The *Robert Gillespie*
# ACADEMIC SKILLS CENTRE
(RGASC)

# Annual Report 2020/2021

# The RGASC's Mandate

The mandate of the Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre is *to support and promote teaching and learning in a range of contexts across UTM*. For students, the RGASC is a resource for developing academic skills through individual appointments and group-based initiatives. For instructional staff and faculty, the Centre is a partner in teaching and learning activities ranging from course and program design to implementation and to the assessment of a given intervention's impact.

Faculty and staff appointed at the RGASC have a range of specializations, including academic peer support, academic writing instruction, educational development, English language learning, numeracy, scientific literacy, and supplemental instruction. This diversity of experience and expertise enables the Centre to collaborate productively with partners from across the disciplines and campus, who bring with them a varied and diverse set of teaching and learning objectives.

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# Introduction

This document reports on the programming and different forms of academic support provided by the RGASC between 01 May 2020 and 30 April 2021.

The purpose of the Annual Report is to present RGASC stakeholders with the information they need to offer feedback on the kind of programming and academic support the Centre provides to the teaching and learning community at the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM). This document has not been written for the purposes of assessment or self-promotion.

The RGASC Advisory Committee[1] was struck in Fall 2015 with a dual mandate: to facilitate communication between the RGASC and its stakeholders, and to help ensure that the RGASC provides programming and support that genuinely respond to its stakeholders' needs. The Annual Report is intended to provide that Committee with the necessary information to fulfill the terms of its mandate.  More generally, the Report is written to facilitate communication between the RGASC and all those members of the University of Toronto community for whom the Centre provides programs and services.

| THE 2020/2021 ANNUAL REPORT IS ORGANIZED INTO FOUR SECTIONS | 1. General Undergraduate Support<br>2. Core Focus Areas<br>3. Programs<br>4. Collaborative Programming |
| --- | --- |

Note: Because ISUP is now responsible for the delivery of utmONE and ISP courses, the "Course Teaching" section of the RGASC Annual Report has been discontinued. Information about other courses with which the RGASC is involved (e.g., EDS325 and other EL courses) is included in other sections of this document.

Wherever possible, this Report offers both a quantification of the results of RGASC programming and qualitative feedback from our stakeholders. We hope this information will not only inform our stakeholders about the RGASC's activities over the past year, but also inspire a community-wide discussion about the reach, impact, relevance, sustainability, affordability, and scalability of RGASC programming more generally.

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[1] The Terms of Reference for the RGASC Advisory Committee are posted on the RGASC website (https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/our-mission-0/rgasc-advisory-committee). Information regarding this year's Committee membership is also included in Appendix A of this Report.

The common themes running through this year's Report are managing the move to "the Institute for the Study of University Pedagogy and "shifting to remote learning as a response to the coronavirus pandemic."

The RGASC greatly values feedback from all of its stakeholders. Comments about this Report can be forwarded via email or telephone using the contact information below; readers are also very welcome to drop by the RGASC in person to set up an appointment with an RGASC faculty or staff member.

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## RGASC Mission

The RGASC is a hub for academic skills development on the University of Toronto Mississauga campus and has a dual mandate: to support instructors and teaching assistants in their efforts to implement best practices in teaching and learning, and to support students in their efforts to enhance their academic skills and increase their understanding of their disciplines.

The RGASC works collaboratively with faculty and teaching assistants to help create the best possible environment for learning in classes, labs, and tutorials. It also directly provides academic support to students through a variety of programming channels, including one-on-one appointments, co-curricular courses, workshops, and peer-facilitated study groups.

The RGASC's programming and support are delivered by staff from the RGASC and faculty appointed to the Institute for the Study of University Pedagogy. In order to fulfill its mandates, ISUP faculty and RGASC staff maintain active research programs, often by collaborating with disciplinary colleagues to assess the impact of an intervention in the classroom. All RGASC programming is informed by a number of areas of SoTL including Writing Across the Curriculum, supplemental instruction, critical thinking, problem-based learning, and collaborative learning. The principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion as well as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are foundational to all RGASC programming.

# Organizational Structure

As noted in the last two Annual Reports, the RGASC has been involved over the past few years in a reorganization which would see it move into a formal Extra-Departmental Unit A (EDU-A). The process came to an end on 16 June 2020 when [Governing Council formally approved the proposal to create Institute for the Study of University Pedagogy (ISUP)](). The new Institute includes all the faculty and staff from the RGASC, the utmONE courses and one staff member who moved with the courses from the Centre for Student Engagement, and all the faculty and staff associated with the new foundational writing and numeracy courses.

ISUP faculty will contribute in different ways to RGASC programming, with those faculty members originally appointed to the RGASC typically allocating a greater portion of their workload to RGASC projects than those who have been hired in the last year for the primary purpose of teaching ISP courses. The following is a list of ISUP faculty who taught in the RGASC in 2020/2021:

- o Sheila Batacharya (ELL support)
- o Andie Burazin (numeracy support)
- o Michael deBraga (experiential learning support)
- o Christopher Eaton (writing support)
- o Tyler Evans-Tokaryk (writing support)
- o Jordana Garbati (writing support)
- o Michael Kaler (writing support)
- o Janine Rose (writing support)
- o Sarah Seeley (writing support)
- o Laura Taylor (ELL support)
- o Jonathan Vroom (writing support)

There were a number of other organizational changes within the RGASC that were the result of both the continued growth of its operations and the creation of ISUP. With the ongoing personnel changes within ISUP/RGASC, it is not currently possible to provide a conventional organizational chart. Instead, we are including the list below of permanent RGASC staff (in alphabetical order) and their job titles:

- o Dianne Ashbourne (Educational Developer)
- o Jessica Carlos (Graduate Student Support Strategist)
- o Ann Gagné (Educational Developer-Universal Design for Learning)
- o Laura Hagglund (Marketing & Communications Assistant)
- o Alyssa Hughes (Administrative Assistant)

- o Cliona Kelly (Centre Coordinator & Business Officer)
- o Thomas Klubi (Learning Strategist and Program Manager)
- o Kerrie Martin (Program Strategist)
- o Rebecca Shaw (Academic Success Strategist)

As well, we would like to acknowledge the extraordinary contributions this year of the sessional faculty who worked entirely online to support the hundreds of students who booked synchronous and asynchronous appointments for writing, study skills, and numeracy support through WCONLINE. Our sessional writing instructors in 2020/2021 were Joel Benabu, Paul Raymont, Cheryl Runke, Penny Saeedi, Ryan Sosna, and James Southworth. Our sessional math instructor was Carlos Restrepo Cunha.

Finally, Henna Salim, a former UTM student who has worked for the PASS and FSG programs over the past few years, made invaluable contributions to the RGASC, supporting our operations as an administrative assistant on a casual contract at the RGASC.

The creation of ISUP and movement of RGASC staff and faculty into this new unit has been both a challenging and rewarding experience for everyone involved. The process of welcoming and onboarding a significant number of new faculty and staff (some of whom have never set foot on campus or met their colleagues in person) during the COVID-19 pandemic has been very complicated, but the herculean efforts of a number of dedicated and talented people enabled us to make remarkable progress in the formation of the Institute over the last 11 months.

