

A Learning Charter

FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN?

Approved by University Council on June 17, 2010

The University of Saskatchewan Learning Charter is intended to define aspirations about the learning experience that the University aims to provide, and the roles to be played in realizing these aspirations by students, instructors and the institution. The overarching goal of the Learning Charter is to optimize the learning experience of every student.¹

The Learning Charter consists of three main parts: (1) our vision for learning; (2) the core learning goals to which the University of Saskatchewan aspires for its graduates; and (3) the roles which students, instructors, and the institution need to play in achieving our learning vision and goals.

In so doing, the Learning Charter serves as an integrative framework for linking aims, values, and principles surrounding teaching and learning to behaviours that will

optimize student learning and discovery. The Learning Charter serves as an educational tool for communicating goals, commitments, and responsibilities to each of the learning partners, and as a tool for organizing, evaluating, and further developing policies that affect teaching and learning.

The Learning Charter is grounded in the values and principles enunciated in the “Teaching and Learning Foundational Document,”² and is informed by the “The University of Saskatchewan Mission Statement,”³ “Guidelines for Academic Conduct”⁴, the “Standard of Student Conduct in Non-Academic Matters”⁵ and the “University of Saskatchewan Strategic Directions”⁶ document, as well as other relevant policies and documents.

Our Learning Vision

Our vision sees the University of Saskatchewan as a unique community of learning and discovery, where people can embark on a process of development through which they grow, create, and learn, in a context characterized by *diversity*—of academic programs, of ways of knowing and learning, and of its members. This diversity provides opportunities for learners to achieve their unique learning goals in ways most relevant to them, in a setting in which learning is seen as a multi-faceted process through which people can learn experientially; independently; in laboratory or clinical settings; through collaboration and teams; through research and inquiry; through debate and engagement with instructors, mentors, and other learners; and through community service.

The University is proud of its sense of place as a public institution with a long history of mutual engagement with the community, but also recognizes that learning is not confined to any particular location, and may take place on campus, in the community, or through distributed learning. Among the learning outcomes we visualize are intellectual growth, clarified values, independence, social responsibility, and the recognition of diversity as an overarching concept that reflects a philosophy of equitable participation and an appreciation of the contributions of all people.

Core Learning Goals

The University of Saskatchewan offers a diversity of academic and professional programs that is matched by few other institutions of learning. Our students undertake programs of many different types and durations, and students in different programs will differ in the specific learning outcomes

they achieve. However, while specific learning outcomes will vary, there is a set of core learning goals to which we aspire for all graduates, to the extent feasible and appropriate within each program of studies. These are of five main types: *Discovery, Knowledge, Integrity, Skills, and Citizenship.*



ALL GRADUATES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN WILL:

DISCOVERY GOALS

- Apply critical and creative thinking to problems, including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.
- Be adept at learning in various ways, including independently, experientially, and in teams.
- Possess intellectual flexibility, ability to manage change, and a zest for life-long learning.

KNOWLEDGE GOALS

- Have a comprehensive knowledge of their subject area, discipline, or profession.
- Understand how their subject area may intersect with related disciplines.
- Utilize and apply their knowledge with judgement and prudence.

INTEGRITY GOALS

- Exercise intellectual integrity and ethical behaviour.
- Recognize and think through moral and ethical issues in a variety of contexts.
- Recognize the limits to their knowledge and act accordingly.

SKILLS GOALS

- Communicate clearly, substantively, and persuasively.
- Be able to locate and use information effectively, ethically, and legally.
- Be technologically literate, and able to apply appropriate skills of research and inquiry.

CITIZENSHIP GOALS

- Value diversity and the positive contributions this brings to society.
- Share their knowledge and exercise leadership.
- Contribute to society, locally, nationally, or globally.



Commitments & Responsibilities



Achieving the learning vision and goals to which we aspire requires the active commitment of students, instructors, and the institution, and depends on each party fulfilling its role in the learning partnership embodied by the University of Saskatchewan. As we identify the commitments and responsibilities of each partner, we recognize that each member of the university community may participate in one, two, or even three of these roles. For example, a graduate student may teach a class and also serve on a university committee, or a technician may instruct on the operation of lab equipment and also take a university class. The commitments and responsibilities we identify are best conceived as attaching to each member of the university community as they serve their student, instructor, or institutional roles.

