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Maple League Quarterly Report

December 2023

Prepared for: The Maple League Community

Overview

On July 1, I succeeded Jessica Riddell as Executive Director of the Maple League and Juan Carlos López began his term as the Director of the Maple League Teaching and Learning Centre. In the first six months, Juan Carlos and I have visited each of the campuses and developed relationships with key stakeholders at each institution. Our focus has been continuity, as we have attempted to maintain the activities of the league, while at the same time attempting to plan a course for the future of the consortium given the aspirations of the community and the opportunities we see within our influence.

Committees

Teaching and Learning Committee

The Teaching and Learning Committee and its associated activities have continued to thrive. Led by Juan Carlos and supported by co-chairs Erin Austen (STFX) and Toni Roberts (Mount Allison), the group has organized several events (book clubs, [Better Together](#) workshops, and external hosts). In total **600** participants have engaged with the Maple League TLC events this term, representing all the Maple League universities but also colleges and universities from across Canada and around the world!

In addition to our series of events, the Maple League's Teaching and Learning [micro-certificate](#) program is currently leading a group of 19 faculty from across the Maple League on a journey to reflect on and improve their practice as educators.

Mentoring faculty and students from across the Maple League to participate in the 3M awards process is also a focus of the MLTLC, and we have supported [faculty](#) applications across all the Maple League Universities and are currently working with [students](#) from across the league to submit strong applications.

Research Committee

This summer faculty and administration representing the four campuses met at Acadia University. Several items were discussed, plans for cross institutional collaboration were made and support for

Canada Research Chairs across the community were offered. The main take away from the event, was the publishing of a brief in response to a House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research: Government of Canada Graduate Scholarship and Post-Doctoral Fellowship Programs. The Maple League Research Committee submission recommended the committee to:

1. Increase graduate and post-doctoral fellowship support by raising the value of the Canada Graduate Scholarship awards and Post-doctoral Fellowship Awards by 50% and adjusting these awards for inflation on a regular basis.
2. Increase support for trainees by increasing base budgets for the federal Tri-Agencies.
3. Return the CGS-M award to two years of funding support.
4. Establish graduate scholarship and post-doctoral fellowship awards specifically for under-represented scholars.
5. Expand and diversify federal support for Postdoctoral Fellows to increase the number of awards that will be held at small universities.

The research committee has been chaired by Anna Redden (Acadia), who has recently ended her term, to date a successor has not been named.

Academic Committee

We attempted to pull together a meeting of the Academic Committee in September but unfortunately it was not well attended, due to various scheduling issues across the campus. Instead, I have begun to meet with groups of Dean's at each university on my visits. In October I had a meeting at Bishop's where Dean's expressed their interest in shared research agendas amongst their faculty and discussed the issues around shared courses. We will attempt to reconvene the academic committee in the new year.

Communities of Practice

We have allowed the various communities of practice to continue their own momentum or to naturally wane as need be. For example, the student development offices continue to support each other, the registrars met in the summer and were supportive of changes made to the shared courses process and helped to operationalize the change. Juan Carlos and I have made ourselves available as a resource to the various communities around the Maple League and we anticipate additional gatherings moving forward.

Shared Courses

Once thought of as a priority with respect to the student experience and faculty collaboration, the Maple League shared course agenda stalled amidst competing priorities across the member institutions. At present time we have revised the [shared-courses](#) approval mechanism to a simple list of accessible fall / winter online courses with a modified letter of permission process amongst the 4 universities. Now that this process is in place and being piloted, we intend to socialize the process and add seats for the 2024/2025 fall / winter catalog as well as better promote spring / summer courses across the league.

Impact Stories

The Maple League sponsored the [Business of the Arts](#) conference at Mount Allison University, which was won by Bishop's University.

The [Nation-to-Nation](#) program, continues in its final year of funding. Organization for the summer trip to Belize is well underway.

Presentations, Events, Networking

In an effort for the Maple League to become more visible and enhance our ability to create opportunities and partnerships across and beyond the league Juan Carlos and I have committed to attending and presented at various conference and events.

- Juan Carlos and Jack presented at the [AAU](#) teaching showcase this fall.
- Juan Carlos presented at Acadia University [Festival of Teaching and Learning](#)
- Juan Carlos attended the *Generativity is Hope Student Summit* in Orford, QC
- Jack presented to the [CCAÉ](#) .
- Jack presented at the [ISEP](#) conference.
- Jack presented at the [ICDE](#) conference.
- Jack attended the [CEWIL](#) Atlantic Day of Learning.
- Jack met with Matthew McKean from [BHER](#) .
- Jack met with James Hammond from the [U15](#) .

