university academics.

When asked what they would change about their first year learning experience at Trent, the students reported the following: they wished they had gotten more involved, they wish for improved to campus services (not food), more academic choice, they wished they had increased their focus on academics, they wished for better food services and that they wished that they had experienced less financial burdens.

Overall, the students agreed that their first year at Trent was engaging (81.72%), challenging (84.95%) and terrific (68.08%).

Past students, now in second year:

When asked to reflect on their first year experience, the 2nd year students reported several highlight of their first year courses at Trent. Clustered and in rank order were; program/ discipline specific highlights, positive instructor/ faculty/ TA encounters, personal academic accomplishments, positive campus communities, availability of academic supports and involvement with college life. The data clustered and rank ordered was the same as first year students with minimal variance.

The survey also provided insight into the reported challenges the second year students remembered about their first year courses at Trent. Clustered and in rank order were; difficult instructor/ faculty/ TA issues, course disappointments, both assessment and evaluation issues and academic difficulties, financial stressors, general lack of preparation or skills and challenging workloads. There was an increase in reported challenges with instructors/ faculty/ TA's by the second year students, however, the other reported challenges were relatively consistent compared to first year students.

When asked what they would change about their first year learning experience at Trent, the students reported the following: they wished they had gotten more involved, they wished for improved food services, they wished they had increased their focus on academics, improved campus services (not food), and that they had experienced less financial burdens. This results suggest that the majority of second year students wished they had been more involved in first year learning opportunities and a quarter of the students wished for an improvement of food services on campus.

Overall, in retrospect, the second year students agreed that their first year at Trent was engaging (84%), challenging (77.34%) and terrific (62.17%).

When comparing first year and second year student responses on the three variables of challenging, engaging and terrific, we see moderate differences:

1st year students: engaging (81.72%), challenging (84.95%) and terrific (68.08%)
2nd year students: engaging (84%), challenging (77.34%) and terrific (62.17%).

Students in second year reported their time at Trent to be more engaging and less challenging. Of course, these students returned for a second year. 38% of 2nd year students are rating their time at Trent at or below an average experience. It should be noted that students who left or withdrew from Trent would not have been available to complete this questionnaire. Therefore, this satisfaction rating is of students Trent retained into second year of studies.

5.8 Phase 4 - syllabus environmental scan

Data Collection

A total of 92 first-year course syllabi were shared from 21 departments from the 2015-2016 academic term. The unit of analysis was the syllabus. The syllabi were reviewed for the following information:

Course Code	**Format of Course**
Course Title	Lecture,
Offered When?	Lab (weekly),
Offered Where?	Lab (bi-weekly),
Full or Half Course?	Seminar/Tutorial (Weekly),
% of grade by drop date?	Seminar/ Tutorial (Bi-weekly),
	Workshop,
Types of Assessment	Practical learning centre & clinical practice
Quiz/Test (in person), Quiz/Test (online),	activities,
Research Paper/Essay,	online course
Lab, Assignment/Project,	**Learning Outcomes? Y/N**
Group Assignment/Presentation,	**Clickers used? Y/N**
Presentation (Individual),	**Blackboard used? Y/N**
Participation,	**Online course materials in non-blackboard? Y/N**
Portfolio,	
Formative Assessment,	
Reflection Piece,	
Online Post/Discussion,	
Midterm Test,	
Final Exam	

Environmental scan results – syllabi

General course syllabi findings are presented in table 33. 88 courses were half credit and 4 courses were a full year. The data collected from the syllabi showed that 84 courses had reported completing 25% of the student grade by the drop date. 88 courses had learning outcomes/ statements included. 6 courses reported using i-clickers and 89 courses use the Blackboard Learning Management System. 14 courses use additional online materials.

Table 33 *Course syllabus results overview (n=92)*

General findings		
	Half Course = 88	**Full course = 4**
25% of grade by drop date	84 courses reported 25% of grade to students by drop date	8 courses reported less than 25% of grade to students or not indicated
Learning outcomes	88 courses had learning outcomes indicated	4 courses had NO learning outcomes indicated
Use of Clickers	86 courses DID NOT USE clickers	6 courses used clickers
Blackboard Use	89 course used Blackboard	3 courses DID NOT use blackboard
Online materials OTHER THAN Blackboard (publisher sites, social media)	14 courses reported using other online materials	72 course did not indicate if they used other online materials

Of particular interest in terms of the types of assessments reportedly used in 1st year courses (see table 34), 95.7% of courses reportedly use a final exam, 85.9% reportedly have a midterm test, 62% have a major assignment or project (not research specified), 47 courses or 51.1% grade student participation, 37 courses or 40.02% have a research paper or essay, 37% use quizzes, and 13 courses or 14.1% use online quizzes. 8 courses reported using group assignments, 6 courses or 9% have oral presentations, 3 courses have online discussions or postings, 1 course reportedly uses portfolios, 1 course reportedly uses reflection and no courses indicated the use of a formative assessment component where students receive feedback prior to a final submission (typically without a grade).

Table 34 *Types of assessments reportedly used in 1st year courses (n=92)*

Types of Assessments	Count	% of courses that use said form of assessment
Final Exam	88 courses	95.70%
Midterm Test	79 courses	85.90%
Assignment or project (not research specified)	57 courses	62%
Course participation grade	47 courses	51.10%
Research paper or essay	37 courses	40.20%

Quizzes (in class)	34 courses	37%
Online quizzes	13 courses	14.10%
Group assignment/ group presentation	8 courses	9%
Individual presentations	6 courses	7%
Online Post/ Discussion	3 courses	3.30%
Portfolio	1 course	1.10%
Reflection piece	1 course	1.10%
Formative Assessment	0 courses	0%

Table 35 reports the weighting of tests and assessments with the percentage of the grade assigned within the last 2 weeks of the course. Row 4 of table 35 expresses the range and average weight of evaluations which occur during the final 2 weeks of the course as well as the exam. According to the syllabi, students in first year courses complete anywhere from 2%-35% of their final course mark in the last two weeks of the course. When we include the exams, students complete a range of 28%-65% of their final grade at the end of the course.

Table 35 *Weighting of test, assessments and percentage of grade within the last 2 weeks of the course (n=92)*

Assessment	Range	Average weight
Weight of Midterm Test(s)	10%-30%	21.2%
Weight of FINAL EXAM	20%-50%	31.4%
% of Grade due in last TWO WEEKS	2%-35%	19%
% of Grade due in last 2 weeks including exam	28%-65%	49%

The syllabi data is consistent with the Instructor data from Phase 1 which shows that 88% of courses are reportedly lecture based, 35.9% have a weekly seminar/ tutorial component, 12% have a fortnightly lab component, 9.8% have workshops, 8.7% have weekly labs, 6.5% have seminar/ tutorial (fortnightly), 5 courses were online and 1 course reported has a practical learning/ field trip/ clinical component.