Professor Heather Miller, UTM's Vice-Dean, Teaching and Learning, deserves special recognition for her work in moving the original proposal for the EDU-A through the governance process, leading the searches for ISUP's first Director and the first four faculty positions in Writing Studies, and for ensuring that the RGASC's important role in the teaching & learning community did not get lost or changed through the reorganization process.

ISUP's Interim Director, Ruth Childs, has done an equally impressive job shepherding the Institute through its formative first year, with all the hiring and administration this has necessarily involved. Since the RGASC Advisory Committee last met, the RGASC and ISUP have hired 12 faculty members, two LTAs, and seven staff members, and are in the process of recruiting still more. With regards to the RGASC, Ruth has worked closely with its team members to not only preserve its existing programming but also provide the conditions for the Centre to grow and flourish in its new administrative home. We are all excited by the prospect of working with Ruth for another two years (yes, she has agreed to stay on for two additional years at Director, ISUP) and continue the evolution of the

RGASC with all the new resources and people afforded by this new organizational structure.

It is important to note that for all the change and growth we have experienced over the past year, the RGASC has worked very hard to ensure that the Centre does not *appear* any different to its primary stakeholders. The students who walk through our door or navigate to our website today should not see anything different from what they would have observed a year ago. Similarly, instructors or TAs looking for teaching support at the RGASC should have the same experience they have always had. From the beginning of this reorganization process, our goal has been to preserve the RGASC brand that students in particular feel comfortable entering. We sincerely hope that this has been and continues to be true.

Of course, no introduction to an Annual Report documenting the activities of an academic unit in a post-secondary institution during a global pandemic would be complete without a discussion of the online context within which we have operated for the last year. It is important for the RGASC's stakeholders to know that, without exception, every one of the RGASC's programs and service successfully moved from in-person to online delivery. Details on how well this has worked and the changes that we needed to make are provided below, but we would like to acknowledge here that many of our programs had fewer students participating this year than in the past. Some programs also experienced significant reductions in the number of students who completed surveys and provided other kinds of feedback, making some of our data less meaningful than we would like.

# Part One: General Undergraduate Support
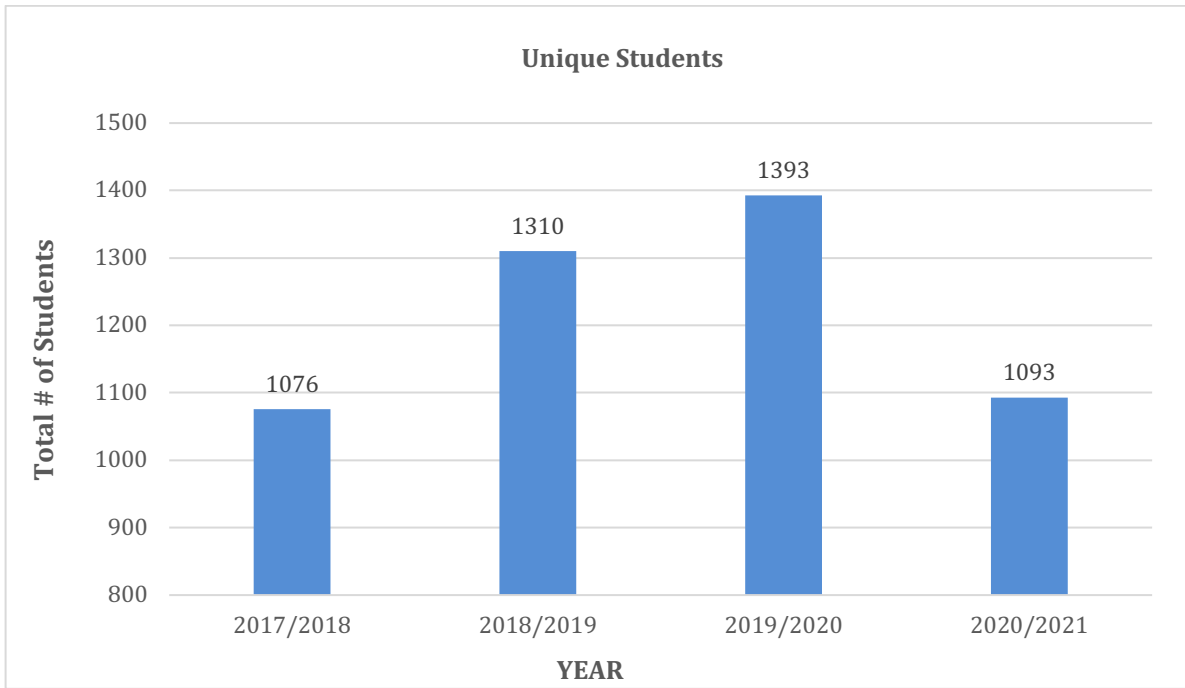
## ONE-ON-ONE APPOINTMENTS

One-on-one meetings and small group consultations are the most popular forms of academic support provided by the RGASC. In addition to support with written assignments (typical of a university Writing Centre), the RGASC also offers one-on-one instruction in mathematics, scientific problem-solving, and general academic skills development (e.g., time management, note-taking, lecture-listening, multiple-choice test preparation, critical reading). Normally, one-on-one appointments at the RGASC are booked in advance, conducted in-person, and 30 minutes long, but an increasing number of appointments are shorter (ca. 20 minutes) drop-in appointments offered on a first-come, first-served basis. This year, all appointments were conducted online in either a synchronous or asynchronous format.

Along with 15 other University of Toronto Writing Centres, the RGASC adopted WCONLINE in 2019 to assist with the scheduling, record-keeping, and reporting of appointments with students. Because students often access support on different campuses and at different colleges' Writing Centres, the Writing Centres' group paid the University of Toronto's IT unit to develop a "front end" for students to access WCONLINE. This "front end" employs a technology called SSO (single sign-on) and uses Quercus to authenticate the student and identify their "home" Writing Centre. The SSO ensures that students always arrive at the correct centre using a common point of entry. In effect, this means that the RGASC supports only those students registered at UTM and that UTM students will not be able to access other Writing Centres. Like all Writing Centres at the University of Toronto, the RGASC is also able to manually add students to WCONLINE if necessary.

A cloud-based system, WCONLINE also provides the tools for conducting synchronous and asynchronous online appointments, a feature that was particularly useful this year when we conducted all of our appointments remotely while our physical office (and most of the UTM campus) was closed to reduce the transmission of COVID-19.

When considering the data below, it is important to take into consideration the significant impact the campus closure has had on this aspect of the RGASC's operations. Demand for online appointments has been lower than historical demand for in-person appointments. More importantly, the WCONLINE platform is not conducive to "drop-in appointments," a service that is extremely popular right before major writing assignments are due in many courses. The absence of drop-in appointments has, therefore, had a negative impact on the total number of appointments the RGASC conducted in this year of online operations.

**Chart 1: Total Unique Students (2017–2021)**



**Unique Students**

Total # of Students

- 2017/2018: 1076
- 2018/2019: 1310
- 2019/2020: 1393
- 2020/2021: 1093

YEAR

*For 2020/2021, "unique student" numbers are totaled by term and combined.

