Strategic Plan Draft Report:

Faculty of Arts: Committee on Improving the Undergraduate Student Experience

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Introduction and Approach

This committee was established in October 2010 as part of the Faculty of Arts five-year strategic plan. Its mandate was to make recommendations to improve the undergraduate student experience. It consulted a range of documentation, including past surveys and reports, and solicited feedback from faculty, support staff, administrators and students, the last-named both individually and through discipline-based student associations.

Committee members met on November 5th, 2010, to develop questions for key stakeholders. Feedback was sought in the following areas:

- Ways to improve the undergraduate student experience in the classroom
- Ways to improve the undergraduate student experience outside the classroom
- How to best balance research pressures on faculty and maintaining commitment to delivering a high quality student experience

The committee examined issues such as the relationship between class size and student satisfaction; whether it was important to guarantee students a small-class experience; how to facilitate more effective student-faculty interaction; the importance of active and community-based learning; and how to encourage a greater sense of belonging among students, staff and faculty members.

On November 18th, 2010, the committee organized a town hall that was attended by more than 60 students, faculty, administrators and support staff. It received written feedback from all discipline-based student associations in the Faculty of Arts. It also considered responses solicited from students in one 1st year Communication and one 1st year History class; previous surveys and focus groups of students from all departments in the Faculty of Arts; university wide data; and information from other universities. Committee members met again on December 9th and 17th, 2010, to analyze the evidence in order to make recommendations.

The committee concluded that a two-track approach was most appropriate. Several initiatives are best pursued at the faculty level. However, the diversity of practices and experiences within the faculty suggests that additional resources also be given to departments to pursue more specialized initiatives.

The committee further recommends that new programs be related to categories used by the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Canadian University Survey Consortium (CUSC) because they are the benchmarks upon which the student experience is judged; that they be implemented for a minimum of two years to enable practices to be properly established and programs to become known; and that they be evaluated annually to measure their impact so that the most successful are retained.

Identification of Deficits

Several surveys of University of Ottawa students demonstrate considerable deficits with respect to student engagement and widely-accepted "best practices" in undergraduate education. Arguably the most widely cited is the NSSE. Developed in 1999 and administered by the Indiana Centre for Postsecondary Research, NSSE is now used by over 1,400 universities and colleges in the United States, and nearly every Canadian university. Its categories grew out of the "Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education" developed in 1987 by Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda Gamson that emphasize the need for "contact between students and faculty ... reciprocity and cooperation among students ...active learning ... prompt feedback ... time on task ... high expectations, and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning." (*American Association for Higher Education Bulletin*, March 1987)

NSSE benchmarks student responses in five areas in the 1st and 4th year of study. Each university is compared to: (a) all universities falling under the same category, which for the University of Ottawa is the "doctoral" classification; (b) a subset of universities with a similar institutional profile called *Carnegie Peers*; and (c) all NSEE participants. As outlined below in Tables 1 through 5, in the 2009 survey, which is the latest one available online, University of Ottawa students rated their experiences as inferior, and often significantly so, when judged against every comparable group. Also problematic is that the level of dissatisfaction becomes more profound by the senior year of study.

Table 1
Level of Academic Challenge
Deals with volume and difficulty of work; the degree to which
students engage in analysis (as opposed to recapitulation) of material;
and the extent to which theory is applied to concrete situations.

Level	uOttawa	U.S Doctoral	Carnegie Peers	NSSE 2009
First Year	49.8	52.7	53.4	53.6
Senior	54.9	56.0	56.1	57.0

Table 2
Active and Collaborative Learning
Measures the extent to which students ask questions in class,
make presentations, work collaboratively with other students,
or participate in outreach activities like Service Learning.

Level	uOttawa	U.S Doctoral	Carnegie Peers	NSSE 2009
First Year	30.4	40.7	41.2	43.1
Senior	43.4	48.8	48.3	51

Table 3
Student-Faculty Interaction
Measures the extent to which students discuss grades, assignments, or career
plans with their instructor, receive prompt feedback on their work, and if
they collaborate on research outside of the classroom with their professor.

Level	uOttawa	U.S Doctoral	Carnegie Peers	NSSE 2009
First Year	16.6	32.2	32.5	34.5
Senior	28.5	38.9	38.3	41.9

Table 4
Enriched Educational Experience
Assesses the degree to students participate in university
activities outside the classroom, or have done a practicum,
co-op placement, field work, or study abroad.

Level	uOttawa	U.S Doctoral	Carnegie Peers	NSSE 2009
First Year	22.0	28.1	28.8	28
Senior	33.4	39.6	40	40.8

Table 5
Supportive Campus Environment
Assesses student perceptions about the quality of support services,
such as, at the University of Ottawa, SASS and Community Life Services.