Table 36 *Course format reportedly used in 1st year courses (n=92) – multiple formats per course included*

Types of course formats	Count	% of courses using said format
Lecture	81 courses	88%
Seminar/ tutorial (weekly)	33 courses	35.90%
Lab (fortnightly)	11 courses	12%
Workshop	9 courses	9.80%
Lab (weekly)	8 courses	8.70%
Seminar/ tutorial (fortnightly)	6 courses	6.50%
Online course	5 courses	5.40%
Practical learning/ field trip/ clinical	1 courses	1.10%

Syllabi Scan Results Summary

A total of 92 first year course syllabi were reviewed, 88 of which were half courses (0.5 credit) and 4 full year courses (1.0 credit). 84 courses (91%) reported providing 25% of the students' grade by the 'drop-date'. Open text responses from the student support staff and students, also identified that some of their courses did not provide 25% of the grade by the 'drop-date". In relation to learning outcomes, 88 courses (96%) had learning outcomes listed on their syllabi.

Six courses (6.5%) reported use of I-clickers. Several faculty at the first year caucus also noted that I-clickers were used in first year courses. Reportedly 89 courses (97%) used blackboard however the use of blackboard differed significantly between courses based on information on the syllabi.

The data scan yielded interesting results in the areas of assessment and pedagogy. A total of 96% of the first year courses have a final exam, 86% report having a mid-term exam, 37% report quizzes, and 14% have online quizzes. Thus, the most common form of assessment is test-taking. The majority of the test assessments are reportedly conducted using scantron test formats. The average weight of midterm tests was 21.2% of the final grade with a range of 10-30%. Weight of the final exams averaged at 31.4% with the range of 20-50% of the course evaluation. When due dates and final exam grades were combined, the average weight of work submitted in the final 2 weeks of class averaged at 49% (with a range of 28-65% of the weighting occurring in the final 2 weeks).

In regards to pedagogy, 88% (81 courses) use a lecture format for some of the course. Seminars, workshops or labs were reported to be used in 62 courses (67%). Six syllabi were delivered as online courses.

6. Discussion – What did we learn?

6.1 Phase 1: Instructor Perspective

Faculty enthusiastically reported several benefits to teaching first year courses. For example, faculty reported deep personal satisfaction of introducing their field of study to new students. Instructors saw themselves in many cases as the embodied introduction to their fields and valued being the first university subject encounter of first year students. Faculty also reported seeing the value and responsibility of supporting students making connections to peers, departments and the institution.   Faculty recognized and appreciated the student enthusiasm and eagerness to learn. Faculty also acknowledged the rewarding aspect of seeing students working in new ways to think about new topics and inspiring ideas.

Concurrently with the positive aspects of teaching first year courses, faculty also reported that there were some specific challenges. These challenges included the volume of administrative tasks such as email and learning management system tasks: Faculty reported that administrative tasks were heavy and interfered at times with their course planning time. Faculty also reported that they felt pressure periodically from their departments around the need to prepare every student for upper year courses and teach all the required foundations within the subject area. There was discussion about how first year teaching loads were assigned and how the work load was acknowledged. Faculty reported consistently that it is significantly more work to teach first year courses compared to upper year courses. Several faculty reported only being able to teach first year courses for a limited time as a result of the heavy workload. Faculty also noted that their teaching pedagogy was limited as a result of teaching large classes in spaces that were not flexible. Faculty noted it was difficult to engage in active learning techniques when several hundred students are in a room where the chairs were affixed to the floor (not moveable). Faculty reflected on the challenges of engaging the students who are viewing their lectures from the over-flow spaces and the impact this would have on their learning experience, including not being able to directly connect with students. Another challenge reported by faculty involved finding strategies to keep advanced students engaged and interested in the subject.

6.2 Phase 2: Student Academic Support Staff Perspective

The student academic support staff contributed an interesting frontline perspective about the first year learning experience at Trent. Similar to faculty findings, there is a parallel expression of both benefits and challenges to supporting first year learners. The major findings of the staff perspective captured the complexity of the students and the student difficulties navigating academic requirements. The data from this staff group reported frequent contact with Trent

first year students (50% reported daily contact and 32% reported weekly contact). Several of these encounters were reoccurring; 68.75% of the meetings were reoccurring appointments with first-year students. In relation to upper year students, 50% of the staff reported spending over 90% of their time with first year students. The staff reported that the main issues brought forward by first year students included; academic challenges, life transition difficulties, conduct/ behavioural issues, emotional issues, social problems, mental health issues, under preparedness for university and difficulty navigating course requirements. The staff reported that many of the meetings with students involved difficult challenges that required considerable amount of time by the staff to address. The complexity of the cases was evident by the staff reporting that 87.5% of the students they see are experiencing academic distress and 75% of the students were in distress outside their academics as well.

Student complexity reportedly took on many forms including under-preparedness both academically and personally for university studies. It was also noted that students experienced significant difficulty navigating course selection, drop dates, degree requirements, pre-requisites, program requirements, academic supports and accessing resources and services. Although accessing resources was identified as challenging, several students were able to access services. Data from the Student Accessibility Services office reported that for the 2015-2016 academic year, of the 1073 registered with SAS, 257 were first year students. Of the 257 students, 177 would be reported to be 101 students (direct from high-school). The SAS staff reported 1069 appointments by first year students and the Centre for Academic Testing facilitated 1549 quizzes, tests and/ or exams for first year students. Academic advising also reported that during the 2015-2016 academic term, 6627 appointments whereby 27% were serving first year students. Academic skills reported that of the 2156 individual appointments last academic year, 38% were with first year students.

The staff also reported the positive feedback about Trent that they heard from students in their meetings. Clustered in rank order, the positive feedback from students were as follows: feeling welcomed in a supportive environment; positive academic experiences; and, experiencing an inclusive Trent community culture. The staff reported that common first year student concerns rank ordered were: difficulty accessing information and services; transitioning and preparedness to university; life stressors; course challenges; and, enrollment management difficulties.

6.3 Phase 3: Student Perspective (Present & Past)

Present students in first year:

The 1st year students reported several highlights of their first year courses at Trent. Clustered and in rank order were:

1. program/ discipline specific highlights (39%) such as learning specific foundations of a field, falling in love with a subject, confirmation that this is what they want to study, and finding a new discipline they never knew about before;

2. the student reported their highlights included an instructor/ faculty/ TA (31%). Examples included being inspired by an extraordinary instructor, learning about their fields deeply and personally, and having terrific support from their TA's;

3. The students reported personal academic accomplishments (12%) as a highlight of first year courses such as achieving a particular grade on an assignment or in a course, passing a course, and working hard and seeing it pay off;

4. First year students reported that campus communities (12%) such as their residence groups and colleges helped form an academic highlight.