**Chart 2: Total Booked and Drop-In Appointments (2017–2021)**



**Appointments
2017 - 2021 Aggregate**

Total Appointments
Drop-in Appointments

# of Appointments

- 2017/2018: 2811 / 1054
- 2018/2019: 2798 / 1276
- 2019/2020: 2857 / 1087
- 2020/2021: 2860 / 0

YEAR
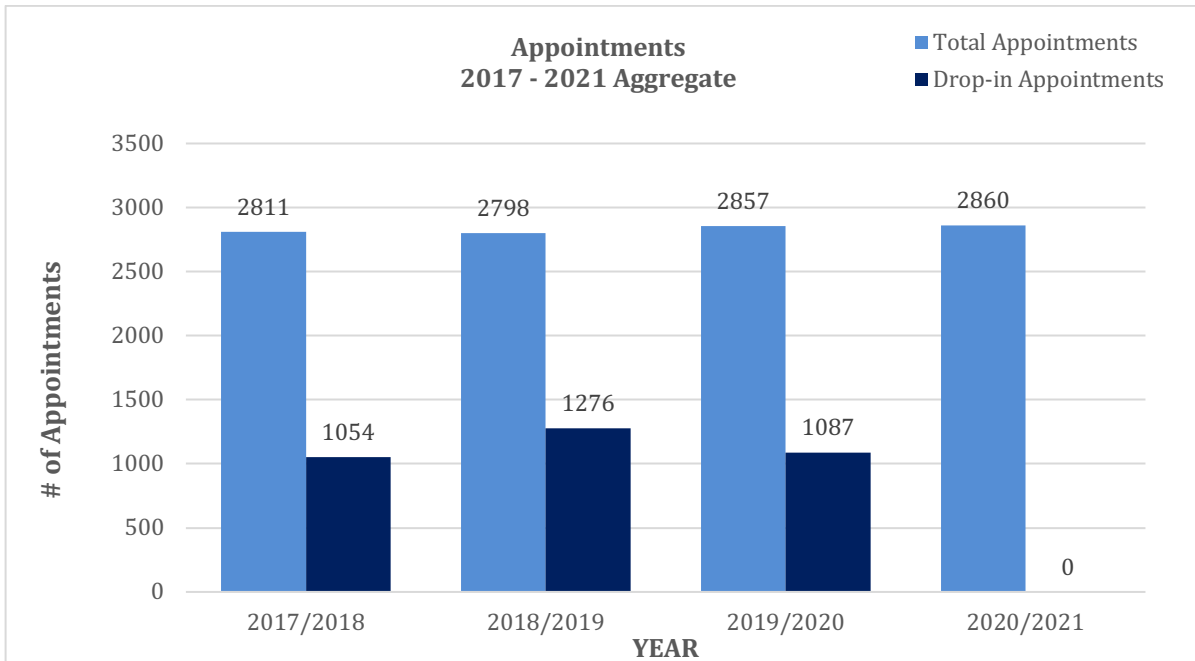
As Table 1 below indicates, the number of waitlisted students at the RGASC increased from 1,772 in 2019/2020 to 2,661 in 2020/2021. While the increase of over 1,100 students on a waitlist is alarming, we were heartened to see that 418 waitlisted students were ultimately able to book an appointment with an instructor. When considering waitlist data,

it important to remember three things: 1) the same student may add their name to the waitlist every single day hoping to get an appointment at a specific time that works for their schedule; 2) many students likely put themselves on a waitlist because there weren't drop-ins available; 3) many waitlisted students who didn't book an appointment would normally get a "drop-in" appointment and so be counted as "booked."

**Table 1: Waitlist Data (2017–2021)**

| Year | Total Waitlisted Students | Waitlisted Unique Students Booked |
|---|---|---|
| 2017/18 | 684 | 259 |
| 2018/19 | 531 | 222 |
| 2019/20 | 1772 | N/A |
| 2020/21 | 2661 | 418 |

Clearly, more needs to be done to reduce the number of students who want but do not access an appointment. This year, we explored a number of new strategies to address our waitlist including the following: 1) adjusting the weekly schedules of Writing Instructors so that they better corresponded with students' availability; 2) increasing the number of Writing Retreats, although these provide a somewhat different kind of support than a traditional "drop-in" (see below for more details on Writing Retreats); 3) dramatically increasing the number of "Writing Office Hours" (WOHs) embedded in individual courses. The WOHs are a COVID-19 innovation designed to take the place of course-specific in-person drop-in appointments (which have attracted hundreds of students per term in the past). The sessions are promoted through individual course Quercus websites: students sign up for an appointment in their course's Quercus calendar, and then before the appointment time they email their assignment, which is then sent back to them with feedback. In other words, these are asynchronous online appointments. Because they are linked to specific assignments, WOHs enable RGASC instructors to assist students by addressing focused, immediately relevant issues. A total of 65 courses and hundreds of different students took advantage of Writing Office Hours in 2021/2021 (see Part 2, Section 1 below for more details).

In an effort to make our support accessible to as many students as possible, the RGASC will continue to offer online (and in-person, if possible) appointments at the times of the week that seem most popular based on the last two years of data collected via WCONLINE. We will continue to operate with extended business hours (Monday through Thursday, 9:00am through 7:30pm in the Fall and Winter terms) and, even after the university resumes normal in-person operations, promote WOHs with our faculty partners.

## STUDENT FEEDBACK

Student feedback on our online appointments was collected through a survey distributed through the WCONLINE system after every single appointment. A total of 354 students responded to the survey in 2020/2021, compared to 174 in 2019/2020.

In general, student feedback was very positive. Of the 354 students who responded to the Appointment Feedback Survey, only 18 students (5%) indicated the "Quality of the Assistance" they received at the RGASC was poor or adequate; approximately 95% rated the support they received as either "good", "very good", or "excellent". Over 52% stated that the quality of assistance at the RGASC was "excellent" (see Chart 3 below). Perhaps most importantly, when asked whether they would use the RGASC again, the vast majority of students (over 97%) answered "yes" and only one said they would not. The rest were unsure (see Chart 4 below).

The results were similar when respondents were asked whether they would recommend the RGASC to another student. Approximately 96% said they would recommend the Centre; just under 3% said they were "not sure"; no students said they would not advise a peer to visit the RGASC (see Chart 5 below).

