

## **McMaster Intersession Learning**

Project: Investigating the content and structure of post-secondary preparation courses

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### **About the Organization:**

McMaster Intersession Learning is a new department offering interdisciplinary courses to students outside the Fall and Winter semesters. This offers students greater curriculum flexibility, who often have full course loads in the Fall and Winter terms. Current offerings include the INSPIRE courses, which offer students the opportunity to learn about educational topics in the Hamilton community.

### **About the Initiative:**

Intersession Learning is exploring the development of intersessional courses that can help students transition better into their first year of university. This comes from recognizing that there is a large gap in skills, knowledge, and expectations that incoming high school students have in transitioning to taking first year courses at McMaster. In Fall 2021, the department piloted offering three courses to incoming students, focusing on developing academic, professional, and wellness skills to help succeed in university. Each course is worth one unit and students have the flexibility and choice to take a single or multiple courses, as per their preferences. The current structure requires students to participate in workshops at the end of August before they arrive at McMaster (virtually), and then attend an in-person class in September to engage with their peers and apply what they learn. All INSPIRE 1-unit courses combine into one core class in the Fall. In other words, the workshop component of the courses is unique for each individual course, whereas the Fall core lecture component of the courses is the same amongst all courses. If a student enrolls in two 1-unit courses, they will need to attend the workshops and complete workshop deliverables for each course separately. Then, in the Fall term, they will have a single combined lecture and deliverables completed during the fall, which applies to both the 1-unit courses. To alleviate the academic burden faced by students during peak midterm and exam periods, the 1-unit courses end at the end of October, with a single 10-minute evaluation meeting with the instructor being scheduled in November.

Enrollment for these pilot courses was lower than expected. In response to student feedback, Intersession Learning is considering expanding the current course offerings from three to six courses, offering more topics and giving students the flexibility to pick and choose the courses most relevant to them. However, the department is taking a pause to conduct research around the content and structure of these courses to ensure the offering is feasible/relevant with the goal of increasing uptake.

### **Research Question:**

- What is an appropriate structure for INSPIRE University Success courses?
  - Would students prefer having 1-unit individual courses that they can choose from out of six options? Or would students prefer the courses are packaged together into one 3-unit course that covers all relevant topics?
  - What is the best timing for the courses?
- What course content would be most interesting/relevant to students?

**Research Activities:**

This research will involve primary data collection with the first-year student population. Research methods could include a survey, interviews, and/or focus groups, to be determined in collaboration with the community partner.

**Audience:**

This research will be used internally by Intersession Learning and the Student Success Centre at McMaster to inform course development.

**Deliverable:**

Plain language report with context, methods, and findings.

**Timeline:**

Fall semester project with a deliverable by late December or early January.

**Community Partner Role:**

The community partner will support the project by helping to narrow down and clarify the scope, review all deliverables (including research instruments and protocols), and assist with participant recruitment (e.g., accessing listservs, providing incentives for participation).

**Interest for Students:**

Students interested in interdisciplinary learning, course development/design, and primary data collection. This project may involve in-person data collection in the Hamilton area (e.g., McMaster university campus).