

**STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOCUS GROUP EXERCISE
PSYCHOLOGY UNDERGRADUATES – PSYC 428Q (QUALITATIVE INQUIRY)
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As part of my qualitative inquiry course, I asked my students to break into groups of 5-6 and conduct focus groups on the topic of the Next Generation University. Below are the questions they were asked to consider and the collated answers garnered from all groups. I only recorded content and not frequency of responses, as this type of data would be rather meaningless with such a small group.

WHAT IS A NEXT GENERATION UNIVERSITY?

- One where the educational focus is on applying knowledge to better society rather than just learning content (i.e., theory)
- This requires a paradigm shift in Concordia's values where students are recognized for community engagement - not just prizes for best GPA
- One that provides teaches technical skills needed for the future
- One that is community based and that adopts a global orientation
- One that focuses on the person as a whole, not just a brain on a stick.
- One that is less traditional in its educational approach, and instead emphasizes flexible learning and applied skill training

WHAT SKILLS DO STUDENTS NEED TO LEARN NOW IN ORDER TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN THE FUTURE?

- Critical thinking
- Time management skills; multitasking
- Working effectively under pressure
- Working well as part of a team
- Public speaking
- How to receive and use constructive criticism
- How to write properly (we need more written assignments and more feedback)
- Computer programming
- Emotional intelligence
- Focusing on skills that we do not know how to automatize yet or efficiently (ex. stimulate design, innovation, creativity because these cannot become obsolete)

WHAT SHOULD CONCORDIA DO TO ENSURE STUDENTS RECEIVE NEXT GENERATION SKILLS?

- Incorporate experiential learning into the curriculum
- Provide direct interaction with the community, organizations
- Make sure partners in organizations are aware of educational goals
- Feel that currently there is very little application, universities aim toward forming future members of academia and not members of the community
- Strike a balance between being centre of knowledge production and distribution and being integrated with application in society

- teach students how to communicate science to various types of audiences
- offer workshops in writing OpEd pieces or popular science magazines.
- train students to give TEDtalks

HOW CAN WE MAKE CONCORDIA DEGREES MORE HANDS ON AND MORE RELEVANT?

- Provide more internship opportunities
- Provide more opportunities to engage in hands on/practical tasks pertinent to your field of study (even as a part of courses – like this one does)
- Provide job shadowing opportunities so that students can observe real world applications of class material
- Need to teach technology - Concordia needs more resources, both physically and personal support. Computer labs are awful and the support we have with tech resources is very limited. We are not taught new or cutting edge technology
- It would be great to have more co-ops, or more stage experience and hands on learning in order to properly match students with their strengths and future job preferences. We want our degrees to be more hands on.

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE THE UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE AT CONCORDIA?

- Make acceptance to an undergraduate degree in psychology more selective so that the program isn't as overpopulated. This, in turn, may allow for students to have more opportunities to participate in internships and even just to get a volunteering position in a lab.
- Provide more specific programs at the undergraduate level. Like Industrial Organizational Psychology. This would allow students to get to a profession faster.
- Better career advising: Informing students what they need to do to optimize their chances of being accepted into grad school. Advise students to always have a plan B in case their initial plan does not play out.
- Modify the undergraduate degree in psychology so that it may lead to more job opportunities. Possibly by making it more hands on or by providing more specific variations of the undergraduate psychology degree (like I.O as mentioned earlier).
- Allow students to receive credit for community involvement and research experience.
- Nurture emotional and mental health by providing spaces that are non academic (greenhouse), social spaces like the Hive Café, napping spaces (chairs).
- Need better trained teachers. Being a good researcher does not make you a good teacher; it makes a difference in our GPA if the teacher explains properly the material or not.
- Provide better access to volunteering opportunities; establish a formal network with community partners
- The food on campus is extremely expensive and limited.
- It would be nice to gain school credit for volunteering outside of Concordia - in order to validate and quantify skills and experiences that contribute to learning.

- Need to encourage social interaction among students (not just party type events); create an inviting environment where students feel welcome to share their points of view.
- A peer mentoring program would be ideal of matching undergrads with masters and Phd students in order to have support from someone who has truly been there
- We need more communal places to eat, rest, and study (library downtown is often very hectic).
- Many students are on campus for long hours; the common spaces (e.g., foyers) could use more seats and benches and tables.
- The Guadagni lounge needs a major update; proper food and comfortable furniture – it's a great space that is being improperly used.
- Have areas on campus that encourage a quick bout of physical exercise (e.g., elliptical machines) between classes or before exams - without having to get a gym membership for a semester.
- Should be able to join the gym on a monthly basis and also have membership valid across both campuses.
- New information system is very difficult to navigate.
- Provide more academic advisors; often find out important information when it's too late.
- Make course evaluations public so that students can choose professors more suited to their learning style

IF YOU COULD CHANGE THREE THINGS ABOUT THE WAY CONCORDIA EDUCATES ITS STUDENTS, WHAT WOULD THEY BE?

- Have weekly assignments instead of exams; cramming for a final not efficient for learning
- Have more projects that encourage participation, hands-on learning and experimenting, creativity.
- Grading scale should be made standard across all courses in a program and across the university.
- Diversify evaluation methods, not just multiple choice.
- Multiple choice as a means of grading is limited and unable to assess critical thinking skills, more long answer/ essay questions or assignments would be beneficial to learning and retaining material.
- Participation should be more heavily considered in class evaluation.
- Course content should be based less on memorization and more on understanding.
- More opportunities to work on class projects that have a direct impact on the community (rather than just satisfying a course requirement).
- Provide PPT slides before hand so that notes can be taken during class
- Provide topical examples from own work – always more interesting and engaging than repeating what is in textbook.
- There are lots of resources available to students but it is not always possible for students to become engaged because they may not be aware of the services.

- Also program demands are badly coordinated (e.g., midterm exams all the same week); structure the courses in a way that allows students to coordinate course load with other activities such as community involvement and research experience.
- Offer workshops on how to succeed with online courses;
- Have more blended learning classes (come to university for contact, hands-on stuff, meetings, lectures do from computer).
- Professors should be more than lecturers, should be mentors, educators.
- More opportunities to practice writing and apply feedback received
- Courses are dry; too much lecturing, not enough activity.
- We need flexibility and interest based learning where students have the time to follow their interest and contribute to their own learning
- Concordia functions as a industry and seemingly conveyor belt type learning style that pumps students in and pumps them out, it doesn't foster interests or abilities of the individual
- More interaction among students and professors - there are too many students for professors to adequately get to know. Often professors are more concerned with their own research than actually teaching and helping the students.
- Letters of references are so important for grad school yet little time is actually given to fostering professor-student relationships.
- Need more choices in courses, choice for psych very limited and classes are always full
- Offer live-streaming of courses.
- Video lessons are better for larger classes, you don't miss out on much content and have little time to pose questions, so in person attendance is not nearly as valuable as it would be in smaller classes that have opportunities for direct discussion with the professor or other students during class time.
- Research component is too heavy for a lot of applicants and therefore should be made abundantly clear when entering into the program. Otherwise students find out halfway through and feel as though they have wasted the time they have invested in the program.
- Volunteer experience are too research oriented, need more clinical options.