5. Students also reported their academic highlight was achieved through academic supports (7%) such as the SAS office, Academic Advising and Academic Skills.

The survey also provided insight into the reported challenges of their first year courses at Trent. Clustered and in rank order were:

1. Course disappointments (26%) such as the course not being what they had hoped it would be.

2. Students reported challenges with an instructor/ faculty/ TA issues (16%);

3. Students also noted challenges with specific assessment practices and evaluation issues (15%);

4. Academic difficulties (13%) such as not being prepared and having difficulty with course material were also reported.

5. Students reported that the financial pressures and the need for work contributed to academic challenges financial (8%).

6. The survey also noted that overall work load (7%) created challenges in their first year courses as well as lack of space (6%) concerns to work.

7. Lack of preparation skills (5%) such as not being able to complete the work load and complete assignments at the course level expectation and 'keeping-up' were also reported as a challenge to their academic experience.

When asked what they would change about their first year learning experience at Trent, the students reported the following:

1. Getting more involved (25%);
2. Improvement to campus services (not food) (13%);
3. More academic choice (10%);
4. Increase focus on academics and academic supports (9%);
5. Improved food services (4%);
6. Less financial burdens (2%).

Overall, the students agreed that their first year at Trent was engaging (81.72%), challenging (84.95%) and terrific (68.08%).

Past students, now in second year:

When asked to reflect on their first year experience, the 2nd year students reported several highlight of their first year courses at Trent. Clustered and in rank order, were:

1. Program/ discipline specific highlights (36%) such as loving their program of study and the curriculum/ content;

2. Instructor/ faculty/ TA (30%) teaching and interactions were reported as highlights;

3. Personal academic accomplishments (23%) such as success on a particular course, a course paper or assignment and completing the first year successfully were also reported;

4. Students reported that campus communities (6%), academic supports (6%), and college life (1%) all contributed to their academic highlights. The data clustered and rank ordered was the same as first year students with minimal variance.

The survey also provided insight into the reported challenges the second year students remembered about their first year courses at Trent. Clustered and in rank order, were; instructor/ faculty/ TA issues (23%), course disappointments (18%), both assessment and evaluation issues and academic difficulties (11% respectively), financial and lack of preparation or skills (3% respectively), and workload (2%). There was an increase in reported challenges with instructors/ faculty/ TA's by the second year students, however, the other reported challenges were relatively consistent compared to first year students.

When asked what they would change about their first year learning experience at Trent, the students reported the following:

1. Getting more involved (58%);
2. Improved food services (20%);
3. Increase focus on academics (12%);
4. improvement to campus services (not food) (8%); and,
5. Less financial burdens (2%).

These results suggest that the majority of second year students wished they had been more involved in first year learning opportunities and a quarter of the students wished for an improvement of food services on campus.

Overall, in retrospect, the students reported their first year at Trent was engaging (84%), challenging (77.34%) and terrific (62.17%).

Both the first year student and the second year student data sets reported similar findings across all main areas. One major theme that came forward for both sets of students was the notion of want to be more involved. Student involvement can be linked with student engagement. The psychological component of student engagement includes a sense of belonging. If students are not engaged, then they tend to feel that they do not belong; if students feel that they do not belong, then they are less likely to participate and engage, so it becomes a cycle of continued alienation for students whose do not feel that their beliefs and values are recognized and valued by their educational institution (Krause & Coates, 2008). Institutions that offer early opportunities for first-year students to connect with peers, staff, and faculty could help to facilitate the engagement process for students, which could assist with transition issues and help to foster a sense of belonging within the university community. Although there are 'first-week' orientation activities, students still identified that they wished they had more of a sense of belonging. It is also important that students can easily identify and access the various student support services that exist across campus. Orientation is an excellent starting point for fostering student engagement, however, it is also important that this focus continues on throughout the student's first-year, as the students' needs will change at different points throughout the academic year. This means that Trent may need to make the effort to further understand the detailed experiences and needs of this first-year students in order to recognize which actions need to be taken and at what times throughout the year.

6.4 Phase 4: Syllabus Scan

The course syllabi were used to capture basic course design approaches for first year courses at Trent. A total of 92 first year course syllabi were reviewed broken down into 88 half courses

and 4 full year courses. A total of 84 courses (91%) provided 25% of the students' grade by the drop-date. Interestingly in the open text responses from students, several reports of this not being the case in practice were reported. In relation to learning outcomes, 88 courses (96%) had learning outcomes listed on their syllabi.

Six courses (6.5%) reported used i-clickers. It is interesting to note that several faculty at the first year caucus discussed that i-clickers were used in 'most' first year courses. Reportedly 89 courses (97%) used blackboard, however the use of blackboard seemed to differ significantly from course to course.

Assessment

Of particular interest are the findings around assessment practices in first year courses. A total of 96% of the first year courses have a final exam, 86% report having a mid-term exam, 37% report quizzes, and 14% have online quizzes. The most common form of assessment is clearly test taking. This may be in part due to the number of students who require evaluation in first year courses. The majority of the test structures are reportedly conducted using scantron test formats. The average weight of midterm tests was 21.2% of the final grade with a range of 10-30%. Weight of final exams averaged at 31.4% with the range of 20-50% of the final weight of the course. When due dates and final exam grades were combined, the average weight of work submitted in the *final* 2 weeks of class averaged at 49% with a range of 28-65%. This is of significant concern: Assuming that a first year student is taking 5 courses (full load – required for OSAP), 50% of all their grades are conducted within a two-week timeframe at the exam period. This may result in significant stress, impact authentic learning, and affect student success and retention (Bask & Salmela-Aro, 2013).

Non-exam written forms of assessment were significantly lower: 62% of courses have a written component, and of the 62% of the courses with this written final assessment, 40% had a research paper component not conducted in a test-taking scenario. Few courses, have group assignments (8 courses) or individual presentations (6 courses) which have been identified as key assessment practices for student learning, student engagement and job embedded learning (Badcock, Pattison, & Harris, 2010).

Pedagogy

Pedagogy involves the methods and practices of teaching, and is sometimes referred to as the combination of the science and art of teaching. There are a range of different approaches to teaching at any education institution. From the syllabus review, 88% (81 courses) reported using a lecture format for some of the course. Similarly, in the faculty survey, of 109 respondents, 99 instructors reported using a lecture format in their teaching. Seminars,

workshops or labs were reported to be used in 62 courses (67%). Six courses were delivered as online courses. The reports from instructors in survey format added greater detail to pedagogical practices and these are outlined in Section 5.1 (table 5) of this report.