Level	uOttawa	U.S Doctoral	Carnegie Peers	NSSE 2009
First Year	49.7	59.1	58.2	61.5
Senior	44.8	55.2	54.3	58.2

Source: http://www.uottawa.ca/services/irp/eng/research/2009-nsse-survey.html

The most recent NSSE data for the faculty level, reproduced in Table 6 below, only surveys senior level undergraduate students. Still, the results are instructive, underlining the need for action. With the exception of the category of "Supportive Campus Environment," which primarily measures services available to all students, the Faculty of Arts scores slightly below the University norm. In most categories, it also scores lower than its traditional comparable, the Faculty of Social Sciences, though its better result in "Student-Faculty Interaction" is likely due to significantly smaller classes, especially in 1000 and 2000- level courses, as demonstrated below in Table 9.

Table 6
2009 NSSE Scores among Senior Undergraduate Students
Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences
University of Ottawa

Faculty	Level of Academic Challenge	Active and Collaborative Learning	Student-Faculty Interaction	Enriching Educational Experience	Supportive Campus Environment
Arts	**54.5**	**42.2**	**28.1**	**31.8**	**47.2**
Social Sciences	**55.2**	**42.0**	**27.0**	**32.6**	**42.6**
University of Ottawa	**54.9**	**43.6**	**28.5**	**33.4**	**44.9**

Source: University of Ottawa, Office of Institutional Research and Planning

More worrying are the CUSC results that focus on undergraduate student satisfaction. In 2009, some 12,000 1st year and graduating students from 57 universities answered more than 150 questions; the response rate was 45 per cent. On student-faculty interaction, the University of Ottawa finished 55 out of 57. When asked if their campus fostered student success, such as by facilitating positive inter-changes between students, faculty and administrative staff, the University of Ottawa scored 57 out of 57. When asked to respond to the statement, "Generally, I am satisfied with the quality of teaching I have received," once more the University of Ottawa finished 57 out of 57. When asked if they were happy with their university education – both at the end of the 1st and the 4th year – the University of Ottawa scored 51 out of 57. And when asked if they would attend the same institution if they were re-starting their university education, the University of Ottawa finished 52 out of 57. (http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/2009/02/04/2009-student-surveys/)

The 2010 *Globe and Mail* Survey of Student Satisfaction, which is based upon more than 40,000 responses nationwide, presents marginally better results. Placing the University of Ottawa as one of sixteen institutions in the Medical/Doctoral category, overall it finished in 13th place, with the specific results being: most satisfied students (11); quality of education (15); student- faculty interaction (14); course availability (13); ease of course registration (11); and class size (15). (http://static.globecampus.ca/uploads/docs/CUR2010_ChartsOnly.pdf)

It is axiomatic to state that students who are not satisfied will be less engaged, more inclined to perform poorly and to abandon their studies. In her well-received 2009 report, "Linking Student Satisfaction and Retention," Laurie Schreiner, professor and director of doctoral programs in higher education at Azusa Pacific University, surveyed more than 28,000 students at 65 four-year "institutions of higher learning" to ask students to rate factors that influenced their satisfaction, which she then linked to retention. Schreiner concluded that students with just "one point higher than their peers [on the satisfaction scale] have an 80 percent better chance of persisting." She also notes, however, that

"there is no one factor that consistently explains satisfaction, and different elements are important to different students." Still, her data reveals the strongest link between *retention* and students *feeing at home* in their university, a connection that, she contends, comes with a "sense of belonging" and "knowing what is going on." (https://www.noellevitz.com/NR/rdonlyres/A22786EF-65FF-4053-A15A-CBE145B0C708/0/LinkingStudentSatis0809.pdf)

Establishing that sense of belonging is most critically needed in the early years of university education, as students adjust to more challenging academic standards, a new environment, and very often being on their own for the first time. Data from the University of Ottawa's Office of Institutional Research and Planning shows that, depending upon the faculty, up to 25 per cent of students drop out of the University during their first two years of study. Although Arts fairs better than many other faculties (especially Science and Engineering), the latest figures, broken down by discipline, show that of the 25.4 percent of Arts students who do not complete their undergraduate degree within six years, most falter during their first two years of study.

