Enhancing Inquiry Based Teaching and Learning in the Social Sciences:
Forward With Integrity Faculty Development Project
FINAL REPORT October 2015

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What was the Social Sciences Inquiry project about?

This project’s central goals were aimed at empowering both experienced and first-time SOC SCI 1SS3: Inquiry in the Social Sciences instructors to become more knowledgeable and more confident in their teaching within an Inquiry model – and so in their teaching more broadly; to further elevate the learning experience of first-year Social Sciences students in our Inquiry course; and to reinvigorate our Inquiry teaching in response to contemporary and changing student needs. This initiative provided a number of professional development opportunities for Inquiry instructors in the 2014-2015 academic year, and resulted in resources (and institutional memory) that will assist instructors – current and future. The resources developed through this initiative (the one-day Symposium Workshop, ‘topic’ workshops, and Instructor Manual and Resources) will have sustained and ongoing value for teaching and learning within the Faculty, and more broadly at McMaster and beyond.

How did the activity enhance the competence and effectiveness of individuals (or others) with respect to teaching, research, service and/or leadership?

For Dr. Busser, as an Inquiry 1SS3 instructor, the opportunity to engage with instructor peers in the capacity of ‘teaching lead and mentor’ was beneficial because it gave him the chance to learn about the different approaches, techniques, and strategies other 1SS3 instructors have been applying in their 1SS3 teaching. For the 2014-2015 cohort of first-year Inquiry instructors in Social Sciences, this initiative was reportedly invaluable, especially in terms of providing practical and pedagogical insights into best practices, teaching strategies, and in-class exercises. Instructors (both new and experienced) reported that opportunities to meet with their instructor peers through facilitated workshops provided them with several solutions for addressing recurring challenges in the classroom, and with new approaches and ideas to enhance their teaching. For Dr. Campbell, as Associate Dean (Academic), this initiative provided a greater insight into the day-to-day teaching experiences of Inquiry faculty, and so a better sense of the steps the Faculty office can take to help orient new Inquiry instructors and support returning instructors.

How has the activity contributed to the goals of a course/Faculty?

This initiative has helped to consolidate the shared teaching expectations surrounding Social Sciences’ first-year Inquiry by identifying clear shared teaching goals to structure each iteration of the class while also giving instructors a clear understanding of the freedom they have to design, shape, and innovate their own
section(s). It also helped to gather some valuable information on the learning needs of first-year students, and trends within that population. This sort of student-focused insight has also, incidentally, helped to further develop the content and direction of Social Sciences 1T03, a Foundations course aimed at ensuring student success and fostering core skills amongst first-year Social Sciences students.

**What have been the results of your evaluation of the quality of the expected development and its potential impact?**

Instructors provided very positive feedback on the Symposium Workshop and topic workshops, and new instructors in particular found the one-on-one instructor support from Dr. Busser as teaching lead/mentor very valuable. As detailed below, further evaluation of the Inquiry course will continue this academic year (2015/16).

**How have you communicated and disseminated the insights gained with peers and broader McMaster communities?**

We developed a Promotional Video aimed at students, communicating the shared expectations of Inquiry 1SS3, in order to increase awareness about the course. An Instructor Handbook and other resources have been established in a shared Instructor Community on Avenue to Learn. We also plan to redesign a website for potential 1SS3 applicants. Dr. Busser, in his capacity as Inquiry Teaching Lead, has presented at and participated in a number of workshops at MIIETL, exchanging insights about the variety of Faculty-specific approaches to Inquiry at McMaster.

**How will the outcomes of the project be sustained or expanded?**

We are submitting an MREB Application, prepared over the course of the past year, to conduct a longitudinal study of student satisfaction and reflection on Inquiry 1SS3, which will also compare 1SS3-student grade outcomes (both short-term and long-term) with those of non-1SS3 students.

**Please outline any barriers or challenges that may have prevented you from achieving some of your project goals?**

We had originally hoped to begin the longitudinal study at the end of the 2014-2015 academic year, but a number of timing, logistical, and academic considerations prompted us to shift the start of the study to March 2016. Beyond that, we are very happy with what we were able to accomplish related to our goals for this project.

We would like to express our sincerest thanks to the FWI Funding Program and to the Faculty of Social Sciences for their generous support for this initiative.

Sincerely,

Dr. Lori Campbell and Dr. Mark Busser