7. Recommendations

When the complexities of responses from the various participants are taken into consideration, it does provide a helpful summary of the first year academic experience. This summary is in no way fully representative of the first year experience. Nonetheless, the evidence from this project warrants deliberation. The recommendations in this section are *in the form of actions for consideration* and are categorized as they relate to faculty, students and staff.

7.1 Related to Faculty

In the category of faculty, the recommendations are grouped into two broad areas: Instructional support and assessment considerations.

Instructional Support

1. Maintain a form of support for faculty who are teaching first year courses through the self-named First Year Caucus. This caucus should meet at least twice annually to continue to identify challenges and successes of teaching first year courses at Trent.

2. Consider how first year courses are staffed. Is there a way to incentivize faculty who enjoy teaching first year courses and implement highly engaging pedagogies when teaching first year courses?

3. Consider whether there is a way to shift the balance of resources toward large first year classes as appropriate. This would involve discussion amongst faculty and deans.

4. Develop a program to support faculty in implementing a greater range and/or depth of active learning strategies that are customized to their size of classes (small, mid-sized or large classes).

5. Support first year instructors in developing manageable and descriptive course-based learning outcomes that align with the principles/philosophy of the course and the program.

6. Develop structures/opportunities that encourage faculty to work more directly with student support staff to develop ways to support those students who do not appear to be quite ready for university learning: What kinds of programming can be linked directly to the specific skills that students need in specific first year courses? And how might student support staff connect in to this programming to not only support students but instructors of first year courses?

Assessment considerations

1. Trent should consider articulating basic principles of student assessment. Several programs within Trent have done just that, and the following principles are an example set, that reflect program level statements at Trent (where those have been stated), as well as common understandings of best practices in assessment (Principles of Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada, 1996).

Course-level assessment strategies should:
- be valid
- be communicated clearly
- allow students to demonstrate their understanding
- provide opportunities for timely feedback (for the purpose of improvement
- be connected to the learning outcomes or goals of the course and the program
- reflect and incorporate what is valued in the course
- be authentic / relevant to the student
- be flexible
- have sufficient variety to enable different student strengths and needs to be demonstrated and further developed
- include both formative and summative opportunities

These principles might serve faculty and programs well when designing course assignments, shared program-level capstone courses, capping assignments, and new programs.

2. Consider how to move some of the assessment and evaluation of students that are typically reserved to the very end of the course, toward the mid-point of courses so that students are not experiencing extreme stress about their grades at the end of the course, and have a sense of 'how they are doing' earlier on in the process.

3. Increase professional learning opportunities for faculty through a professional development series focused on sharing assessment ideas for first year courses. The focus of these sessions could build on the notion of "class-embedded assessments" which (i) occur within class time, (ii) usually involve a demonstration of understanding, (iii) can be individual or group-based, and (iv) provide direct evidence that students are meeting course learning outcomes/goals. Class-embedded assessments have the advantage of providing students with timely feedback. This is known as a 'just-in-time learning approach' and does involve flexible teaching (Ryan & Tilbury, 2013), but also offers a way to realistically capture student understanding 'in the moment' and often blocks common forms of academic dishonesty. Class-embedded assessments are positively linked to attendance and retention.

7.2 Related to Students

Students reported that the greatest impacts on their experiences as first year students were academic. These positive academic experiences were the highlights of the year for most students. Their lowlights related predominantly to engagement and regrets of 'not getting more involved'.

The recommendations above related to faculty, also directly affect students. In addition to the above, Trent should consider three student-focused academic recommendations.

1. Continue to elicit responses from students regarding their first year experiences through surveys and other means. This could be in the form of a three- to five-year study that provides faculty and administration with insights into the first year experience from the students' perspective – not just from an academic lens but even more broadly. This recommendation is aligned with the recent Retention Review Report recommendations.

2. Review access to student academic support services, by gathering additional data on student wait times for academic advising and support. Is Trent confident that there are sufficient academic supports for first year students?

3. Continue with the development of a Student Planning Degree Audit System (an online academic planning tool for students that helps them make important decisions about their program and courses) by providing key information about academic options, requirements and opportunities. This work is being initiated as a joint project between the Registrar's Office and Information Technology.

In the longer term, Trent could consider developing an online First Year Student Navigation System that provides first year students with online textbooks, syllabi, academic events, schedules, maps of rooms, modules on academic integrity and tutorials on essential skills for learning in first year.

Based on the student survey results, engagement in the academy overall is of concern. Therefore, a fourth student recommendation that steps beyond the bounds of academics is proposed:

4. Examine the range and nature of ways that first year students can become involved in life at Trent University. This work should also involve delving more deeply into asking students what would help them to become more involved in student life.

7.3 Related to Staff and Administration

Again, the recommendations listed above often involve staff and/or administration. In addition to the above, Trent could consider the following:

1. Discuss with Deans and the Strategic Enrollment Management committee, what might constitute a personalized experience in first year courses. This should be discussed from two perspectives: good practice and reputation. If the Trent experience is personalized, how does the instructor manage this in very large classes? What might constitute a cut-off point for a section in first year courses? And/or how might student learning be enhanced through greater emphasis on seminars, labs and workshops. Further data should reviewed regarding the number of classes that use overflow rooms. Departments and the Registrar's Office could provide information on the level of supports in place for large classes (e.g., the number of workshop leaders, TA's, supports to faculty, etc). Based on these discussions, Trent could determine a standard for personalized contact with faculty, and develop a plan for implementation based on the decisions reached. This would also likely require a shifting of instructional resource allocation.

2. Examine academic supports for first year students further in terms of access, wait times and nature of services. Based on the data gathered to date, the college advising system does provide students with academic support in many ways, however the question of connecting with those students who are struggling and not reaching out for supports remains a significant area of difficulty.

3. Further examine methods for engaging students in terms of their sense of belonging at Trent. What programs and offerings help a wider range of students in developing this sense of belonging and engagement? And how can these programs be implemented more consistently?

4. Engage faculty and administration in discussions about the purpose and value of the current emphasis on final exams in first year courses. Are final exams the best strategy for assessing student learning in all cases? Are there alternate forms of assessment that are equally valuable and enable students to demonstrate their understanding in more relevant but still rigorous ways? If final exams were to be reduced in quantity, resources may need to be allocated to assessment and evaluation practices that are more directly embedded in the course.

