

Teaching Excellence Project Reflections: Guest post from Ruth Rodgers

Since September 2013, it has been my privilege to participate with the Centre for Innovation and Excellence in Learning (CIEL) team in the initial stages of a project investigating the characteristics of excellence in teaching practice valued by VIU faculty and students. The goals of this project were multi-layered: the team hoped to engage the VIU community in dialogue about excellent teaching practices; develop video resources on good practice to share with the teaching community; conduct a literature review related to good teaching practice; and, along the way, engage in personal professional development. Although my role in this project is drawing to a close, I have every confidence that all of these goals will be met by the conclusion of the project. At this time, I'd like to reflect on my experiences here at VIU and provide an appreciative "mirror" for those I've encountered here.

From the start, the level of service and support I have received from CIEL staff has been outstanding. From details such as ordering my taxis or booking my transportation and accommodation, to the provision of every tool or process I could possibly need, every member of the team has been extraordinarily focused on providing for my comfort and effectiveness here. I don't believe I have ever encountered a more efficient and effective support team—not to mention their warm, cheerful, and enthusiastic welcome each and every time I visited or contacted the campus. What a delight! I also thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to have several lunches in the Discovery Room—delicious and unusual food, well-prepared and beautifully served. A hidden gem!

The research project team members (Kathleen, Michael, and Carl, supported and advised by Liesel) exemplify all the qualities you'd want in colleagues. They are all willing to listen and learn, but at the same time, able and ready to contribute their own expertise and efforts. They bring a diverse set of skills and experiences to the team, which we found to be very complementary on this project. All of them are open to feedback, quick to collaborate, and able to revise their work on the basis of peer input without pride or hesitation—the mark of true professionals. VIU is fortunate to have such energetic and focused individuals working to their benefit.

Like all institutions of higher education in today's climate, the CIEL faces challenges. Resources, personnel, and time are necessarily limited, yet they respond with innovative, creative, outside-the-box ways of supporting the growth and development of the VIU teaching community. I had the opportunity to experience a number of CIEL-led sessions as part of my time here, and was impressed by the depth and breadth of the response they were able to evoke from participants. The CIEL has both energetic and inspiring leadership and dedicated team members, who work seamlessly to generate new and diverse ways of supporting their clients.

Our project included surveying students about their experiences of learning at VIU, and I can attest that the vast majority of the responses gave evidence of a positive experience. Students particularly praised VIU's attention to individual students and reported enjoying the welcoming and comfortable learning environment. Most described their teachers as supportive, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable.

The data gathered during our exploration has confirmed my existing belief that good teachers are primarily focused on teaching—sounds obvious, but it's easy to lose sight of the need to continue to learn about learning, and to strive to incorporate new insights into your teaching practice. The university is a setting for the discovery and dissemination of new knowledge in many fields—it is important to ensure that, as part of that new knowledge creation, we are also creating knowledge about the most effective ways to teach and learn. I am pleased to have had the opportunity to contribute to that goal at VIU, and hope to have future opportunities to interact with this very strong team.

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