**Chart 3: Student Appointment Feedback Data: Quality of Assistance (2020/2021)**
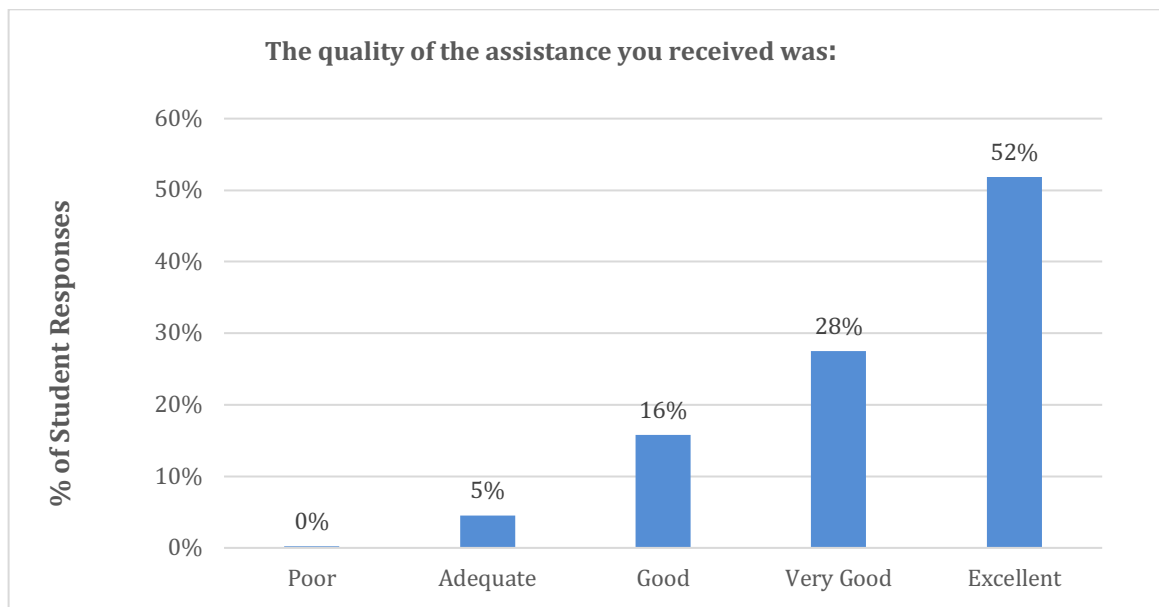
**Chart 4: Student Appointment Feedback Data: Repeat Users (2020/2021)**

**Do you think you will use the RGASC again?**

A bar chart showing the percentage of student responses. Yes: 97%, No: 1%, Not sure: 2%. The y-axis is labeled "% of Student Responses" ranging from 0% to 100%.
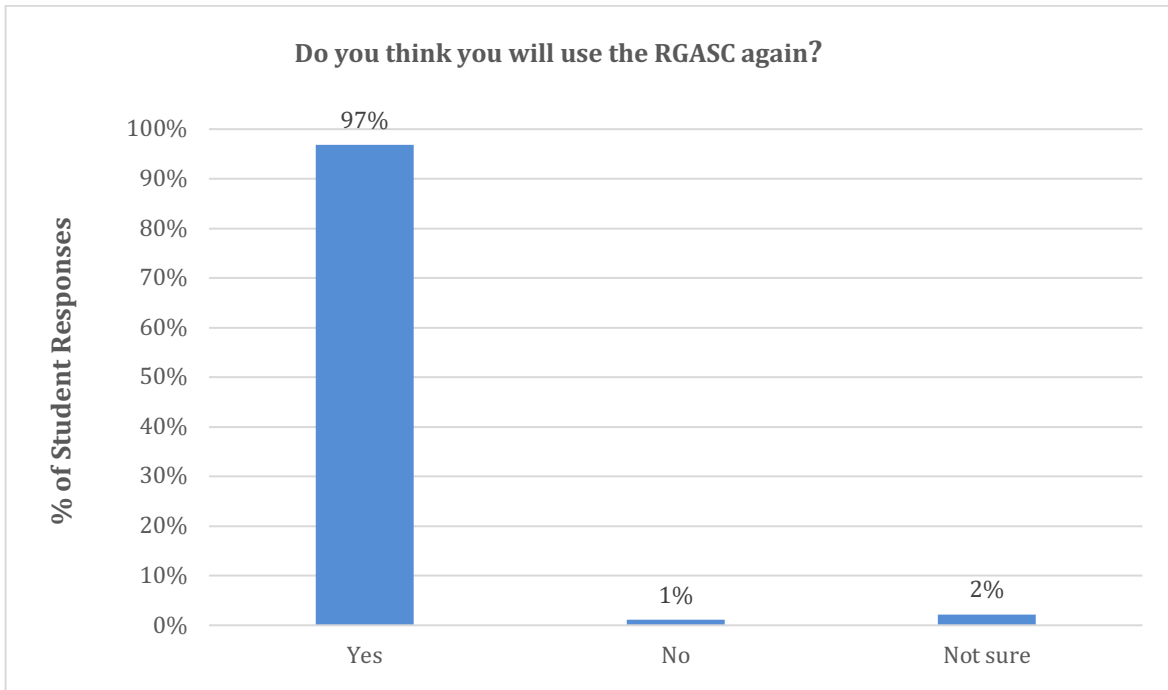
**Chart 5: Student Appointment Feedback Data: Recommend to Others (2020/2021)**

**Would you recommend the RGASC to others?**

A bar chart showing the percentage of student responses. Yes: 96%, No: 0%, Not sure: 3%. The y-axis is labeled "% of Student Responses" ranging from 0% to 120%.
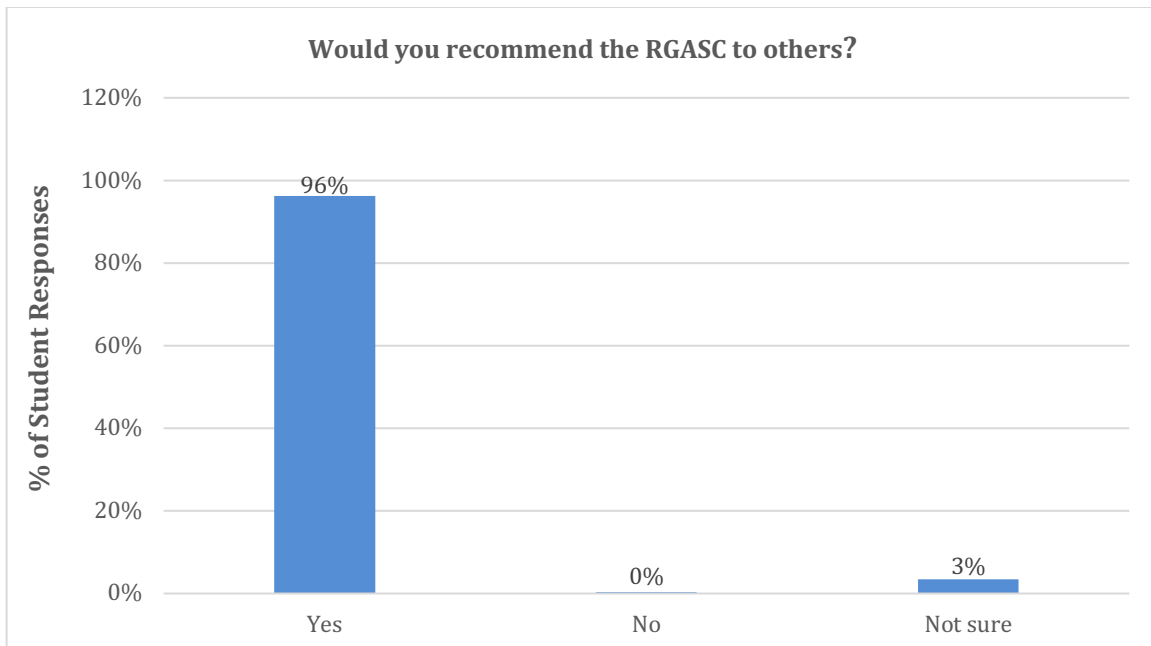
When asked what they found "most helpful" in their appointment, students mentioned a wide variety of strategies and topics.