5. Several groups have introduced the idea of foundational 1st year courses as a strategy for supporting 1st year learning experiences across disciplines. These courses could be aimed at helping students develop academic skills and familiarizing students with university level expectations. Consider whether a summer block preparation might also provide foundational experiences for students who are potentially at risk, based on their entrance grades.

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APPENDIX A

Faculty Survey

Inventory of 1st Year Courses

Q31 This survey is aimed at better understanding the challenges and benefits of teaching first year courses. The survey stems from a First Year Instructor meeting where the gathering of this data was seen as an important step to better understand what the first year student experience is like. The Centre for Teaching and Learning gathered these questions from face-to-face meetings and from a document feedback process. This survey is specifically designed to gather data on first year courses and instruction. Thank you very much for taking the time to respond. We recognize that this takes time and we appreciate your participation.

Q1 What is the Course Code for the first year course you teach/coordinate/oversee/support?(ex. ADMN 1000)

Q2 Home department for the course:

Q18 What is your role with your course?

○ Department Chair
○ Instructor - CUPE
○ Instructor - TUFA
○ Lab Demonstrator
○ Teaching Assistant - CUPE
○ Teaching Assistant - OPSEU
○ Workshop Leader - CUPE

Q10 How many students are enrolled in the course for 2014-2015?

○ 0-49
○ 50-99
○ 100-149
○ 150-199
○ 200-249
○ 250-299
○ 300+

Q3 How many times have you taught this course?

○ Once, twice, 3-5 times, 5-10 times, more than 10 times

Q5 Describe how instructors are allocated to the first year courses.

Q22 How many hours per week do you spend on the course, outside of teaching time, on assessment and evaluation?

○ 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10, 10+

Q21   How many hours per week do you spend on the course, outside of teaching time, preparing course content and materials?

○ 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10, 10+

Q15 How many hours per week do you spend on the course, outside of teaching time, completing administrative tasks (emails, meetings etc)?

○ 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10, 10+

Q17 Which university services does your course utilize?

❑ Academic Skills Centre
❑ Bookstore
❑ Career Centre
❑ Centre for Academic Testing (CAT)
❑ Centre for Teaching and Learning - Professional Development
❑ Counselling
❑ Information Technology
❑ Library - Library Skills Modules
❑ Student Accessibility Services
❑ Trent Online
❑ Other _____
❑ None

Q12 What is the teaching format?

❑ clinical
❑ field work
❑ lab
❑ lecture
❑ online
❑ seminar
❑ workshop

Q34 What room(s) do you teach in? If more than one, separate rooms by semi-colon.

Q23 What technology is used in your course?

- ❑ Blackboard
- ❑ Clicker Response System
- ❑ Data Projectors & Screens
- ❑ Document Camera
- ❑ DVD Player
- ❑ In-Room Audio System
- ❑ Lectern computer with CD/DVD, TrentNet, Internet access
- ❑ Laptop with input adapter (audio / video)
- ❑ Lectern Microphone
- ❑ Panopto Webcasting System
- ❑ Telephone
- ❑ Touch Screen (Interactive Whiteboard)
- ❑ Video Conferencing
- ❑ Wireless Microphone
- ❑ Other _____

Q20 What additional technology would you like to use in your course?

Q24 What physical space requirements do you have for your course?

- ❑ auditorium seating
- ❑ lab space (ex.computer lab, chemistry lab etc.) _____
- ❑ modular furniture (moveable)
- ❑ performing space
- ❑ traditional desks
- ❑ Other _____

Q25 What is your ideal physical space for your class?

Q35 What technology is used in your class?

- ❑ Blackboard
- ❑ Panopto
- ❑ Textbook Manufacturer's site
- ❑ Other _____

Q26 What teaching strategies do you use in your course?

- ❑ debates
- ❑ field trips
- ❑ flipped instruction (e.g. content provided online in advance with problem structure in class)
- ❑ individual prompted reflection
- ❑ lecture
- ❑ on campus but out-of-class events / meetings
- ❑ outdoor excursions
- ❑ Q & A periods
- ❑ small group discussion
- ❑ small group problem solving
- ❑ survey questions
- ❑ use of Apps on tablets or handhelds
- ❑ use of current events
- ❑ use of equipment and/or hands-on materials
- ❑ use of social media (twitter, instagram, Facebook, etc)
- ❑ use of video for analysis/discussion
- ❑ whole group facilitated discussion
- ❑ Other _____

Q28 What are two challenges you find with teaching a first year course?

Q29 What are two positives and / or highlights of teaching a first year course?

Q27 Additional comments

Q32 Thank you for completing this survey. Some of the data will be used when compiling a report on the teaching of first year courses and first year student experiences. The report will be shared in future meetings with first year instructor group.

APPENDIX B

Faculty Survey Results

Table 1 *Role with 1ˢᵗ year course*

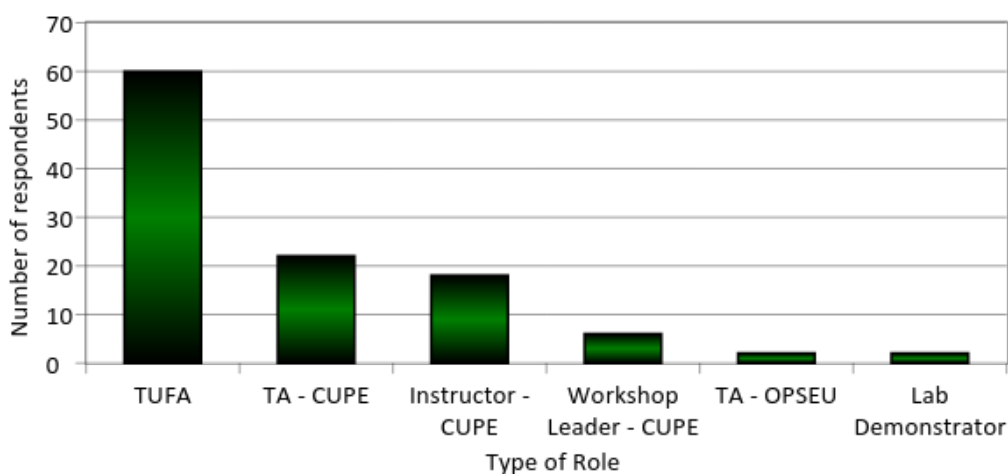| Role in 1ˢᵗ year course	# of respondents	%
Instructor – CUPE	18	16
Instructor – TUFA	60	55
Teaching Assistant – CUPE	22	20
Teaching Assistant – OPSEU	2	2
Workshop Leader – CUPE	6	5
Lab Demonstrator	2	2
TOTAL	114	100%