Budget

As per our agreement, each of the four universities contributed \$50,000 in annual funding for 2023 / 2024 and carry over funds of \$101,147.48 were sent from Bishop's University to STFX where the finances of the league are now codified with a series of GL's. Our goal for the year is to not exceed our annual funding allotment and to maintain or grow our surplus, this will allow us to continue to plan for future strategic activities that may result from our developing strategic plan.

Strategic Planning Update

In my first 6 months as Maple League Executive Director, I have done my best to be visible at the 4 campuses and have held discussions with a variety of stakeholders, including Presidents / Principal, VPA / Provosts, Deans, Former Maple League Executive Directors, Registrars, Faculty, Teaching and Learning Committees, Student Development, Recruitment, Advancement, etc.

Below are a series of preliminary thoughts on several topics as I look at the current context of the Maple League and potential new opportunities. These thoughts fall well short of a strategic plan, but with further discussion over the winter term a clear strategic direction will emerge.

Advocacy

When the Maple League initially formed as the U4, approximately 10 years ago, higher education was on a much different trajectory. In the intervening decade, public funding to universities has frozen in real terms, private competitors have entered the market, online learning has proliferated, a global pandemic has caused considerable upset to human resources and supply chains, inflation has returned, and the politicization of higher education has become increasingly evident.

While advocacy may not have been an original mandate of the league, there are few agencies organized, to provide a voice for smaller, immersive, university experiences. While we belong to networks such as Universities Canada the specific issues that smaller institutions face is not their mandate.

I point specifically to the issue facing Bishop's University in the fall as a clear opportunity to operationalize the Maple League as a source of advocacy for their position with respect to regulatory changes. I would recommend that the governing body and the President's Council revisit this issue to clarify the advocacy mandate of the league, and to ensure that its members have a voice at the table with respect to the issues that affect our institutions.

Governance

The switch to a governing board consisting of the 4VPA's / Provosts occurred last year. I feel this is the right governance model for the league, however I think we should consider expanding that group, perhaps through a larger board consisting of Provosts and delegates (additional academic leaders at each institution). Deans or Associate Provosts may be able to play a stronger role in the governance of the league in addition to their work as an academic committee or a community of practice. Expanding the board from 4 members to 8, could provide more active support to the Executive Director, and the potential for sub committees. Just something to consider as the consortium evolves, this will be discussed with the President's Council and potentially revisited as a motion at the governing board early in the new year.

Committees and Communities of Practice

I'd like to improve the communication across the Maple League, without adding more scheduled meetings, so I am investigating a modern community platform, so that members, communities, committees, task forces etc. could communicate with one another regularly.

The Teaching & Learning committee has been resourced and as such has developed a fulsome repertoire of activities, however the other committees and communities have not been resourced and therefore function solely as support networks for ideation and benchmarking. This is not a criticism, but I would like to understand the opportunities if other communities had a more formal system of supports to enable their work, and I believe creating a more organized way to communicate would be a start.

Continuing Education

Recently I have begun to have conversations across the Maple League on potential collaborations amongst the 4 universities in the area on non-credit programs. I presented potential ideas to the Provost and VP Teaching and Learning at Acadia and have a presentation planned for Mount Allison in January. I am planning to visit Bishop's in February with the aim to discuss the concept as well. I believe the use of shared platforms could significantly increase the reach, profitability, and sustainability of continuing education / open learning for all institutions, while at the same time allowing each institution to define its own unique brand and approach.

Recruitment

Historically recruitment has been a difficult project for the Maple League to support as a collective. In an attempt to come at the issue from a slightly different perspective, I've pulled together a group consisting of myself, Kutay Ulkuer (Mount Allison), Scott Duguay (Acadia), and Stine Linden Andersen (Bishop's) and Matea Drljepan (STFX) to come up with an innovative approach to brand building for the Maple League that could positively impact recruitment for all member institutions. "Tilling the soil" if you will, I will keep the community updated on this task force as ideas are generated.

On behalf of myself and Juan Carlos López we look forward to continuing our work on behalf of the member universities.

Sincerely,

Jack Rice

Executive Director, The Maple League of Universities