The data in Tables 2 and 3 below provide a more detailed breakdown of students' perceptions of the quality of support they received during face-to-face consultations with Writing Instructors. Please note that the number of responses is higher than the 354 respondents who completed the survey because some students identified multiple topics when offering feedback. Similarly, the percentage of respondents exceeds 100 because some respondents identified more than one kind of support as helpful.

**Table 2: Student Appointment Feedback 2020/2021 (Most Helpful Areas of Support)**

| Topic | Count | % of Respondents |
|---|---|---|
| Feedback and advice on writing assignments | 137 | 38.70 |
| Brainstorming/discussing ideas | 23 | 6.50 |
| Structure/organization/format | 35 | 9.89 |
| Grammar/spelling/style | 17 | 4.80 |
| Referencing/citing sources | 3 | 0.85 |
| Thesis statement | 10 | 2.82 |
| Feedback on math support | 20 | 5.65 |
| Detailed explanation | 11 | 3.11 |
| Background knowledge of the content | 3 | 0.85 |
| Additional resources provided | 4 | 1.13 |
| Reviewing assignment guidelines and requirements | 8 | 2.26 |
| Instructors' interpersonal skills/approachability | 35 | 9.89 |
| Instructors' ability to respond to students' specific needs | 46 | 12.99 |
| General tips/advice | 9 | 2.54 |
| Appointment format | 10 | 2.82 |
| Miscellaneous | 2 | 0.56 |

As the table above suggests, students identified a wide variety of topics in their responses to the question "Please describe what you found most useful in this session." Of course, it is not surprising that the majority of students (almost 39%, or 137 students) identified "feedback and advice on writing assignments" as the most helpful part of their sessions—this is precisely what the vast majority of students are looking for in their appointments. That said, it is reassuring to know that students generally find this kind of support to be useful. The number of students who identified "brainstorming/discussing ideas" (6.5%, or 23 students) and "structure/organization/format" (almost 10%, or 35 students) as the most helpful aspect of their session is fairly typical. We were pleasantly surprised, on the other hand, that almost 13% (46 students) of respondents indicated that their instructor had the ability to respond to their specific needs. This is, after all, one of the strengths of the Writing Centre model of academic support.

The appointment feedback data also suggest that students appreciated instructors' interpersonal skills (10%, or 35 students). This is a noteworthy result considering that all appointments were conducted online this year.

**Table 3: Student Appointment Feedback 2020/2021 (Areas of Improvement)**

| Topic | Count | % of Respondents |
|---|---|---|
| No suggestion/satisfied with service | 200 | 56.50 |
| Improve availability/number of appointments/number of drop-in hours | 5 | 1.41 |
| More flexibility with time per appointment/better time management | 3 | 0.85 |
| Interactive online appointments | 14 | 3.95 |
| Improve booking system/better notifications | 4 | 1.13 |
| Change content of appointments | 28 | 7.91 |
|     More detailed/specific feedback | 68 | 19.21 |
|     Prioritize most problematic areas | 3 | 0.85 |
|     More tips/general advice | 19 | 5.37 |
|     Better explanation/give examples | 3 | 0.85 |
|     Provide written copy of feedback | 1 | 0.28 |
|     Grammar/edits | 4 | 1.13 |
| Have instructor familiar with discipline/assignment | 9 | 2.54 |
|     Review assignment outline before appointment | 2 | 0.56 |
| More information about services | 3 | 0.85 |
|     More specific details about appointments (skills) | 2 | 0.56 |
|     Notifications | 6 | 1.69 |
|     Platform consistency | 14 | 3.95 |
| Negative experience | 3 | 0.85 |
| Miscellaneous | 2 | 0.56 |
| Meaning unclear | 3 | 0.85 |

The table above provides an overview of students' suggestions for improvement. While most students (almost 57%) were entirely satisfied with their experience at the RGASC, approximately 19% of respondents indicated they would like more detailed / specific feedback. This is an unusual response that was most likely prompted by the feedback students got from asynchronous online appointments where instructors did not edit or revise papers and restricted their comments to marginal and global comments.

Another subset of respondents (5%, or 19 students) stated that they would like to receive more general advice or tips that they can apply outside of a specific assignment. A small proportion of students (3%, or 9 respondents) also wanted more discipline- or assignment-specific assistance, with a few requesting that the RGASC permit students to upload the assignment guidelines ahead of time so instructors could review it them before the appointment.

We were (again) heartened to note that very few students requested more information about the Centre's services through marketing or interactions with the RGASC Front Office. We have invested significantly in this area in the past three years and recently hired a Marketing & Communications Assistant, so we interpret this feedback as confirmation that this work is having the desired impact.

## WRITING RETREATS

We continued to offer Writing Retreats during the pandemic. As in previous years, these sessions were intended to not only provide students with a different way of interacting with a writing instructor, but also to create a relaxed, supportive environment where students could sit down and do some actual writing.

Like everything else this year, we held the Writing Retreats online via Zoom for four days per week in the Fall Term and two days per week in the Winter Term. Each session was three hours long, so the RGASC offered 12 hours of Writing Retreats in Fall and six hours in the Winter. The timing varied, depending on the instructors' schedules and student feedback from previous years, but generally the Writing Retreats were held in the afternoon or early evening.

This year, Writing Retreats were facilitated by ISUP faculty members hired to teach ISP100. The instructors provided feedback on writing in progress and encouraged students to stay and write for as long as they liked. After experimenting with different online approaches, we determined that the Retreats worked best with the support of a student facilitator who greeted attendees, took attendance, explained the rules and guidelines, and monitored the general Zoom meeting while faculty were conducting individual consultations in a Breakout Room. To more clearly differentiate between Writing Retreats and other forms of writing support (appointments or Writing Office Hours) students were informed that they could receive up to two 15-minute consultations during the Retreat.

As Table 4 below indicates, a total of 120 students attended the Writing Retreats held between September 2020 and April 2021, a slight increase from the 113 who attended the Retreats last year. Given the challenges of running the Retreats online and the fact that we offered fewer hours of retreats than normal in the Winter term, we are generally satisfied with these numbers.

As is typical with this kind of support, many of the students who participated in the Retreats were repeat visitors. The kinds of questions typically addressed during these kinds of sessions are very similar to those that are brought to a formal, booked appointment (e.g., a range of lower and higher order concerns). Some students attended the Retreats because they had put themselves on strict deadlines and were using the hours in that space as a way of holding themselves accountable.

**Table 4: Writing Retreat Program (2017–2021)**

| Session | Total Number of Attendees | Total Number of Unique Attendees |
|---|---|---|
| 2017/2018 | 86 | 60 |
| 2018/2019 | 202 | 133 |
| 2019/2020 | 113 | 65 |
| 2020/2021 | 120 | 72 |

The instructors who led the Writing Retreats this year agreed that one of the pedagogical strengths of this model of writing is its open-endedness. Students are encouraged to come without any preparation; once they are there, they can start writing, articulate their concerns or ask their questions, and find a solution. There were generally two kinds of students who attended the online Retreats this year: those who came and actually started a writing project while in attendance, and those who came with a quick question that they were able to get addressed.

