

Maple League COVID-19 Response **April 27, 2020**

Mitigating Disruption through Collaboration

The rapid shift from face-to-face interactions to online/remote teaching in the Winter 2020 term has been one of the most disruptive shifts in the history of Post-Secondary Education (PSE). In the coming months our institutions will be called upon to balance delivering high quality online learning while making an argument for the deep and enduring value of face-to-face learning. One of the core strengths of our institutions is the many opportunities for in-person engagement with extraordinary faculty and staff. With the suspension of on-campus and in-person activities at our four campuses in mid-March 2020, colleagues across the Maple League moved quickly to connect with each other to provide support and resources for faculty, administrators, staff and students in virtual communities.

Turning Challenges into Opportunities

Many of these initiatives build upon existing collaborations in which the Maple League has been engaged since its inception, and they have put us in a strong position to work together in navigating through the current crisis. The Maple League provides us an opportunity to shift from crisis management to a tactical, entrepreneurial approach in the light of COVID-19 and respond to longer-term pressures. In the light of the crisis precipitated by the global pandemic, the two guiding questions at the heart of this consortium – “what can we do together that we cannot do on our own?” and “how does working together enhance what we do on our individual campuses?” – are more relevant (and indeed more urgent) than ever.

Maple League Highlights over the past Six Weeks

- Teaching and Learning Support with Virtual Open Office Hours for Faculty
- Peer Support with Virtual Open Office Hours for Students
- Curated Mental Health Resources via Social Media
- Indigenous Mindfulness Retreat
- Collaborative Scenario Planning and Sharing Best Practices
- Shared Spring/Summer Course Offerings
- Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that encourages inter-institutional course sharing
- Pedagogical Support for Online/Remote Learning (Spring/Summer 2020 & Fall 2020)
- Maple League Academic Programming
- External Engagement with Foundations, Think Tanks, and Government

Maple League colleagues have demonstrated generosity, compassion, and resilience in the light of the global pandemic. Our four institutions reached out to one another immediately and are now finding ways forward that are stronger together. These are extraordinary times and our collective willingness to think differently to deliver a high quality 21st century liberal education sets us apart from our competitors. In the coming weeks and months we can harness our strengths and put ourselves in a whole new league in Canadian higher education and internationally.

Weeks 1 & 2 (March 18 – 27, 2020)
Pedagogical Triage & Eco-Systems of Support

Virtual Office Hours for Faculty

From March 18th – March 27th, the Maple League Teaching & Learning Centre (MLTLC) launched Virtual Open Office Hours, running daily from 3pm Eastern/4pm Atlantic to 6pm Eastern/7pm Atlantic, to help faculty adjust their assessment criteria, re-work exams, explore online platforms for content delivery and to work through specific problems such as labs or experiential learning.

- **24 x One-hour sessions**
- **16 faculty facilitators**
- 3 – 4 faculty/hour used the virtual office hours for a total of **96 faculty contacts**

Topics of Discussion:

- creative assignments;
- re-weighting assessments;
- educational technology and online solutions for discussion-based courses;
- alternative methods of assessment;
- creating effective take-home exams;
- lecture capture and how to record short videos for content delivery; and
- experiential learning and lab assessment.



Virtual Office Hours for Students



The Maple League Student Fellows hosted dedicated online office hours for students to help them adapt to the shift in content delivery.

These were led by Lara Hartman (Acadia), Tiffany McLellan (St. Francis Xavier), Georges-Philippe Gadoury-Sansfaçon (Bishop's) and many other student volunteers who shared their experience with learning strategies, tips for organization and support for succeeding online.

We also engaged the four Student Unions to promote student office hours to their student bodies and to work with them on student-centered programming with a focus on a mental health outreach campaign via social media.

Weeks 3 – 5 (March 31 – April 17) Mental Health & Mindfulness

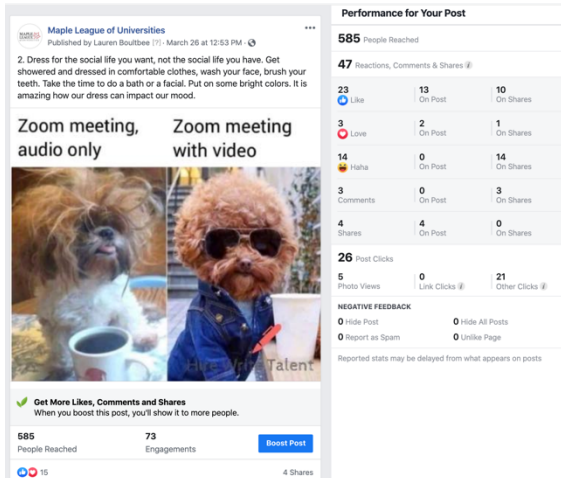
Seven Sacred Teachings: An Indigenous Mindfulness Program

In response to the feedback from members of our community, the Maple League designed and hosted the **Seven Sacred Teachings Retreat**, an Indigenous mindfulness workshop taught by Mi'kmaq cultural teacher Darlene Peters Copeland. Elder Darlene (a member of Glooscap First Nation community and Indigenous Student Advisor at Acadia) co-taught with Dr. Cynthia Alexander, a faculty member at Acadia (Politics Department) The Seven Sacred Teachings Yoga “Introductory Stress Buster Series” ran **March 31 – April 17** (eight sessions in total) and concluded with a celebratory virtual sharing circle.



