

The Nexus between Teaching and Research/Scholarship 2008-2009

Sowing the seeds of inquiry: launching a university-wide initiative

In the spring of 2009, the Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning) and Teaching and Learning Services (TLS) launched a university-wide initiative to promote the links between undergraduate teaching and research/scholarship. This initiative reflects one of the strategic objectives of the University set forth in the [Provost's strategic academic plan, Strengths and Aspirations](#), and in the recommendations of the [Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning](#).

The inaugural event, "**Sowing the seeds of inquiry: Teaching and learning at a research-intensive university**," was held on March 5-6, 2009, and nearly 100 McGill faculty members, administrators, unit directors, and students attended one or more of the sessions. An overview of these sessions is provided below. For further information about the event, including copies of the presentations and key resources, please see the [event website](#).

The **Opening Symposium** was held on March 5, 2009 at Redpath Museum, and featured a keynote speech by Dr. Mick Healey, a recognized expert on the nexus between teaching and research/scholarship, and a panel of four McGill professors, each one accompanied by a student. The panelists addressed the audience in pairs. First, the professor described the integration of research/scholarship/inquiry into an undergraduate course, and then the student explained how this experience influenced learning and inspired further interest in the field.

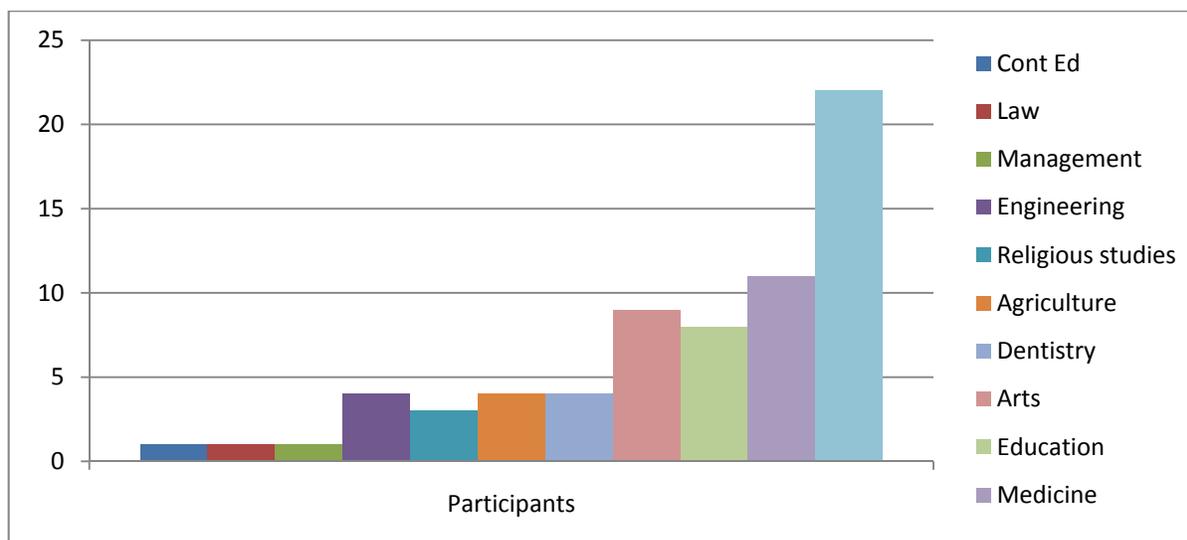
During the question and answer period, participants commented on how refreshing it was to hear from students, and wondered how the University could reinforce this type of teaching and learning approach. Following responses by the panelists and Dr. Healey, the Provost provided the closing remarks in which he praised the professors on the panel for their exceptional contributions to McGill, and reaffirmed Dr. Healey's view that strengthening the connections between undergraduate teaching and research/scholarship would be extremely valuable for McGill. As the applause broke out and participants headed for the reception, the mood was buoyant. In fact, several people enthused, "This was the best event of the year!"

The next day, Dr. Healey led two highly interactive sessions where he presented a model for conceptualizing the links between undergraduate teaching and research/scholarship, and distributed an extensive set of case studies from different disciplines and institutions in Australasia, Europe and North America. He encouraged participants to think about their own practices, and promoted a cross-disciplinary exchange of ideas.

The success of this event revealed the genuine interest at McGill in the integration of teaching and research/scholarship. This enthusiasm, however, was tempered by concerns that contextual factors (such as large classes, limited departmental support and insufficient institutional rewards) may limit professors' willingness to experiment with innovative strategies. With this in mind, TLS is continuing to engage the McGill community in conversations about how to address these challenges. For example, in 2009-10, the "Inquiry Network" will be launched for professors who wish to further develop their own discipline-specific, inquiry-based strategies to link teaching and research/scholarship. One of TLS' main objectives for the year ahead is to continue exploring ways to promote the links between undergraduate teaching and research/scholarship, and we invite all members of the McGill community to join us in this initiative.

QUICK FACTS

- Number of participants who attended at least one of the events: 99
- Distribution of participants:
 - Instructors: 44 professors, 5 lecturers
 - Students: 15
 - Representatives of service and administration units: 23
 - Participants from external institutions: 2
 - Other/Unknown: 10
- Distribution of participants according to Faculty (68)



- The majority of participants who filled out feedback forms at the **Opening Symposium** on March 5, 2009 were very satisfied with this event. Furthermore, almost all participants who filled out feedback forms at the lecture and the workshop the following day stated that these events gave them ideas about how they could link teaching and research/scholarship in their own courses.
- Participants' comments on the feedback forms were largely positive, and included suggestions for how to promote the links between teaching and research/scholarship at McGill.
 - Sample responses to the question: What aspects of this event did you find most interesting?
 - Hearing about the teacher/student experiences -- real experiences from real people.
 - The resources that show the range of possible applications and ways of integrating research and teaching.
 - The cases gave great ideas for changing institutional rewards, curricula, and specific courses.
 - The opportunity to reflect on my own practice while listening to others.
 - Sample suggestions for follow-up:
 - I would like more opportunities to learn how to link research and teaching (i.e. more teacher-student panels).
 - A serious discussion of what resources we need to manage and how and what can be done within our limitations to join research and teaching.
 - The university should provide increased individual and departmental support for implementing these great ideas.