

## **Students' learning can be enhanced via Centres of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: A quick view all over the world**

**George Asimakopoulos<sup>1</sup>, Thanassis Karalis<sup>1</sup>, Katerina Kedraka<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Educational Science and Early Childhood Education, University of Patras, Greece, <sup>2</sup>Department of Molecular Biology & Genetics, Democritus University of Thrace, Greece.

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper studies the Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTL) of the 100 top Universities in the world and investigates their role and services. The vast majority of these Centers is located in educational institutions of the US, the UK, Australia and Canada. CTL services cover many areas and target several portions of the university population. They try to meet contemporary requirements and aim to enhance teaching, learning and research processes.*

***Keywords:*** *Centers for Teaching and Learning; services; university; support.*

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## **1. Introduction**

Continuous change in contemporary societies forces universities to discover efficient methods so as to be flexible and constantly updated (Raikou & Karalis, 2011). Kedraka & Rotidi (2017) point out the importance of higher education pedagogy. They consider it a multidimensional process which relates to specific teaching practices and approaches. They claim that training and support within the university environment can promote active student learning. Moreover, modern learning theories alongside the use of technology-enhanced pedagogical tools, call for more active student learning and a shift in the role of modern higher education institutes (Wells & Edwards, 2013).

Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTL) are relatively recent support structures, operating within academic institutions. They first appeared in the second half of the 20th century but they grew remarkably just in the last two decades. Given the particularity and variation among academic institutions around the world, there are significant differences both in terms of mission, functions, organizational structure (Hurtado & Sork, 2015), and in terms of the name used for these: usually we find them under the name Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) or Centre for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (CETL). Sometimes terms such as "excellence", "innovation" and "support" are also included.

According to Hurtado and Sork (op. Cit.), The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at the University of Michigan was the first to be established in the United States in 1962. Over the last two decades, hundreds of tertiary education institutions in the United States have established such centers, responding to a similar national call, to support and promote remedial change in institutions. According to McDowell et. al. (2007), the corresponding offices in the United Kingdom (Centres for Excellence in Teaching & Learning - CETL) emerged from a "Government White Paper" entitled "The Future of Higher Education", published in 2003, which recognized that effective teaching and learning are essential elements for promoting excellence and opportunities in Higher Education. The Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) were proposed as a way to teaching and learning practices could be recognized, rewarded and good practice disseminated. In fact, successful CTLs would receive significant funding to enhance the learning experience of their students.

## **2. Our study of CTLs**

We based this study on "The World's Top 100 Universities, 2020" and the "QS World University Rankings 2020" and we examined the orientation and character of CTLs. From the lists we included the first 100 institutions with a CTL or similar support structure.

According to *Table 1*, the vast majority of institutions with CTLs are in USA and UK (55%), other European countries (16%) along with Australia and Canada (14%) follow, while Japan and New Zealand (6%) and other Asian countries (9%) come last.

**Table 1. Number of institutions with CTL per country.**

Country	No of institutions having a CTL	Country	No of institutions having a CTL*
USA	35	Hong-Kong	3
UK	20	Belgium	1
Australia	9	Denmark	1
Canada	5	Germany	1
Japan	5	Finland	1
Netherlands	4	Norway	1
Sweden	4	China	1
S. Korea	4	Singapore	1
Swiss	3	New Zealand	1

\*Total 100

CTLs mainly support faculty members in improving their teaching. By offering help and support to teaching staff, they aim to enhance students' learning (Fry et al., 2009). This kind of academic support derives from a student-centered approach to both teaching methods and teaching environment (Klemenčič et al., 2020). But as we can see in *Table 2*, almost half of the CTLs include students to their support services. That is a direct support approach.

24% of CTLs have special programs/courses for Teaching Assistants, while 29% offer support to post-graduate and 9% to post-doctoral students. They support and train these staff categories in order to obtain student learning enhancement. Apart from teaching support, research support is important for universities. So 15% of CTLs offer support programs for researchers in the fields relative to the teaching enhancement. While all CTLs must be in cooperation with other structures within the academic environment, 7% of them officially support Schools, Sections or Teaching Units offering support during curriculum and program design, teaching material or teaching spaces choices.

**Table 2. University population supported by CTLs.**

<b>Supported categories</b>	<b>No of CTLs (total 100)</b>
Faculty members	99
Students	45
Researchers	15
Post-graduate students	29
Post-docs	9
Schools, Sections, Teaching Units	7
Teaching Assistants	24
Other staff	9

### **3. Services provided**

The services provided by CTL are very widespread as the character of the institutions is not the same, the organization is different and they come from different countries/cultures. In Table 3 we tried to capture the main thematic areas, to which the CTL services refer.

More than half of the CTLs (52%) offer counseling support, very often personalized and tailored to the needs of the teaching staff that request them. A significant number of CTLs (40%) offer structured learning programs/courses/lessons for both teaching staff and students on a variety of topics. Also 44% offer labs/seminars/institutes, while the same percentage (44%) has teaching/learning resources-materials and/or libraries to support staff and students. On the other hand, only a 1/5 of CTL (21%) organizes events such as conferences or symposiums.

CTLs that enhance innovation and teaching excellence or offer corresponding teaching excellence awards reach the remarkable percentage of 44%. Similar is the number (42%) of CTLs that offer or promote scholarships or funding for teaching development, while enhancing professional development of teaching staff (16%).

Following the developments in digital technologies, more than 1/3 of the Centers (37%) offer ICT/educational technology training and mobile learning training. Almost 1/4 (23%) support the use of digital support platforms (Moodle, Zoom, Canvas, LMS etc) that have been developed or adopted by the respective educational institutions. In this context, several CTLs support online/distance teaching/learning or flipped classroom (Klemenčič et al., 2020).

**Table 3. Services provided by CTLs.**

<b>Service / thematic area</b>	<b>No of CTLs (total 100)</b>
Consultation services	52
Training programmes/courses/lessons	40
Labs/seminars/institutes	44
Teaching/learning resources/materials	44
Events	21
Innovation/ teaching excellence /awards	44
Scholarships/funding	42
Professional development	16
ICT/educational technology training	37
Digital support platforms	23
Online/distance teaching/learning	23
Learning communities/groups/networks	36
Research support	20
Course design	32
Teaching strategies /enhancement	18
Course observation/analysis	18
Curriculum/ program design	11
Assessment and feedback	42
Inclusive education	17
Studying strategies / academic success	22
Academic writing	12

In order to exchange knowledge and experiences, 36% of the Centers coordinate or encourage learning communities, exchange groups or special networks. At the same time, 20% offer support to researchers (undergraduate students to post-docs), as the universities themselves rely on research to produce knowledge.

Regarding the specific thematic areas, in which the Centers offer support, we could single out lesson design (32%), effective teaching strategies / teaching enhancement (18%), lesson observation/analysis (18%), curriculum/program design (11%), assessment and feedback

(42%) and inclusive education (17%). For students, in particular, support is offered in areas such as studying strategies / academic success and time management (22%) and especially academic writing (12%) (op. Cit).

#### **4. Conclusion**

CTLs were established to contribute in providing quality assurance concerning teaching and learning in higher education institutes. Academics are considered as the main and "most important learning resource" (EAQAHE, 2005:17) available to students and therefore a call for professionalizing higher education teaching is raised (European Commission, 2013; Pleschová et al., 2012). A student-centered culture has been emerging in the framework of these academic learning communities, in order good practices, experiences, and concerns can be shared among academic teachers along with their ability to create and understand how to facilitate students' learning in digital environments and distance learning which are crucial after COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2020).

The aim of this study was to examine the main areas where CTLs offer services, courses, and support for teaching staff and students. Regarding the distribution of CTLs of the top 100 universities, it is rather not surprising that the vast majority of them are situated in the US, Canada, Australia, and Europe, following the relevant ranking of universities. It is worth mentioning that the majority of them do not restrict their fields of activities to teaching staff (faculty members, post-graduate students), extending them to students and research staff as well.

Concerning the thematic areas of the services provided, most of them offer training programmes and consultation/support, while some other interesting areas of activities include the production of educational materials, events organizing, and support for the use of ICT. As for the content of the courses provided to teaching staff, we can conclude that the main sectors are those of course design, teaching strategies, and feedback and assessment. For the courses and support provided to students, the main sectors of activities are those of studying strategies, academic success, and academic writing.

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*Students' learning enhanced via CTLs all over the world*

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