Figure 1. Reported role within 1st year course

Table 2 *Number of enrolled students in your 1ˢᵗ year course (2014-2015)*

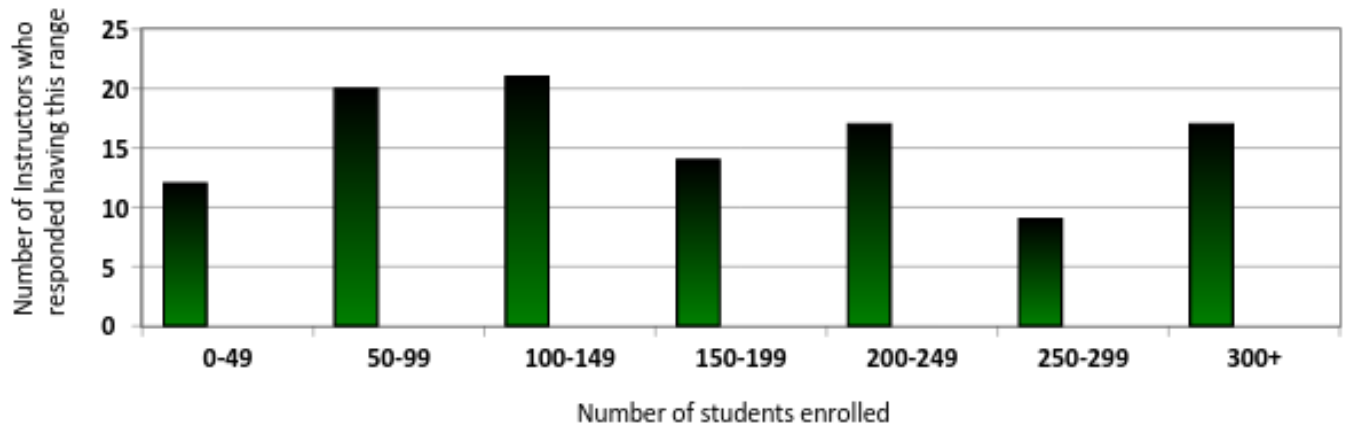| # of Students Enrolled	Reported ratio of students in their course	% of classes with students in this range
0-49	12	11%
50-99	20	18%
100-149	21	19%
150-199	14	13%
200-249	17	15%
250-299	9	8%
300+	17	15%

Figure 2. Enrollment of students by ranges

Table 3 *Number of times Instructor has taught this 1st year course*

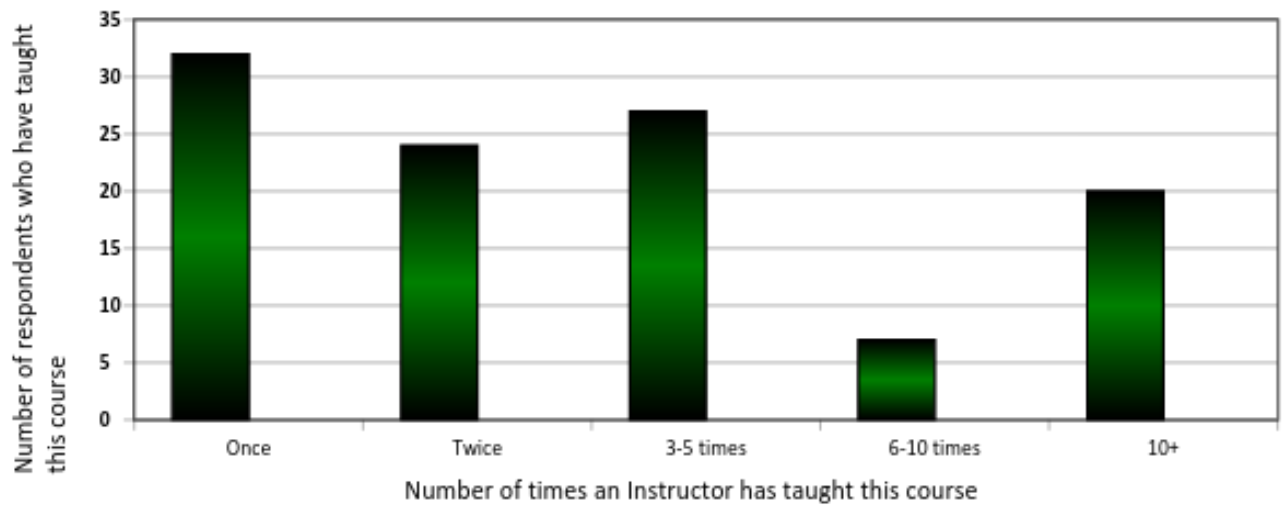| Number of times Instructor have taught THIS 1st year course	Number of respondent who have taught this course	% of instructors who have taught this course in this range
1 time	32	29%
2 times	24	22%
3-5 times	27	25%
6-10 times	7	6%
More than 10 times	20	18%
M = (2.63)		

Figure 3 Number of times Instructor has taught THIS 1st year class

Table 4 *Number of hours reportedly spent on Assessment and Evaluation*

Number of hours Instructors spent on Assessment & Evaluation	Number of hours/ weekly spent on Assessment & Evaluations	% of reported hours in instructors spent on Assessment & Evaluations
1-2 hours	27	25%
3-4 hours	45	41%
5-6 hours	19	17%
7-8 hours	7	6%
9-10 hours	4	4%
10+ hours	8	7%
M = (2.45)		

Figure 4 *Weekly hours spent on Assessment & Evaluation*

Table 5 *Number of hours reportedly spent on Content & Materials*

Number of hours Instructors spent on preparing course Content & Materials	Number of hours/ weekly spent on Content & Materials	% of reported hours in instructors spent on Content & Materials
1-2 hours	25	29%
3-4 hours	30	21%
5-6 hours	21	25%
7-8 hours	16	7%
9-10 hours	4	18%
10 + hrs	14	5%
M = (2.87)		
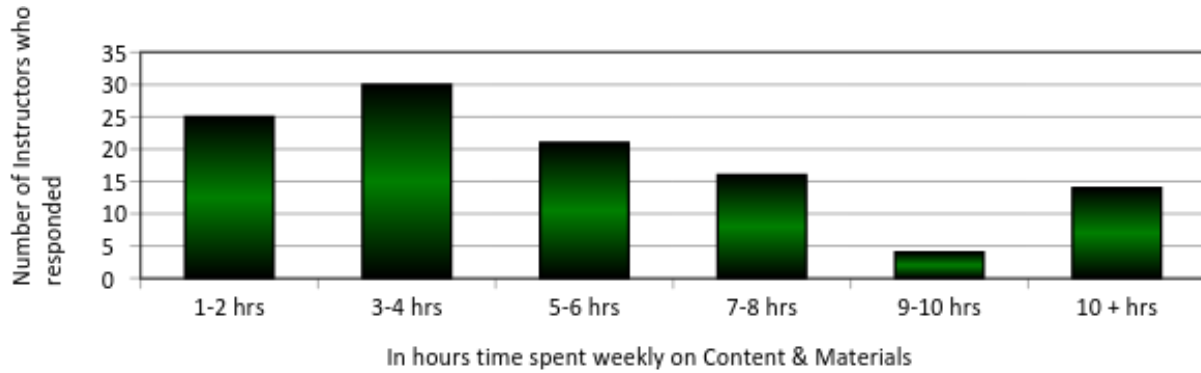
Figure 5 Weekly hours spent on Content & Materials