Upwards of **40 people** attended each session and participants who attended all eight sessions received a certificate of completion.

Curating Mental Health Resources on Social Media



The Maple League curated resources to help faculty adapt in the light of university closures and the shift away from face-to-face instruction, with a particular focus on sharing resources on supporting mental health for our communities.



Collaborative Scenario Planning

A number of committees and groups have connected regularly over the past six weeks to troubleshoot, share practices and check in with one another, including the VPs Academic, Registrars, Recruitment Directors, Athletic Directors, the Maple League TLC, the Maple League Research Committee, ITS Directors, and the Presidents' Council. A number of these groups are going on virtual planning retreats and working groups have been formed to identify pain points and engage in collaborative strategic planning and change management.

Longer-Term Response: Sustainability through Collaboration (April 20 – present)

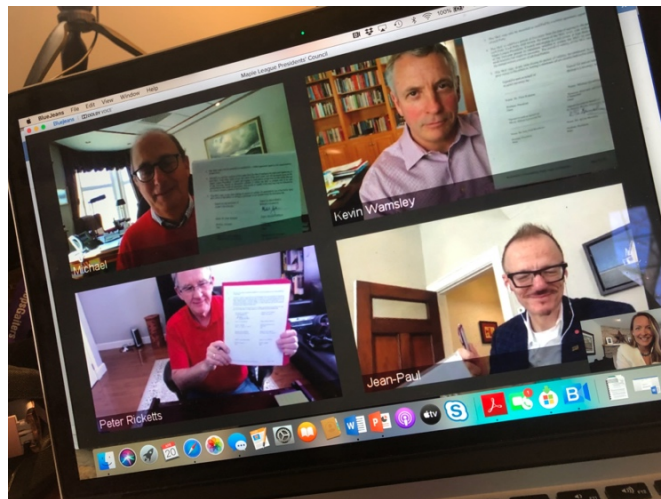
Sharing Spring/Summer 2020 courses

The VPs Academic led a collaborative effort to share online courses offered on all four campuses for Spring/Summer 2020. With the Registrars, they created a menu of almost 200 courses to provide students with diversity and choice. There is a newly created page on the Maple League website dedicated to Spring/Summer course offerings with resources for students, a fillable visiting student application form, and other FAQs in an effort to make it easy to take courses at other Maple League universities.

Encouraging students to take courses across the four institutions (MOU)

We have a history of Maple League academic programming (such as joint courses taught across all four universities) and over the past two years we have identified and addressed the challenges of collaborating across campuses. Last year, the Maple League Presidents' Council asked our four Registrars to develop an agreement whereby our students would no longer require Letters of Permission and associated fees to take courses at other Maple League universities, and that courses from each institution would be recognized for credit across the Maple League. On April 20, 2020, the four university presidents signed by a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to remove a number of logistical barriers for students:

1. Students can transfer their mark (with the appropriate conversion) and course code to their home institution.
2. Students do not need a Letter of Permission (LOP) as there is a simple visiting student form.
3. Students do not need to pay additional fees or costs related to course registration. There is no extra tuition in Fall/Winter (students will continue to pay tuition in Spring/Summer to the host institution).
4. Students are encouraged to take courses across the Maple League while ensuring specific program requirements are respected (*e.g.* recognized course equivalencies).



In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, the timing of this MOU is fortuitous given the upcoming spring/summer sessions where there are reduced course offerings and on-line only courses being delivered across the Maple League. The increased capacity for Maple League students to take courses across the four institutions will help offset that overall reduction in institutional offerings.

Pedagogical Support for Online Delivery

The Maple League Teaching & Learning Committee and Maple League Academic Committee are thinking longer-term (into the Spring/Summer and Fall 2020) about alternative delivery of courses and how we can support faculty and students. Some members of the MLTLC are currently taking a course offered by Lethbridge College called “Facilitating Online Learning” that trains faculty to design, deliver and support colleagues on online delivery. The MLTLC is exploring the following longer-term pedagogical support:

1. Curating resources in a Virtual MLTLC
2. Providing pedagogical triage (open office hours for faculty) for Spring/Summer and Fall 2020 with individualized support
3. Designing professional development (e.g. online spring institute to help faculty teach online)
4. Facilitating focus groups and surveys for faculty needs assessment to ensure pedagogical support is relevant, timely, and high impact

Maple League Academic Programming

The Maple League has the opportunity to harness our collaborative, inter-institutional approach to high quality undergraduate education through virtual learning communities and digital pedagogies. We are currently exploring how we might complement the work being done on individual campuses with a suite of high impact Maple League online courses with longer-term goals for 2020 – 2021 and beyond. The idea is still in the concept stage and we are currently exploring external funding sources to alleviate some of the pressure on our individual campuses. We have already secured ~\$200,000 of funding for this project and would like to secure additional monies from foundations and think tanks in the coming weeks and months.

Engaging in External Partnerships and Cultivating Eco-systems of Support

We are heartened by the support and collaboration of our colleagues, peers, students and friends at the four Maple League institutions, as well as partners in higher education throughout Canada. In these uncertain times, their willingness to share their insight, experience, thoughts (and their candid concerns) has been most welcome.