Students

While all three roles are important, the role of the learner is most fundamental to the learning partnership. No learning can take place without active engagement by the learner in the learning process—to being open to, and learning from, the multitude of learning opportunities available at the University, both inside and outside of courses, and both on and off campus. To optimize their learning experiences, students need to make the following commitments and fulfil the corresponding responsibilities. These commitments can be summarized as *Learn Actively*, *Think Broadly*, *Act Ethically*, and *Engage Respectfully*.

STUDENT COMMITMENT 1: *Learn Actively.*

Actively engage in the learning process.

Honouring this commitment requires that students be willing to learn independently, experientially, and collaboratively with other students, as appropriate to their learning objectives; to engage in self-evaluation and reflection; and to take personal responsibility for their learning. Students should seek out and take advantage of learning opportunities beyond those found in their formal courses. Within the course context, students will maximize their learning if they prepare for their courses, engage in course activities, submit assigned work as scheduled, accept constructive feedback on their learning, and provide constructive feedback on their learning experience.

STUDENT COMMITMENT 2: *Think Broadly.*

Thoughtfully consider, on the basis of evidence, a diversity of theories, ideas, beliefs, and approaches to problems and solutions.

Honouring this commitment requires that students consider viewpoints other than their own, actively try to understand the range of ideas and beliefs pertinent to any given issue, and consider the relevant evidence for various theories and beliefs. It requires the courage to challenge accepted wisdom, and the willingness to critically appraise possible approaches and methods for solving problems and resolving issues.

STUDENT COMMITMENT 3: *Act Ethically.*

Undertake all university work in accordance with principles of academic integrity.

Honouring this commitment requires that students understand key principles of academic integrity, and adhere to the standards set out by the University of Saskatchewan covering academic misconduct⁷. Students need to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty⁸, and be sure that any academic work they undertake or submit does not violate principles of academic integrity, and that any research undertaken is congruent with ethical principles, as these principles apply to their subject area, discipline or profession.



STUDENT COMMITMENT 4: *Engage Respectfully.*

Engage in a respectful way with members of the university community and its partners.

Honouring this commitment requires that, as they engage in learning activities, students conduct themselves in a respectful way with other members of the university community, including other students, instructors, and staff. Behaviour that may constitute harassment, bullying, or discrimination must be strictly avoided. Students need to comply with university expectations for student conduct.⁹ None of this, however, is to be construed as restricting the freedom of students to raise controversial issues or views within the context of open and healthy dialogue.

Instructors

While commitment by the learner is fundamental to the learning process, the active commitment of those members of the university community responsible for providing learning opportunities is crucial to optimizing the student learning experience. To do so, university instructors (including faculty, sessional lecturers, graduate teaching assistants, and other instructors) need to make the following commitments and fulfil the corresponding responsibilities. Instructor commitments can be summarized as *Exemplify Learning, Teach Effectively, Assess Fairly, and Solicit Feedback.*

INSTRUCTOR COMMITMENT 1: *Exemplify Learning.*

Embody learning behaviours expected of students.

Honouring this commitment requires that instructors demonstrate the learning behaviours expected of students. That is, instructors should create a learning context which values and facilitates active learning, should demonstrate broad thinking, should act according to ethical principles, and should create a learning environment where all participants can engage respectfully. All participants need to be encouraged to try to understand and acknowledge points of view that may diverge from their own. Instructors must strive to present sensitive topics in a fair and balanced manner. This should not be construed, however, as restricting the ability to raise controversial issues, nor serve to undermine academic freedom. Whether issues are controversial

or not, instructors should encourage and foster open and healthy dialogue. Within the teaching context, instructors also need to convey respect for members of the university community and its partners.

Maintain an appropriate instructor-student relationship.

Honouring this commitment requires that instructors maintain a professional relationship with students under their supervision, and avoid conflicts of interest that may be posed by dual or multiple relationships with students. Where potential conflicts may exist, these should be disclosed to the appropriate academic official.