Table 6 *Number of hours reportedly spent on Course Administrative Tasks*

Number of hours per week Instructors spent on Course Administrative Tasks	Number of hours/ weekly spent on Course Administrative Tasks	% of reported hours in instructors spent on Course Administrative Tasks
1-2 hours	63	57%
3-4 hours	25	23%
5-6 hours	6	5%
7-8 hours	7	6%
9-10 hours	2	2%
10 + hrs	7	6%
M = (1.92)		

Figure 6 Weekly hours spent on Course Administrative Tasks

Table 7 *University services utilized in the course*

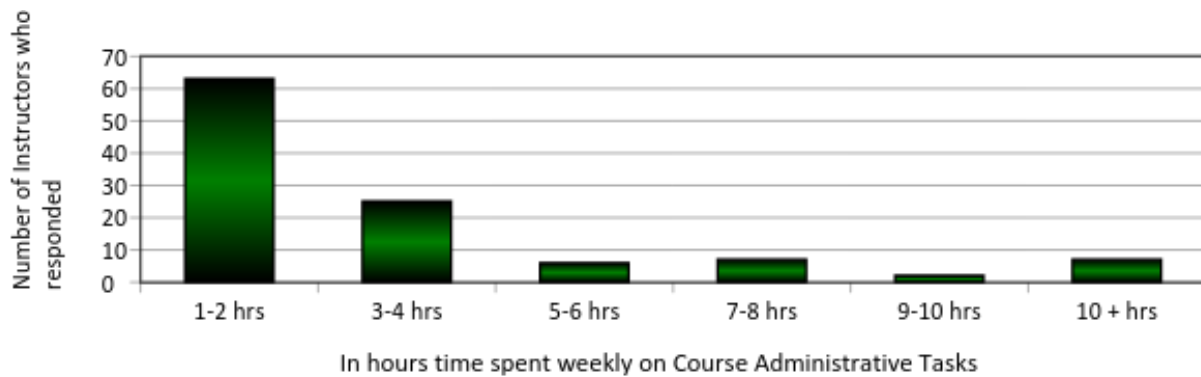| Which University services does your course utilize?	Responses who used this service	% of respondents used this service
Student Accessibility Services (SAS)	83	75%
Bookstore	70	63%
Academic Skills Centre	65	59%
Information Technology	52	47%
Trent Online	49	44%
Centre for Academic Testing (CAT)	48	43%
Counselling (part of SAS)	12	11%
Centre for Teaching & Learning	9	8%
Career Centre	2	2%
Other: Blackboard Learning System (6) First People's House of Learning (2) Librarian (1) Trent Community Research Centre (1) Nursing Lab (1)		

Table 8 *Teaching Format Used in 1st year Courses*

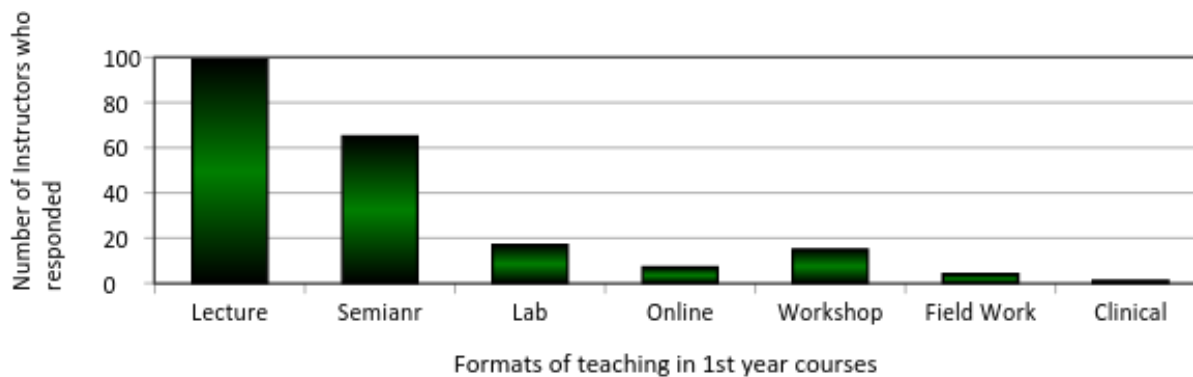| Format used for teaching.	Responses who used this format	% of respondents used this format
Lecture	99	90%
Seminar	65	59%
Lab	17	15%
Online	16	14%
Workshop	15	14%
Field Work	4	4%
Clinical	1	1%

Figure 7 *Format of teaching used in 1st year courses*

Table 9 *Teaching strategies used in 1st year courses.*

Teaching strategies used in 1st year courses	Responses who use this type of teaching strategy	% of respondents who use this type of teaching strategy
Lecture	92	84%
Small Group Discussions	81	74%
Whole Group Facilitated Discussion	73	66%
Use of Current Events	67	61%
Individual prompted reflection	60	55%
Small Group Problem Solving	60	55%
Use of Video for Analysis / Discussion	56	51%
Q & A Periods	53	48%
Debates	41	37%
Use of Equipment and/or Hands-on Material	33	30%
Flipped Instruction	26	24%
Use of Social Media	18	16%
On campus but out of class / meetings	9	8%
Survey Questions	8	7%
Field Trips	6	5%
Use of Apps on Tablets or Handhelds	6	5%
Outdoor Excursions	5	5%
Guest speakers	5	5%
Other: Elder/traditional teacher (1), patient actors for role plays (1), demonstrators (1), experiential learning (1), socratic method (1), student led presentations (1), group assignments (1), practice exams (1)		

Table 10 *Rooms used for 1st year courses – Top 9 rooms presented in table. (Additional information is found in Appendix)*