The Writing Retreat model of support seems more popular with stronger writers or those that are reasonably confident in their writing abilities; we do not tend to see ELL students or writers who are struggling with their self-confidence. When students meet one-on-one with an instructor in a break-out room, they receive a similar kind of support to what they would experience in a standard booked appointment at the RGASC (i.e., instructors use the read-aloud protocol or Socratic questioning, share online resources, or collaboratively brainstorm arguments or options for structuring a paper). The instructor who ran the Writing Retreats in the Winter Term felt that the new administrative structure with a student assistant and clearly formulated guidelines had worked extremely well and should be retained next year.

## ONLINE MATH APPOINTMENTS

The RGASC offers one-on-one math appointments for students seeking support in foundational math. Prior to the COVID-19 disruption, this support was offered through in-person drop-in appointments that lasted about 30 minutes depending on the students' needs. When the RGASC moved its operations online, the appointments were changed to be synchronous (video and chat) and 45 minutes in length and were booked by students through WCONLINE. Both the Numeracy Specialist and a sessional math instructor conducted online math appointments from May 2020 to April 2021. Math appointments were mostly booked by students who took differential calculus (MAT132/MAT135) and integral calculus (MAT134/MAT136).

As always, the focus of the math appointments is on foundational mathematical background knowledge. The sessions are not at all intended to address or re-lecture concepts that are covered in the university mathematics or statistics courses.

Historically, math appointments have a utilization rate of approximately 60%. However, in

the Fall 2020 term, there was a decline in appointments booked by students and the utilization rate fell to 37%. While we do not know the precise reason for this development, it is possible that awareness of the RGASC and the kind of support it offers was low among the first-year population that began their studies online. It is also possible that first-year students who graduated and started university during COVID-19 were less likely than previous cohorts of students to recognize that they needed or would benefit from math appointments.

Table 5 below shows the total number of students who booked online math appointments at the RGASC this year compared to the number who took advantage of drop-in appointments in previous years. We are pleased with the slight increase in the total number of online math appointments conducted at the RGASC, especially given the technical challenges with discussing math on a platform designed for writing consultations. We should emphasize, as well, that significantly more appointments were offered this year than last, so this modest increase actually reflects a less effective use of our limited resources.

**Table 5: Math Drop-In Sessions / Online Appointments**

| Academic Year | Math Drop-In /Online Appointment Attendance |
|---|---|
| 2016/2017 | 147 (drop-in) |
| 2017/2018 | 152(drop-in) |
| 2018/2019 | 167(drop-in) |
| 2019/2020 | 207(drop-in) |
| 2020/2021 | 215 (online appointments) |

## MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

All RGASC programs depend to some degree on the effectiveness of our marketing and communications efforts for their success. As we have noted in previous Annual Reports, it can be quite challenging to promote our programming because (unlike most Departments on campus) our target audience is not very well-defined and can be quite difficult to reach. Of course, our programs and services suffer sometimes from the stigmas or misinformation associated with them. Some students, for example, will simply not attend a writing workshop or book a writing appointment because they wrongly assume this kind of support is only for weak students or those who did not learn English as a first language.

Over the past few years, we have solicited input from the RGASC Advisory Committee and hired some extraordinary students and casual staff to address these challenges and improve our marketing and communications efforts. As a result, we are confident that the RGASC's visibility has increased and that our stakeholders' understanding of our programming and services has improved. The new RGASC website, social media presence, and collaborations with other units have all helped us communicate more effectively with UTM students, staff, and faculty.

In spite of these successes, it has become increasingly apparent over the past few years that the RGASC's front office staff simply did not have capacity for the work involved in marketing and promoting the RGASC and TLC. To address this need, the RGASC hired a Marketing & Communications Assistant (50%) who had expertise in this area and could develop a coherent marketing plan for the Centre. With the addition of this new team member, the RGASC Coordinator and the rest of the RGASC front office were able to make a concerted effort this year to expand promotions for all RGASC programming, even while we operated virtually. In addition to creating a multitude of digital and marketing assets for our programming, the Front Office was successful in increasing promotional initiatives across all RGASC social media platforms in order to build program awareness while students and other stakeholders worked from home.

Although the RGASC's general email address is extremely busy (see Table 6, below), we wanted to increase access to the Centre while our physical offices were closed and so added an online chat tool, LiveChat, in October of 2020 (see Table 7, below). This service provided faculty, students and the general community instant answers and referral information to RGASC programs and resources across the university.

**Table 6: Front Office Email Activity (2020/2021)**

| Year | Total # of unique senders | Total # of email responses | Total # of grad student appointment confirmations | Total # of Math appt. confirmations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2020/ 2021 | 2014 | 4619 | 225 | 217 |

**Table 7: LiveChat Analytics (October 2020 – April 2021)**

| | 2020-10 | 2020-11 | 2020-12 | 2021-01 | 2021-02 | 2021-03 | 2021-04 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| LiveChat per month | 4 | 19 | 14 | 19 | 16 | 16 | 14 | 102 |
| Average chat per week | 4 | 4.8 | 4.7 | 4.8 | 4 | 3.6 | 3.5 | 4.2 |
| LiveChat tickets received while "offline" | 1 | 7 | 8 | 10 | 5 | 7 | 7 | 45 |

The RGASC is now able to share website and social media data with our stakeholders. The following tables show the reach of our website and social media channels over the past year. Table 9 shows some of the implications of these data for our future marketing and communications efforts.

**Table 8: Website and Social Media Data (2020/2021)**

| Platform | Total Users/ Followers | Total Posts | Total Impressions | Profile Visits | Total Reach | Total sessions | Total page views |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Website | 20,027 | x | x | x | x | 43,833 | 89,451 |
| Twitter | 983 | 249 | 210,000 | 6,295 | x | x | x |
| Instagram | 1,025 | 120 | 96,298 | x | 48,015 | x | x |
| Facebook | 144 | 178 | x | x | x | x | x |

**Table 9: Website and Social Media Demographics and Implications (2020/2021)**

| Platform | Audience Demographics | Implications / Possible Actions |
|---|---|---|
| Website | Age: 18-24 (27.5%), 25-34 (33.5%) | More people access the site by desktop which means content that looks good on desktop should be prioritized. The use of a three-column view should be minimized where possible to decrease clutter. |
| | Technology: desktop (72%), mobile (26% – 68% of which by iPhone), tablet (1.2%) | Social media does not appear to be directing much traffic to the website. However, since direct traffic is so high (43%) some may be coming from students typing in the direct uoft.me link. (Note: uoft.me links can be checked for usage by adding "+" to the end of the link). |
| | Locations: Mostly Canadian (78%), followed by US (5%), followed by China (2.3%), India (1.7%) | Unique Urchin Tracking Module codes could be assigned to specific URLS that are shared by email or clickable promotions to track their effectiveness. |
| Twitter | n/a | The account hasn't had much growth over the past year – this could be due to the demographic skewing older than our students, or the content isn't hitting the mark, or followers may be cycling out as they graduate. |
| | | The data in the app reports double the amount of link clicks than Google reports to the website, but it's still very low at 0.2% |
| | | We could start reporting analytics on a monthly basis to determine best content |
| | | A paid tracking service may provide further insight such as demographics and posting times as well as make scheduling posts easier. |
| Instagram | Age 18-24 (60%+); 62% male and 68% female. | The number of followers, engagement, and impressions are down from the previous period, possibly due to COVID and the switch to virtual learning which has caused fatigue for engagement online. |
| | | A social media calendar could be developed to plan content for better time management and efficacy. We should plan content so it's not repeated, (same topic, fresh content). |
| | Most are Canadian (88%) with 44% from Mississauga and 21% Toronto | A promotion strategy could be developed for each RGASC program to plan multi-channel and integrated content and distribution (which includes channels outside social media) |
| | | To increase engagement, we could use more "link in bio" calls to action as well as asking for comments, tags, and shares. We could experiment with A/B testing content: image vs. text and carousel vs. single image posts |