Table 7
Faculty of Arts
Retention Rates in First Two Years of Undergraduate Study by Discipline

Year	Discipline	Head Count	% Continuing to Year 2	% Continuing to Year 3
2007	German	2	50	50
2008	German	2	100	-
2007	Arts General	126	70.6	61.9
2008	Arts General	92	79.3	-
2007	Visual Arts	37	89.2	81.8
2008	Visual Arts	46	87	-
2007	Canadian Studies	8	87.5	75
2008	Canadian Studies	5	100	-
2007	Classical Studies	26	80.8	73.1
2008	Classical Studies	8	100	-
2007	Communication	174	90.2	81.6
2008	Communication	175	84	-
2007	Second Language Teachers (English)	9	88.9	88.9
2008	Second Language Teachers (English)	10	100	-
2007	Second Language Teachers (French)	20	90	75
2008	Second Language Teachers (French)	21	100	
2007	Aboriginal	4	75	50

	Studies			
2008	Aboriginal Studies	2	100	-
2007	Études de la langue français	1	100	100
2008	Études de la langue français	8	75	-
2007	English	151	91.4	82.1
2008	English	112	88.4	-
2007	ESL	1	100	100
2008	ESL	2	66.7	-
2007	Spanish	11	81.8	72.7
2008	Spanish	8	50	-
2007	Ethics and Society	15	80	66.7
2008	Ethics and Society	23	69.6	-
2007	French as Second Language	30	96.7	90
2008	French as Second Language	24	91.7	-
2007	French	3	100	66.7
2008	French	6	66.7	-
2007	Geomatics and Spatial Analysis	5	100	100
2008	Geomatics and Spatial Analysis	4	75	-
2007	Geography	34	85.3	76.6
2008	Geography	32	81.3	-
2007	History	193	88.1	81.3
2008	History	185	85.4	-
2007	History and Theory of Art	21	81	66.7
2008	History and Theory of Art	20	75	-
2007	Italian	3	100	100
2008	Italian	2	50	-
2007	Journalism	38	63.2	42.1
2008	Journalism	28	92.9	-
2007	Latin and English Studies	1	0	0
2008	Latin and English Studies	5	60	-
2007	Classics	9	88.9	77.8
2008	Classics	2	50	-
2007	Linguistics	61	82	73.8
2008	Linguistics	55	85.5	-
2007	Lettres françaises	20	85	85
2008	Lettres françaises	29	79.3	-

2007	Medieval Studies	6	100	66.7
2008	Medieval Studies	6	83.3	-
2007	Music	52	96.2	84.6
2008	Music	59	86.4	-
2007	Philosophy	29	79.3	69.0
2008	Philosophy	33	81.8	-
2007	Russian	2	100	100
2008	Russian	1	100	-
2007	Religious Studies	5	80	80
2008	Religious Studies	6	16.7	-
2007	Theatre	60	85	70
2008	Theatre	69	82.6	-
2007	Translation	16	93.8	87.5
2008	Translation	18	88.9	-

Source: University of Ottawa, Office of Institutional Research and Planning

One factor that accounts for difficulties in the early years of university education is large class size. This is not to say that large classes are automatically worse than smaller ones; indeed, course evaluations from several disciplines in the Faculty of Arts demonstrate that when well-taught (and presumably properly supported with adequate numbers of TAs), large classes are often very highly rated by students. Still, for many, large classes reinforce a sense of anomie and discourage interaction with professors. Moreover, in general, upper level courses (which tend to be smaller) are more highly rated by students; though possibly influencing this correlation is a greater level of interest in the subject matter among a student clientele more likely to be majoring in the discipline being taught.

Data available on 19 universities that report on average class size through the Council of Ontario Universities reveals a greater proportion of large and medium sized classes at the University of Ottawa (representative data for 2010 is produced below in Table 8).

Table 8
Average Undergraduate Class Size by Level
Representative Universities, 2010

York

	1st Year		2nd Year		3rd Year		4th Year	
Size	(#)	(%)	(#)	(%)	(#)	(%)	(#)	(%)
< 30 students	277	42.3%	282	36.7%	524	50.2%	639	78.3%
30-60 students	98	15.0%	186	24.2%	361	34.6%	164	20.1%
61-100 students	71	10.8%	171	22.2%	114	10.9%	8	1.0%
101-250 students	161	24.6%	114	14.8%	43	4.1%	2	0.2%
251+ students	48	7.3%	16	2.1%	2	0.2%	3	0.4%
Total	655	100.0%	769	100.0%	1044	100.0%	816	100.0%

Ryerson

Class Sections	1st Year		2nd Year		3rd Year		4th Year	
Size	(#)	(%)	(#)	(%)	(#)	(%)	(#)	(%)
< 30 students	221	35.2	275	49.5	286	53.0	354	66.9
30-60 students	200	31.9	159	28.6	173	32.1	120	22.6
61-100 students	70	11.2	82	14.8	63	11.7	50	9.5
101-250 students	125	19.9	39	7.1	17	3.2	5	0.9
251+ students	11	1.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	627	100.0	555	100.0	539	100.0	529	100.0

Carleton

Size	1st Year		2nd Year		3rd Year		4th Year	
	(#)	(%)	(#)	(%)	(#)	(%)	(#)	(%)
< 30 students	118	37.6%	63	17.1%	155	41.9%	257	75.4%
30-60 students	54	17.2%	122	33.1%	144	38.9%	67	19.1%
61-100 students	44	14.0%	110	29.8%	52	1.4%	14	4.1%
101-250 students	70	22.3%	71	19.2%	19	5.1%	3	0.9%
251+ students	28	8.9%	3	0.8%				
TOTAL	314	100.0%	369	100.0%	370	100.0%	341	100.0%

University of Ottawa

Size	1st Year		2nd Year		3rd Year		4th Year	
	(#)	(%)	(#)	(%)	(#)	(%)	(#)	(%)
< 30 students	155	27.8	193	30.8	422	48.3	375	73.1
30-60 students	135	24.2	163	26.0	314	35.9	111	21.6
61-100 students	89	15.9	192	30.6	110	12.6	19	3.7
101-250 students	165	29.6	74	11.8	28	3.2	6	1.2
251+ students	14	2.5	5	0.8	0	0.0	2	0.4
Total	558	100.0	627	100.0	874	100.0	513	100.0

Source: http://www.cou.on.ca/Statistics/CUDO.aspx

However, at the University of Ottawa, there are significant differences in average class size between faculties. Table 9 shows that at the 1000 and 2000 level, the Faculty of Arts is lower than the norm. Still, as outlined in Table 10, there are wide variations within the Faculty of Arts, such as on the basis of language, and because some disciplines, like English and Philosophy, provide 1st year students with a small group learning experience such as Discussion Groups and Philosophy Tutors.

Table 9
Average Class Size by Faculty, 1000 and 2000 Level Courses
University of Ottawa, 2009-10

FACULTY	1000 Level	2000 level
Administration	121.8	73.7
Arts	67.8	49.4
Common Law	40.2	43.4
Civil Law	50.1	36.1
Education	33.2	35.4
Engineering	79.4	36.4
Medicine	76.0	72.2
Science	110.6	68.2
Health Science	150.3	79.8
Social Science	121.9	70.4
University Wide	80.3	58.4

Source: University of Ottawa, Office of Institutional Research and Planning

Table 10
Sampling of Class Size at the 1000 Level by Discipline
Faculty of Arts, University of Ottawa, 2009-10

Discipline	Course Code(s)	Number of Students
Canadian Studies	1100	150
Classics	1102	400
Communication	1148/1548/1560/1160	160-200
DLS	1100	40
English	1100/1120/1121/1122/1123	40-65
English	1131	110
Environmental Studies	1101	230
Spanish	1991/1992	25
French	1518/1528/1538	45
French	1710/1720	110
Geography	1302	180
Geography	1701	60
Geography 1702 – 100	1702	100
History	1101/1110/1111/1120/1501/ 1511/ 1520	150-200
Italian	1911/1912	20
Linguistics	1300/1340	150
Linguistic	1700/1710	60
Music	1301/1302	130-140
Music	1701/1703	40-50
Music	1990	20
Philosophy	1101/1102/1192/1103/1104/1370/1501/1502	80-200
Theatre	1300/1500	50-70
Translation	1301/1501	27-30

Source: University of Ottawa, Office of Institutional Research and Planning

Definitively establishing the impact of class size on student experience in the Faculty of Arts is difficult given available evidence. At the department level, the most recent NSEE data is for 2008, only surveys senior undergraduate students, is not tabulated into weighted composite benchmark scores, and involves small numbers of respondents. Still, some of the feedback is suggestive, such as if one compares English (that has many smaller classes at the 1000 level) and History (that has 4000 level seminars capped at 15 students) against Communication that has generally larger classes, including at the 4000 level. As evident in Tables 11 to 13, in various qualitative indicators, English and History students report on generally better interaction and relationships with faculty.

Table 11
Discussed Grades or Assignments with their Instructor
2008 NSSE Report, Select Disciplines
Faculty of Arts

Frequency		Communication	English	History
Never or Sometimes	Count	22	13	14
	% in Discipline	61.1	50.0	34.2
Often or Very Often	Count	14	13	27
	% in Discipline	38.9	50.0	65.8
Total	Count	36	26	41
	% in Discipline	100	100	100

Table 12
Discussed Ideas from Readings or Classes with Faculty Outside of Class
2008 NSSE Report, Select Disciplines
Faculty of Arts

Frequency		Communication	English	History
Never or Sometimes	Count	34	20	34
	% in Discipline	87.5	80	82.9
Often or Very Often	Count	2	5	7
	% in Discipline	12.5	20.0	17.1
Total	Count	36	25	41
	% in Discipline	100	100	100

Table 13
Quality of Relationship with Faculty Members Measured on a 7 Point Scale
1 = Unavailable, Unhelpful, Unsympathetic; 7= Available, Helpful, Sympathetic
2008 NSSE Report, Select Disciplines
Faculty of Arts

Rating		Communication	English	History
1-3	Count	9	4	3
	% in Discipline	26.5	16.0	7.5
4-5	Count	21	11	19
	% in Discipline	61.8	44.0	47.5
6-7	Count	4	10	18
	% in Discipline	11.7	40.0	45.0
Total	Count	34	25	40
	% in Discipline	100	100	100

Source: University of Ottawa, Office of Institutional Research and Planning

One thing that is crystal clear, however, is the diversity of student experiences in the Faculty of Arts. This becomes evident from qualitative data this committee consulted, in which students identified key challenges and areas for improvement.

In early 2008, 310 undergraduate Arts students were surveyed to identify ways of improving NSSE scores. The feedback showed that students wanted professors to be well-prepared for class, to provide prompt feedback, to implement small group exercises, to make better use of TAs, to incorporate field work and service learning, to offer opportunities to collaborate on research, and to encourage students to ask for assistance. Departments were asked to do more to publicize student accomplishments, to better advertise events, and to provide more support for discipline-based student associations. Many students spoke of frustration with the course registration process and the need for more course selection; cases were cited of students being unable to get into classes needed to complete their degree.

A wide range of responses was also received at the 25 November 2010 "Town Hall." Conclusions on the importance of class size to student success were mixed, but most still wanted a small group learning experience. Many spoke of the need for more opportunities for active leaning, particularly for community-based projects. Some pointed to the importance of bilingualism, but this was not a strong theme with respect to improving the student experience. The committee found it very instructive that when polled as to where they felt the greatest sense of connection, students overwhelmingly cited their department.

Many of the same trends were evident in the written responses received from undergraduate student associations representing the various disciplines. Those from Translation and Interpretation, Medieval Studies, Linguistics, Music, Geography, Canadian Studies, Aboriginal Studies, Philosophy, and History said "Smaller class sizes are essential." Most associations favoured discussion sections in larger courses. Several pointed to severe deficiencies in course selection. Many said there needed to be clearer instructions for students on where they should turn for different types of administrative matters. Many expressed the desire of students to work with professors on research projects. Most supported the idea of professors being assigned an official mentoring role. A majority identified outreach activities, namely Service Learning, as an area that should be developed. More effective communication of faculty events, a more extensive system to recognize professors who excel at improving the student experience and further recognition of outstanding student achievements also received strong support.

The Way Forward

Based upon statistical data, scholarship, and qualitative feedback, the committee concluded that the best strategy is a two-track approach, namely one that includes both faculty and department initiatives. Programs introduced in each category should be implemented, and funded, for a minimum of two years to hone procedures and to gain recognition and buy-in. The committee also recommends that the faculty create two research positions, perhaps under the University's Work Study Program, to undertake in-class surveys and other data collection and analysis to determine the impact of new programs, with questions taken or adapted from the NSSE and CUSC because they are the most widely used and disseminated measures.

On that note, it is also important that a greater number of students respond to NSSE and CUSC surveys, given that low response rates have been observed, and that a greater turnout may better reflect the richness of the programs within the Faculty. Students may need to be better "primed" about the terms used in the NSSE, about the importance of this instrument, and about the need to be involved, both to improve participation and to increase positive responses.

Several universities have launched targeted marketing campaigns, such as the University of Louisville, in Kentucky, which like the University of Ottawa is a large urban school. For many years, its NSSE scores consistently fell below the general NSSE standard and that of its Carnegie peers. In 2007, U of L launched the "Every Card Counts" campaign where 1st and 4th year students were encouraged, through a variety of media, to participate in the NSSE (see Appendix 1 for samples from this marketing campaign). This campaign doubled the participation of U of L students to 32% in 2009. As well, over the past three years, U of L's NSSE scores have risen to the point where it meets its Carnegie benchmarks in a majority of the categories measured. (http://louisville.edu/nsse)

Faculty Level Projects to Enhance the Undegraduate Student Experience

(a) **Publicizing What Exists**: Many areas measured by the NSSE are well established at the University of Ottawa. It has, for example, one of the country's largest and most successful Co-op programs, and its Community Service Learning program places nearly 2,000 students per year into volunteer positions with not-for-profit agencies to undertake projects related to class work. A more aggressive advertising strategy is needed to make students aware of such services and what the faculty is doing to enhance the undergraduate experience, especially at the time when the NSSE and CUSC surveys are being done.

(b) **Information:** Greater effort should be made to inform students of faculty and department events, including through a dedicated webpage and new social media.

(c) **Guides**: Students in the Faculty of Arts should be given clear instructions on who they should contact within administration to deal with different course- and degree-related matters, and in the effective use of Rabaska. The faculty should also consider hiring additional human resources during the registration process to answer student questions about Rabaska.

(d) **Celebrating Professors:** There needs to be more recognition than the current award structure of professors who excel at improving the student experience, such as through web-profiles and an annual reception. As well, formalized means should be pursued to recognize faculty who make exceptional efforts to improve their teaching through TLSS. The committee wishes to underline the fact that there is more generally a strong relationship between professor satisfaction and student satisfaction.

(e) **Celebrating Students:** The faculty should create an on-line newsletter to which departments, student associations, and others can submit stories that celebrate achievements by undergraduate Arts students in areas that include academics, community-based service, and contributions to the student experience and the University.

(f) **Marketing Students**: Students in the faculty have skills that are highly valued in the wider community, and for which they can earn money. In some areas, demand is substantial, such as for Fine Art students to do a portrait or for Music students to play at a reception. Departments are also contacted to find researchers, proof-readers, interpreters, and so forth. The faculty should create an on-line bulletin board where student CVs and available services can be posted. Pointers on creating an effective CV, and links to SASS's Career Services that provides such instructions, should also be posted. This would put the faculty on the cutting edge in terms of marketing the skills of its students, underline its commitment to student success, and help students better appreciate their emerging professional competencies. Resources will need to be allocated so that it is easy for students

and community members to post information and so that the bulletin board is kept up-to-date.

(g) **Celebrating Staff**: An award should be established in the faculty for "service excellence," judged on the basis of student nominations and letters of support.

(h) **Student-Faculty Research**: More effort should be made to disseminate information on and successful applications within the Faculty of Arts to the new University Research Opportunities Program (UROP) in which 3rd and 4th year undergraduates can receive $1000 and professors $500 to support joint research. By doing so, more students will apply, thus perhaps stimulating more university resources being devoted to this program that has the potential to improve NSSE results with respect to student-faculty interaction.

(i) **Truth in Advertising:** Departments should only advertise courses they are actually offering. On several websites, the full range of department courses are listed, many of which are only offered sporadically. This creates frustration and disappointment for students. If a Department has a regular rotation of courses, this should also be made public, so students can plan ahead in their course selection.

(j) **Course Guarantee:** Undergraduates should receive at least sixty per cent of their course selections each year in their major so long as they apply on time. This will necessitate more sections of popular, mandatory and several pre-requisite courses, presumably taught by part-timers, and it may be necessary to schedule some of these classes on weekends.

(k) **Utilizing Teaching Assistants**: TAs should be better prepared to take on a more central role. They should attend lectures, read the assigned texts, and have office hours. This will leave them with less time for marking, meaning that the faculty will need to fund more TA positions to adequately support courses. But this will provide a better service to undergraduate students, and a superior apprenticeship for graduate students as teaching is a fundamental component in their professional development.

(l) **Community-Based Learning**: The Faculty of Arts should establish a 1st or 2nd year optional and elective interdisciplinary course with a "General Arts" classification that revolves around the theme of "Community and the Arts." This would introduce students to problem-based active learning, which is identified and measured by the NSSE as a best practice, and that was cited in student feedback as an area that should be further developed. As part of this course, students, either individually or in groups, would volunteer with a local not-for-profit community agency to work on a project that provides service to the client, links to course concepts, and from which they would produce a deliverable for marking. Placements would be established through the University of Ottawa's Experiential Learning Service.

(m) **Small-Group Experience**: Students in the Faculty of Arts should be guaranteed at least one small group learning experience, preferably in their first year of study where the retention rate is most problematic.   For professors who want to structure their courses to incorporate tutorials, the faculty should try to accommodate through additional room allocations. Professors could teach one or more of the tutorial groups for workload credits (depending on the number of tutorial sessions linked to a course), an incentive that could draw more experienced faculty into teaching at this level, thus increasing interaction with students during their early years of university education.

(M) New Programs:
(i) Evidence consulted for this report shows that students connected to exclusive programs develop a strong sense of pride, belonging and satisfaction. This was also articulated in a detailed proposal growing out of the University of Ottawa's last Strategic Plan, *Vision 2010*, to create an exclusive interdisciplinary and bilingual program and school called *Humanitas XXI*. With an annual intake of 60 students, it was to provide "a broad foundational education in what has traditionally been known as the liberal arts: the humanities and social sciences, sciences and technology." Organized around themes such as *The Human Imagination*, *Political Theory and Government* and *Ethics and Human Rights*, students would be exposed to "great works of art, literature and music," be required to make oral presentations, take courses in both official languages, engage in group work, produce a senior capstone project, and partake in three Community Service Learning activities, one local, one in another part of Canada, and one outside of Canada. (Adele Reinhartz, *Proposal for the Creation of a New Program: Honours Bachelor in Arts and Science*, 2007)

Similar programs in the United States and Britain have proven to be major draws and have generated very positive student feedback. In Canada, such programs exist at Kings College, McMaster, Waterloo, Carleton, Guelph and UBC. Applications to each are very strong; for instance, at McMaster in 2007, the incoming class had a mean average of 90%.

As originally conceived, *Humanitas XXI* was to have a Director (with a 9 credit course release), an Associate Director (with a 3 credit course release), a dedicated teaching staff, and one full-time and one part-time administrative assistant. Its total projected costs exceeded revenues by $250,000 per year, but it was pointed out that this deficit could be reduced substantially by hiring part-time instructors, by trimming administrative support, and by charging students higher tuition, such as to cover the costs of Service Learning outside of Ottawa.

Adapting such a program to the Faculty of Arts would produce more modest costs because annual student intake could be lower, existing courses could be utilized and university services are now better developed than they were in 2007, such as the Experiential Learning Service. As well, an Arts-based *Humanitas* program could be managed by a single academic director - with a course release package

similar to that provided to Directors of Institutes – and one administrative assistant. However, it is important for the program to have a defined physical space to create a sense of identity and belonging. It is recommended that an ad hoc committee be established to examine the feasibility of adapting *Humanitas XXI* for implementation within the Faculty of Arts.

(ii) To create a greater a greater sense of belonging and connection, particularly in the first year of undergraduate study, universities have created more structured programs that keep many of the same students together through block scheduling. These programs are premised on Tinto's Theory of Learning Communities, and are designed to enable students to create their own support groups, ultimately enhancing their social integration because they spend time together outside the classroom interacting, studying, and discussing course material (Tinto, V. (1998). Colleges as communities: Taking research on student persistence seriously. *The Review of Higher Education, 21*(2), 167-177).

Two initiatives along this line are the Arts One program at Carleton University and the FSS+ program offered through the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Social Sciences (see http://www2.carleton.ca/artsone/ and http://www.socialsciences.uottawa.ca/fss/eng/about.asp). In the FSS+ program, students participate in a 1000 level course introducing them to the Social Sciences; share three courses per session within their major; and participate in study groups led by student mentors. Seeing each other regularly, they "build friendships and support networks," which presumably ease their transition to university and create a stronger sense of belonging and engagement. However, as of yet, there is no definitive data to demonstrate the impact of the program. Still, this committee recommends that an ad hoc group be established to examine the feasibility of creating a pilot program within the Faculty of Arts modeled after these initiatives.

(N) Administrative Reform: Currently, there is an impersonal physical environment at the Office of Undergraduate Students in SMD128. Although most academic visits from students are done in the departments, still the Undergraduate Office serves as a backup, and is often the principal point of contact for special students, international students, and students with academic difficulties, pursuing general degrees and that do not wish to/cannot receive services in their department. The current office provides no privacy for these students who, as a result, often feel they cannot truly express the reason for their visit, such as in cases where they need to withdraw from a course or ask for a deferral for personal issues. The Academic Assistants at the Undergraduate Office, unlike the departmental Academic Assistants, do not have a private office to meet with students. An evaluation of how noise could be reduced, and greater privacy achieved, would be valuable.

Department Level Projects to Enhance the Undergraduate Student Engagement

Funding for new department initiatives to improve the undergraduate student experience could be set on a pro-rated basis related to size (preferably the department's undergraduate student population) or to a certain maximum for all departments for approved projects. Proposals should be related to areas measured by the NSSE or CUSC and make clear how their impact will be assessed. The faculty should also publicize many of these initiatives as they might be of interest to students in other departments. While the suggestions below are by no means exhaustive, committee members believe that they reflect, and thus are well-supported by, the evidence consulted for this report.

(a) **Mentoring**: Establishing a professorial mentoring program received favourable responses at the November 25th Town Hall and in written replies from most student associations. Mentoring is well established at the University of Ottawa, namely through the extensive network of student mentors managed by SASS, many of whom are assigned to specific faculties, departments or to students in particular years of study. Furthermore, if a student is classified as being at "very high" or "high" risk, meaning that they have a CPGA of 3.5 or 4.5 or less respectively, they are asked to see a student mentor or an Academic Advisor to identify problems as well as to receive information and guidance to help them develop effective learning strategies, and have follow-up meetings to discuss academic, personal and professional issues. Many students would also benefit from the opportunity to consult with an expert teaching in their discipline who could offer advice on achieving academic success and in preparing for career development in the field, including for graduate studies.

Cost scenarios for such a program were presented in a 2006 SASS report. (*Proposal for the Establishment of a University Professorial Mentoring Service*, Student Academic Success Services, 2006) The cheapest option presented was to select at least one professor per department to perform a mentoring role in lieu of committee work. Based on an estimate that committee work translates into 1.5 hours per week averaged over two thirteen-week academic terms, this would allow each professorial mentor to have up 39 hours for student appointments per year. Option B proposed that each participating professor be given a three-credit course release in one of his or her two-year mandate as a mentor. Assuming that a course requires three hours of preparation, marking, and out-of-classroom student contact for every hour of classroom delivery, this means that in lieu of a thirteen-week course, 156 hours of mentoring would be generated. In the other year of the professor's mandate, during which she or he would be released from other departmental administrative duties, 39 hours of mentoring would result, thus producing an annual average of 97.5 hours over the two-year mandate. Option C would be to provide each participating professor with a three-credit course release in both years of his or her two-year mandate, thus generating an annual average of 156 hours per year.

With a three-credit part-time professorial replacement costing approximately $7,500, and the Faculty of Arts being comprised of 10 major departments or sectors, Option C would cost $75,000 per annum, exclusive of publicity and administrative costs.

Option B would cost approximately $37,500 per year, and the costs for the first option would be negligible. Although the most expensive, Option C would generate revenue for the faculty if 120 fewer full-time students dropped out, as the faculty receives approximately 45% of revenue generated by each BIU. According to the Office of Institutional Research and Planning, 74.6% of Arts students complete their degree, and, as noted earlier, the majority of those who drop out do so during their first two years of study. With 7,500 students now in the faculty, the present pattern means that 1,750 will not complete their degree.

(b) **Social Events**: Departments might fund a series of social events where students and professors meet to discuss academic and professional matters.

(c) **Celebrating Undergraduate Work**: Departments might organize an annual conference where 3rd and 4th year students present exceptional work. Such a gathering would be instructive for students in the 1st and 2nd years of their studies as to what constitutes excellence at the senior undergraduate level, enrich the education of senior undergraduates, and better prepare those contemplating graduate school.

(d) **High Profile Events**: Departments could establish a speakers' series or a major annual public lecture for which it could develop a departmental award to attract high profile visitors.

(e) **Orientation:** Departments could establish orientation sessions for 1st year students, taught by graduate or exceptional senior undergraduates, covering issues and challenges pertinent to the field, including researching and writing, tips for classroom success, and how to interact most effectively with professors, both in person and by e-mail.

(f) **Course Development:** Departments should be permitted to use discretionary funds to establish a course focused on discipline-based careers, which would include an unpaid practicum with firms or agencies in the private or public sector to work on a project upon which students would be marked. This would be different than Community Service Learning because the projects would be geared towards students' professional development.

(g) **Learning Grants:** Departments could use new funding to support course-based activities or projects suggested by professors, such fieldwork or the development of web-based material. Departments should link such initiatives to areas measured by the NSSE or CUSC, and ensure that its impact on students is assessed.

Conclusion

Major surveys of students, such as the NSSE and CUSC, reveal the University of Ottawa as languishing near or at the bottom. Part of the problem is that existing services are not advertised and used effectively; as such, this committee recommends a robust publicity

campaign, especially at the time when the NSSE or CUSC are being conducted, to make students aware of what services exist and what the faculty is doing to improve the undergraduate student experience. Improved communication must also focus on making students aware of what is going on in the faculty, on better accessing programs like UROP, in directing students on where exactly to interact with administration to address different issues, and in celebrating and promoting the achievements and skills of students, professors, and support staff.

In several areas consensus was evident for faculty-level initiatives, namely: to guarantee students a minimum course selection in their discipline; to provide a small-group learning experience; to better utilize teaching assistants; to do more to recognize professors and support staff who make remarkable efforts or contributions in improving the student experience; to better publicize student skills and contributions; and to expand active learning and innovative pedagogy, perhaps through a 1000 or 2000 level Community Service-Learning course, a version of *Huminatas XXI*, and/or the establishment of structured Learning Communities.

The committee also concluded that the diversity of academic structures and student experiences in the faculty, as well as the inclination of students to identify most closely with their department/discipline, necessitates that more resources be devolved to the departments to enable more specialized initiatives. Based upon the evidence consulted, the committee suggested that departments consider proposals such as establishing a professorial mentoring service, more student-faculty social events, a speakers' series or major public lecture, a "careers course", and introducing course-based learning grants.

Finally, the committee recommends that new initiatives be linked to improving student satisfaction scores, particularly on the NSSE and CUSC, that they be implemented and funded for a minimum of two years, and that they be evaluated annually to gauge their impact on students so that the most successful programs are identified and retained.