Which room are used for 1st year courses	Responses who used this room (Top 9)
Wenjack Theatre	24
Science Complex 137	17
Gzowski College 114	10
Otonabee College 203	7
Gzowski College 117	5
Gzowski College 105	5
Gzowski College 110	5
Durham Campus 121	4
Durham Campus 125	4

Table 11 *Technology used in 1st year Courses*

Technology used in 1st year courses	Responses who used this technology	% of respondents used this technology
Blackboard Learning System	85	89%
Lecturen computer with CD / DVD, TrentNet, Internet Access	74	79%
Data Projectors & Screens	62	66%
In-Room Audio System	49	52%
Lecture Microphone	37	39%
Wireless Microphone	34	36%
Panopto Webcasting System	27	29%
DVD Player	26	28%
Laptop with input adapter (audio / video)	25	27%
Document Camera	20	21%
Clicker Responses System	7	7%
Telephone	6	6%
Touch Screen (Interactive Whiteboard	3	3%
Video Conferencing	1	1%
Other: Tablet (2), Website (1), Satellite Room (1), McGraw Hill Connect (1), Chalk/white board (1)		

Table 12 *Technology 1st year Instructors would like to use.*

Technology 1sy year course instructors would like to use	Responses who would like to add this technology
Clickers	5
Interactive boards	4
Portable microphone	3
Projector	2
Tablets	2
Audio/ visual content online	2
Video recording	2
Other: Splash top (1), Bamboo tablet (1), Greater Wifi capacity (1), Camera more than 1 angle (1), Improved lighting (1)	

Table 13 *1st year Instructors physical space requirements.*

Physical space requirements for 1st year course instructors	Responses who require this type of physical space	% of respondents who require this physical space
Auditorium seating	67	71%
Modular furniture	27	28%
Lab space	14	15%
Seminar space	11	12%
Performing space	5	5%
Other: Break out rooms (1), workshop space (1)		

Table 14 A *Ideal furniture type for 1st year Instructors.*

Ideal furniture requirements for 1st year course instructors	Responses who would like this type of furniture
Modular furniture	22
Increased desk space for students to write	5
Folding desks/ tables	1

Table 14 B *Ideal size of space for 1st year Instructors.*

Ideal size of space for 1st year course instructors	Responses who would like this type of space size
Larger auditorium space than Wenjack	4
Spacious rooms	2
Lecture hall without Internet	1

Table 14 C *Ideal environment for 1st year Instructors.*

Ideal environment for 1st year course instructors	Responses who would like this type of environment
Improved lighting/ dimming/ windows	5
Spacious seating	3
Whiteboards around room	2
TV monitors	2
Instructor/ student seating gap closer	2
Other: Podium that doesn't block the screen (1), podium that doesn't block instructor from students (1), improved microphone system (1), removal of broken furniture (1), improved seminar rooms overall (1)	

Table 15 *1st year Instructors reported challenges.*

1st year course instructors reported challenges	Number of responses
Motivating, Engaging Students	30
Under preparedness by students	20
Size of Classes	16
Administrative Support**	13
Teaching to various types of Students	11
Tech: Distraction for students	5
Tech: Not working	5
Students unaware of University Resources	5
Spaces	5
TA Challenges	4
Lack of Resources	4
Instructors underprepared to teach	2

Table 16 *1st year Instructors reported positives/ highlights.*

1st year course instructors reported positives/highlights	Number of responses
Enthusiasm and eagerness of students to learn	28
Seeing student's think about new topics / inspiring a field of study	14
Teaching good foundations for university careers	9
Seeing student's grown and progress	9
Diversity of students	7
Challenge of exciting students	2
Sharing joy and material with students, designing course	2
The topics I get to discuss & teach	2
Rewarding experience	1
Availability of resources on demand	1
Support from course Lead	1

Table 17 A *1st year Instructors challenges reported.*

Challenges
Seminar-lecture model/ Class size barrier to engagement
Preparedness of students
Use of undergraduate markers/ TA's/ consistent marking
Student Accessibility Services and Centre for Academic Testing booking systems
First year student burnout
TA hours exceed GTA's allotment
Curriculum
Availability of resources on demand
Support from course Lead
Keeping strong students engaged

Table 17 B *1st year Instructors suggestions reported.*

Suggestions
Implement required writing skills
Honorariums for guests/ keynote speakers
Seminar/ tutorials no more than 20 students
More teaching/ professional development opportunities
Ensure ESL students truly meet TOEFL standards

Table 17 C *1st year Instructors general comments reported.*

General comments
Need a fundamental re-think of first year experiences at Trent
Opportunities to discuss pedagogy
Seminar/ tutorials no more than 20 students
More teaching/ professional development opportunities
Ensure ESL students truly meet TOEFL standards
Overall rewarding

APPENDIX C

Focus Group Process and questions:

A faculty focus group was conducted to further explore themes and trends from the data. The focus group was hosted in June 2015 with 6 faculty members who each had extensive experience and knowledge of 1st year teaching at Trent were invited. The focus group was facilitated around 3 questions.

Q.1. What are the positives of teaching 1st year courses?
Q.2. What are the challenges of teaching 1st year courses?
Q.3. What is one wish you have for 1st year teaching?

APPENDIX D

Student Support Staff Survey Questions:

1. Role:
   DROP DOWN MENU

2. What kind of supports/ services do you offer 1st year students?
   OPEN

3. What types of interactions do you have with 1st year students?
   FORMAL MEETINGS/ SCHEDULED APPOINTMENTS
   INFORMAL DROP INS
   SPECIAL EVENTS
   1:1 SUPPORT
   GROUP SUPPORT
   OTHER:
   (All that apply)

4. How often do you work with 1st year students?
   Daily
   Weekly
   Fortnightly
   Monthly
   Yearly

5. Estimate the amount of time you spend with 1st year students compared to other year students?
   Ratio of time spent with 1st year students (expressed as a %)

   1-25%
   26-50%
   51-75%
   75-95%
   96-100%

6. How would you describe the intensity of contact?
   Easy to answer questions
   Moderate challenges that can be addressed
   Difficult challenges that require additional attention and time
   Extreme challenges beyond the scope or capacity of the team

7. Estimated percentage of students who you perceive to be in short term distress
   0%
   25%
   50%

75%
100%

8. What is the nature of this perceived distress?
    Open field

9. Estimated percentage of students who you perceive to be in long term distress
    0%
    25%
    50%
    75%
    100%

10. What is the nature of this perceived distress?
    Open field

11. In your role, what are three positive comments that 1st year students make about their experience at Trent University?
    Open Field

12. In your role, what are three reported difficulties or challenges that 1st year students experience at Trent University?
    Open Field

13. If you could change one thing about the 1st year student experience what would it be?
    Open Field

14. Other Comments: