TAW Strategic Priorities:
A Response to the Institutional Strategic Plan — January 2016

The Teaching Award Winners are an informal group of outstanding educators who gather from across campus to share ideas, and to provide a perspective on the teaching environment at the University of Alberta. We met to discuss a response to the ISP in the context of the Faculty Member of the Future. The question we posed was:

*What could the UofA do at the institutional level that would most powerfully leverage transformation in teaching excellence over the next five years?*

Our discussions on this question led to three themes: a culture which values teaching and learning, leadership which provides strategic direction for teaching and learning, and resources to support teaching and learning.

The **culture and values** theme is closely aligned with the “Engaging the Whole People” theme. We see the need for a culture change which drives this institution forward as a leader in teaching and learning excellence. This is a natural and synergistic partner with excellence in research. Through recent initiatives such as the Festival of Teaching and Learning, through a higher profile for CTL, and through funding initiatives (see below), this culture is being revitalized.

Specific and concrete actions would add momentum at a critical moment. The **leadership** theme is focused on providing a focal point for teaching scholarship on campus, much as the Vice President Research provides a focal point for research activities on campus. We welcome the appointments of Sarah Forgie and Nat Kav as Vice-Provosts (Learning Initiatives, 5 days/wk, and Programs and Instruction, 2 days/wk). We need to bring this portfolio in line with other major post-secondary comparator institutions across the country. Empowering and engaging all learners on campus, and in the broader community, requires new ideas and outstanding faculty development. Looking up from below, we see a full time VP Research whose role is to drive research excellence at the institution. The Provost is the operational leader of the institution and the VP Academic, and his all-encompassing role has many facets. While we offer the Provost our whole-hearted support, we miss the balance and direction provided by a single individual whose full-time role is to drive world-class teaching excellence for the institution. We dream of an environment where teaching excellence is supported by a strong infrastructure for faculty development, particularly in the early career stages, where outstanding learner outcomes are celebrated with the same sense of accomplishment as publications in “good” journals, and where there is a shared understanding of what we mean by excellence in educational scholarship as we progress through the ranks.

None of these initiatives can be accomplished without resources. Our **resources** theme is less financially intensive than the equivalent resources needed to impact research, because the people are already here. This is a place where we see enormous potential in implementing our values as actions. We begin by celebrating and acknowledging the evidence of change and progress in this area over the last five years: The TLEF PD funds provide critical resources for interactions, the TLEF funds, MOOC and Blended learning projects, and the finite terms of the Vargo Chairs all allow engagement of more scholars across campus and provide impetus for the development of excellence in educational scholarship. Some faculties have done an excellent job of providing stories to UofA news about excellence in teaching, as well as current research results, and these stories are important to the community.
As the Teaching Award Winners (TAW) group, we have identified a number of key strategic opportunities for the next five years:

1. Expand the role of the Director of the Centre for Teaching and Learning to a permanent, full time appointment, parallelling the other major academic service unit on campus, the Chief Librarian. We believe that this individual must be someone who can provide leadership, experience, and expertise in three areas:
   a. pedagogical instruction of professors, contract instructors, senior PhD students and PDFs
   b. teaching in higher education, as distinct from K-12 or adult learning
   c. teaching scholarship, which includes evidence based course design and improvement, assessment and accreditation, and the mentoring and professional development of academics who wish to publish their findings. We need to stop reinventing the wheel, and start leveraging our discoveries in the classroom.

The selection of this individual, and the terms of appointment, will send a loud message to teaching scholars across campus as to the institution’s strategic direction and priorities around teaching and learning.

2. Formally expand and support our concept of scholarship as inclusive of creative works, community engagement, pedagogy, and discipline-based educational scholarship as well as research on teaching and learning.

3. Provide FEC’s with tools and direction on how to define and assess pedagogical scholarship and multi-faceted measures of teaching excellence. CTL (and TAW) can provide tools and direction on how to encourage growth in teaching excellence and scholarship without resorting to an increase in teaching assignments as instructional staff become more senior in the ranks. This strategic opportunity builds on current strengths as the blended and MOOC committees have provided letters and guidelines to the FEC’s in which the project PI’s are situated. We note that this point builds a diverse and inclusive environment where scholars of all kinds can flourish, sustaining and empowering a culture of excellence in learning and enquiry for our students and communities.

4. Provide a course, or courses, in pedagogy through CTL, expanding existing pilot-scale models in the Faculties of Medicine and Nursing which allow the completion of Masters Degrees in discipline specific educational models. Completion of this course, or courses, could be part of the evidence of engagement with the scholarship of teaching at decisions for tenure and promotion. Research shows that instructors with a grounding in the fundamentals of pedagogy are better teachers.

5. Develop a Gold College-like entity in teaching scholarship to provide support and strong cohorts of teaching scholars who can raise the bar, in a very selective way, for teaching excellence across campus. Again, this would most logically be housed at CTL.

6. Consider expansion of the role of the two Vice-Provosts to include responsibility for the learning environment and faculty development in teaching specifically. We recognize this point as a potential stretch target, but at the same time note some of the remarkable things being done at the University of Calgary with a similar full-time appointment.

7. Encourage a realignment of the Associate Dean structures within the various faculties to support an Associate Dean of Teaching and Learning, or equivalent, in each large faculty. These Associate Deans would work with CTL to lead faculty development, learning initiatives, and teaching scholarship.