INSTRUCTOR COMMITMENT 2: *Teach Effectively.*

Ensure content proficiency.

Honouring this commitment requires that university instructors maintain a high level of subject matter knowledge, and ensure that course content is current, accurate, relevant to course objectives, representative of the body of knowledge covered in the course, and appropriate to the position of the course within the program of studies in which it is embedded.

Ensure pedagogical effectiveness.

Honouring this commitment requires that university instructors be aware of the range of instructional methods or strategies appropriate to conveying the course content, and that they select and utilize methods of instruction that are effective in helping students achieve the learning objectives of the course. Where graduate teaching assistants play a role in instructing a course, the instructor must ensure that they are provided with the proper guidance and supervision to allow them to fulfil their responsibilities effectively.

INSTRUCTOR COMMITMENT 3: *Assess Fairly.*

Communicate and uphold clear academic expectations and standards.

Honouring this commitment requires that instructors provide a clear indication of what is expected of students in the course, and what students can do to be successful in achieving the learning objectives of the course. This includes providing a course outline at the beginning of the course¹⁰ that provides information on course objectives, course activities, course requirements, methods of student assessment, and weighting of assessment criteria. The instructor will take appropriate action in response to any concerns about academic dishonesty.¹¹

Perform fair and relevant assessment of student learning.

Honouring this commitment requires that instructors ensure that assessments of student learning are transparent, applied consistently, and congruent with course objectives. Students should be provided with prompt and constructive feedback on their learning progress at regular intervals throughout the course. When individuals other than the instructor play a role in the grading of assignments and examinations, the instructor must provide careful supervision of this process.

INSTRUCTOR COMMITMENT 4: *Solicit Feedback.*

Provide opportunities for student feedback.

Honouring this commitment requires that instructors provide students with the opportunity to give candid feedback on their learning experience, without concerns of possible repercussions. Instructors will consider this feedback and strive to improve the student learning experience.¹²

Solicit other feedback on their teaching effectiveness.

Honouring this commitment requires that instructors solicit feedback on their teaching effectiveness from a variety of sources, and to continually seek ways and means of improving teaching effectiveness and the student learning experience.

The Institution

The University as an institution serves as a catalyst and context for learning and scholarship. It brings together learners and other members of the educational community in an environment conducive to learning and discovery. The institution plays a critical role in ensuring the quality and quantity of learning opportunities available to students, and in providing the teaching and learning resources that will optimize the student learning experience. To fulfil its institutional role, the University of Saskatchewan (including its academic, administrative, and support units, as well as its governance bodies) needs to make the following commitments. These can be summarized as *Provide Opportunities, Ensure Quality, Build Environment, and Support Learning.*

INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT 1: *Provide Opportunities.*

Offer high quality programs for learning and discovery.

Honouring this commitment requires that the University develop and ground programs and curricula in ways that are socially relevant, adaptive, and responsive, and that will facilitate engagement with the relevant community. It requires that the University provides resources and activities to allow students to develop their interests beyond the experiences provided by their courses. It requires that programs and curricula be evaluated against the Learning Vision and Learning Goals identified in this Learning Charter, and be reviewed and adapted on an ongoing basis. It requires that every program be provided with the critical mass of teaching resources (particularly faculty resources) necessary to assure quality of program execution.

Foster learning partnerships.

Honouring this commitment requires that the University recognize that the student learning experience can be enhanced by appropriate interactions with various learning partners outside the university, and that the University strive to both facilitate these interactions and ensure that they occur in a way beneficial to all parties.

INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT 2: *Ensure Quality.*

Ensure qualified instructors and effective instruction.

Honouring this commitment requires that the University ensure that all instructors possess both content and pedagogical competence for any course they are assigned to teach, and that instructors understand and accept their commitments and responsibilities as identified in this Learning Charter. It requires that the University provide opportunities for instructors to enhance their teaching skills, and considers teaching performance an important factor within all hiring and review processes. Where graduate teaching assistants and other university staff participate in instruction, the University will ensure that guidance and supervision is provided such that they can effectively perform their roles. The institution will ensure that staff providing learning support are well qualified, and will ensure the quality of services provided by support staff.



Promote research-enhanced learning.

Honouring this commitment requires that the University encourage fruitful and synergistic interaction between the research, scholarly and artistic work being conducted at this institution and the learning experience of the student. It requires that the University embrace the teacher-scholar model, under which most university instructors engage in both dissemination of knowledge and creation of new knowledge. It requires that students be given opportunities—appropriate to the nature of their programs—to learn (and to create new knowledge) through research and discovery.

INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT 3: *Build Environment.*

Provide a safe, secure, and inclusive environment.

Honouring this commitment requires that the University provide a safe, secure and inclusive environment for all members of the university community. It requires that all members feel welcome and valued, and that administrative systems are designed and operated to minimize stress and avoid frustration.

Provide appropriate learning resources, facilities, and technology.

Honouring this commitment requires that the University provide appropriate classroom, research, and study environments for students; access to informational resources; and appropriate teaching and research technology to support teaching, learning, and student discovery within a context that supports both on-campus and distributed learning. This also requires that class sizes be set commensurately with the pedagogy that best fits their course content and learning objectives.

¹ The University of Saskatchewan Learning Charter was approved by University Council on June 17, 2010

² *The Teaching and Learning Foundational document can be found online at:*
http://www.usask.ca/ip/inst_planning/docs/TLFD_Council_Approved_Version_December_2008.pdf

³ *The University of Saskatchewan Mission Statement can be found online at:*
http://www.usask.ca/university_secretary/policies/contents/uofs_missionstat.php

⁴ *The Council Guidelines for Academic Conduct can be found online at:*
http://www.usask.ca/university_secretary/council/reports_forms/reports/guide_conduct.php

⁵ *The Senate Standard of Conduct in Non-Academic Matters can be found online at:*
http://www.usask.ca/university_secretary/honesty/StudentNon-AcademicMisconduct.pdf

⁶ *The Strategic Directions can be found online at:*
http://www.usask.ca/ip/inst_planning/strategic_directions/index.php

⁷ *The "University of Saskatchewan Regulations on Student Academic Misconduct," available online at:*
www.usask.ca/university_secretary/honesty/StudentAcademicMisconduct.pdf

INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT 4: *Support Learning.*

Support students.

Honouring this commitment requires that the University help students to select programs appropriate to their particular abilities and preparation. Where better preparation is required, the University will counsel students on how they might obtain this preparation. The University will ensure that students understand their commitments and responsibilities—as identified in this Learning Charter—as a guide to how they can best achieve success in their learning pursuits. Honouring this commitment also requires that the University provide appropriate academic and other supports to students who experience various challenges to their learning, including challenges of a cultural, social, psychological, or physical nature.

Support instructors.

Honouring this commitment requires that the University provide opportunities to instructors to maintain and improve the quality of their teaching. Course assignments need to be commensurate with the content and pedagogical needs of each teaching assignment and consideration of the full spectrum of responsibilities of each instructor. Instructors need to be supported with teaching and laboratory assistants and other support staff as appropriate to their teaching assignments.

⁸ *A detailed description of what constitutes academic dishonesty can be found in Section 2 of the above document.*

⁹ *The "Expectations for Student Conduct" are outlined in Section III of the "Standard of Student Conduct in Non-Academic Matters," available online at:*
http://www.usask.ca/university_secretary/honesty/StudentNon-AcademicMisconduct.pdf

¹⁰ *The requirement to provide a course outline to students, and other regulations regarding the conduct of examinations, are detailed in the University of Saskatchewan Examination Regulations*
http://www.usask.ca/university_secretary/council/Examination_regulations.php

¹¹ *The Council Guidelines for Academic Conduct can be found online at:*
http://www.usask.ca/university_secretary/council/reports_forms/reports/guide_conduct.php

¹² *For more information on teaching evaluation, including frameworks for student and peer teaching evaluation, see the Teaching and Learning Committee website*
http://www.usask.ca/university_secretary/council/committees/teaching_learning/index.php