| Platform | Audience Demographics | Implications / Possible Actions |
|---|---|---|
| | | Ask UTM Instagram (@uoftmississauga) to add us to their "Accounts to Follow" Instagram highlight for more exposure to current students. |
| Facebook | n/a | Engagement on FB has suffered over the last few years. The demographic using this platform is no longer our audience and it can be challenging to get traction on initiatives posted. |

# Part Two: Core Focus Areas

In addition to offering individualized support for undergraduate students in writing, numeracy, and general academic skills, the RGASC has six core focus areas for its programming and service delivery:

1. **Writing Support**
2. **Numeracy Support**
3. **English Language Learner Support**
4. **Graduate Student Support**
5. **Faculty Support**
6. **Experiential Learning**

The following pages offer a brief overview of each of these core areas of focus.

## WRITING SUPPORT

### WRITING DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE (WDI)

The largest single writing-related project that the RGASC supports is the Writing Development Initiative (WDI), which provides financial and organizational support for departments to enhance the writing components in their courses. Historically, funding for the WDI has been provided by the Office of the Dean while the RGASC administered the program. Since the formal creation of ISUP as an EDU-A and the movement of the RGASC into this new institute, the Office of the Dean moved funding for the WDI into RGASC's base budget.

WDI support is typically allocated to discrete projects linked to a particular course, but potentially impacting several courses. To ensure that these projects are appropriate in terms of program and discipline, and that they respond to authentic needs, individual faculty members or Departments are encouraged to take the initiative to submit proposals for interventions to improve the development of writing in their programs. A Writing Specialist provides support as needed in the development of proposals, and the completed proposals are adjudicated by the Writing Development Initiative Committee, whose members include a librarian and faculty representatives from across the curriculum.

Typically, proposals to the WDI involve a combination of extra writing assignments (often scaffolded), writing-focused tutorials, additional instruction in disciplinary writing practices, and enhanced formative feedback on written assignments. In 2020/2021, 25 courses across the campus with total enrolments of over 8,500 were directly supported. For

several years, the number of proposals for new projects had been declining, to a low of three in 2019, but in both 2020 and 2021 we received twice that, with six proposals each year.

Given the number of courses already supported, the decline that we experienced in previous years was not surprising, as UTM does not have an unlimited number of courses with instructors who are invested in enhancing their writing support: hence, this revival in the number of proposals submitted is a pleasant surprise that can be attributed partly to the promotion of the WDI by the RGASC, partly to knowledge of the WDI spreading through UTM's writing ecosystem, and partly to the desire to keep or enhance writing support in departments where there are already WDI projects.

Once approved, projects are often repeated, and the WDI encourages faculty to reflect on and develop their projects over time. If a given project is successful and has attained a reasonably stable form, the WDI Committee may recommend that its costs be transferred into the departmental base budget, as happened last year with projects in ECO320, JGE378, and PSY290. Thus, the WDI should be seen as a mechanism through which innovative uses of writing instruction and instruction through writing can be supported, and faculty innovation and reflection can be encouraged and rewarded. It should be noted as well that a) many of the faculty working with the WDI are also involved in other pedagogical initiatives at the RGASC or active members of the *Teaching and Learning Collaboration at UTM* and b) TAs in WDI-supported courses are trained in using and assessing writing. Thus, the WDI is a key part of the teaching and learning community at UTM.

Over the past several years, a priority for the WDI has been the enhancement of our project assessment process. Accordingly, a part of the WDI's budget is allocated to the assessment of all funded projects, which means the RGASC administers and runs a "basic assessment package" involving pre- and post-assessment of student writing (focusing on skills targeted by the funded interventions), the collection of student views on the interventions and their own writing, as well as formal interviews with instructors and TAs (see the Annual Reports for the past two years and the *WDI page* on the RGASC website for more details). Each year, we continue to refine this process so that it can respond to the particularities of each project: this year, for instance, we collaborated with faculty running the MAT133 WDI project in order to design rubrics that would be applicable to mathematical proof writing. Assessment data and overviews of the writing development in courses are provided both to the instructors of those courses, with the expectation that they would use these data for their Final Reports, and also directly to the members of the WDI Committee. Despite the pandemic, the trends this year are similar to those in previous years: The assessments of student writing showed improvements in every case, and while the nature of the improvements varied with each project, one consistent area of improvement had to do with students' abilities to use and integrate their evidence into their own writing.

One of our goals for the year to come will be to create more complementarity between the WDI and ISP100H. Last year, we wrote that "we anticipate that the most significant foreseeable development for the WDI in the coming years (i.e., not including effects of the current pandemic) will be its integration with ISP100H, the new foundational writing course." This integration, however, has been less pronounced than expected. One department (DVS) has chosen to phase out its WDI projects due to perceived overlap with ISP100H, but other than this, the new first-year writing course has not had a significant impact on the WDI. Nevertheless, as ISP100 continues to expand into new departments, we aim to tailor new WDI projects (and adapt existing ones) so that they complement and build on the skills targeted in the new first-year writing course.

## TA TRAINING

In order to support WDI-funded courses, the RGASC works closely with TAs, a group that is often underappreciated in the development of pedagogical initiatives. At the start of both the Fall and Winter terms, we offered seven-hour Writing TA Training Sessions, at which TAs learned about the benefits of enhanced focus on disciplinarily relevant aspects of writing in their courses, and were given tools for, and training in, creating writing-focused environments. The Writing TA Training Sessions were attended by a total of 50 TAs (40 in September 2020, 10 in January 2021) from across the disciplines, and in several cases, the TAs attending were "head" or "writing" TAs, passing their training on to the other course TAs. This year, due to the pandemic and the very real dangers of Zoom fatigue, the training was divided into four segments consisting of two two-hour Zoom meetings, each preceded by one and a half hours of asynchronous work (exercises and reflective activities) that TAs did individually to prepare themselves for the meetings. In addition to these training sessions, the RGASC provides ongoing support to TAs during the term as they design, deliver, and assess writing work.

Overall, TAs appreciated the training. When asked in a survey to rate the training's usefulness out of five, 50% of the respondents (16 out of 30) rated it as a five, 38% (12 out of 30) rated it as a four, and the other two rated it as a three. As has generally been the case, TA survey responses indicate that they especially appreciated the sessions on assessment, sentence-level issues, and working productively with ELL students. There were several requests for more discipline-specific training sessions, which is something that we have considered in the past. While we appreciate the benefits (and comfort) of working only with those in one's home discipline, we feel that there are also benefits to venturing out of one's comfort zone and finding the similarities, and differences, in writing-related challenges across the disciplines. As well, students themselves are often coming from different

disciplines, and so it is useful for TAs to have some exposure to ways of thinking that are characteristic of other fields.

Our work with TAs extends beyond the WDI: in addition to the WDI-related training session mentioned above, in 2020/2021, we ran 12 writing-focused training or benchmarking sessions (typically two or three hours in length), integrated with course material or assignments.

## INSTRUCTOR SUPPORT

The RGASC also offers writing support to instructors of courses that do not receive WDI-funding. Typically, this support focuses on assignment design in writing-intensive courses. In 2020/2021 we were able to directly contribute to the creation, integration and execution of writing-based tasks in the following courses: BIO153, BIO203, BIO417, BIO434, CSC290, ECO100, ECO204, ERS404, GGR111, GGR202, HIS230, HIS236, ISP100, MAT133, MAT392, POL200, POL340, POL346, SOC205, SOC323, SOC304, SOC317, SOC349, SSM1120. This total does not include consultations with faculty preparing projects for WDI proposals, nor does it include development work for ISP100, discussed below.

These contributions often included assisting with the development of assessment criteria (and associated rubrics) that help improve feedback, consulting on creating scaffolded assignment structures, and helping develop tools to assess the efficacy of writing instruction, such as student surveys and analyses of student writing. Of the courses with WDI projects, we were particularly heavily involved with BIO205, for which rubrics and assessments were redesigned as part of a research project on the effects of feedback on sentence-level writing, and two new WDI projects in BIO417, in which we assisted the instructor in the development and assessment of a series of writing workshops, and in MAT133, in which we worked with the instructor to train TAs in assessing portfolios and develop new criteria and rubrics.

## DIRECT STUDENT ASSISTANCE

In addition to regularly scheduled one-on-one meetings, discussed elsewhere in this report, our direct contact with students takes place in course-specific drop-in sessions focused on specific assignments, presentations and workshops in classes. In 2020/2021, due to the pandemic, we moved these drop-in sessions entirely online (asynchronous) and renamed them "Writing Office Hours" (WOHs). We ran WOHs for the following courses: ANT201, BIO152, BIO153, BIO201, BIO203, BIO205, BIO360, BIO417, BIO434, CCT109,

CCT110, CCT205, CCT208, CIN101, CLA233, CSC290, ECO100, ECO204, ECO320, ENG100, ENG202, ENG203, ENV201, ERS111, ERS203, ERS211, ERS404, FAH101, GGR202, HIS102, HIS103, HIS104, HIS230, HIS236, JGE378, PHL103, POL112, POL114, POL200, POL209, POL216, POL302, POL346, POL443, PSY210, PSY220, PSY270, PSY327, PSY353, PSY393, RLG101, RLG332, SOC100, SOC109, SOC205, SOC216, SOC221, SOC304, SOC317, SOC323, SOC349, SSM1120, UTM118, WGS366, and the MScSM Research Paper Course. These appointments are entered into WCONLINE and included in the totals reported above in Part One: General Undergraduate Support.

WOHs are promoted through the course Quercus websites: students sign up for an appointment (slots are listed in a course's Quercus calendar) and also for WCONLINE (so that their appointments can be entered into the system), and then before the appointment time they email their assignment, which is then sent back to them with feedback. Because they are linked to specific assignments, WOHs enable us to assist students by addressing focused, immediately-relevant issues.

In addition to providing support with regard to specific assignments, WOHs raise student awareness of the RGASC; they also are enthusiastically embraced by faculty and help keep the RGASC up to date with activities in these courses. These are significant benefits and make them worth continuing, even in cases where overall attendance is not high. In the past year, the trend was for WOHs to be either very well or very badly attended, depending to a great extent on the instructor's role in promoting them—we do our own promotion on the course website through timed announcements, but nothing we do is as valuable as an instructor's encouraging students to attend.

We also gave 109 writing-focused presentations or workshops, almost all in credit-bearing courses from across the disciplines (this number does not include any co-curricular offerings, such as the workshop series discussed directly below). The presentations and workshops covered topics such as academic integrity, paragraph structure, thesis statements, critical reading and thinking, and exam writing.

## ELEMENTS OF ACADEMIC READING & WRITING WORKSHOP SERIES

In the 2020/2021 year we ran six iterations of a six-week workshop series that focused on academic reading and writing. Last year, we ran four iterations—one for the humanities in each term and one for the sciences and social sciences in each term. This year, we ran three iterations each term, for the sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Students who completed the series received a Co-Curricular Record (CCR) notation on their transcripts; this required them to attend five workshops, complete four homework assignments, and write a final reflection. Participation in the workshops was significantly higher this year

than last year: in 2019/2020, average attendance per workshop was six students and a total of 18 students completed the series, whereas in 2020/2021, the average attendance was 11, and 34 students completed.

**Table 10: Elements of Academic Reading & Writing Workshop Attendance (2020/2021)**

|  | Fall | | | Winter | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Science | Social Science | Humanities | Science | Social Science | Humanities |
| Why scholars write research articles | 29 | 18 | 14 | 11 | 11 | 8 |
| Reading Strategies | 25 | 17 | 12 | 9 | 10 | 5 |
| Using sources properly | 18 | 12 | 12 | 7 | 9 | 2 |
| How arguments work | 17 | 10 | 11 | 8 | 10 | 7 |
| Paragraphs in academic writing | 15 | 8 | 7 | 5 | 12 | 6 |
| Sentences in academic writing | 17 | 11 | 8 | 5 | 7 | 7 |

## ASSIGNMENT-SPECIFIC WRITING RETREATS

In the second half of the Winter term, assignment-specific writing retreats were offered in three courses (POL346, SOC109, and PSY327), in the hopes that they would help address the isolation students often feel when writing assignments during the pandemic. These retreats, which took place on Zoom, gave students an opportunity to discuss their ideas for an assignment with their classmates, as well as some dedicated time to write (and implement the ideas they discussed).

A total of five 90-minute retreats were held (two in POL346, two in SOC109, and one in PSY327). For the first 45 minutes, students took turns sharing their ideas and plans for their assignments, and asked questions about anything they were unsure of. They also took turns responding to each other in this time. The discussions were always lively and engaging and could easily have lasted longer than 45 minutes. The next 30 minutes were dedicated to independent writing, with cameras and mics off. For the last 15 minutes, students raised some final questions, and they took turns sharing their next steps.

The retreats were unfortunately not very well attended (three in the first POL346 retreat; six in the two SOC109 retreats; four in the PSY327 retreat), which we attribute partly to the fact that the idea to have them arose late in the winter term, meaning that there was not a great deal of time for promotion. For the students that came to the retreats, the discussions were very engaging and productive: students were explaining course concepts to each other, answering each other's questions, and giving each other ideas for their assignments. Every student who participated noted how much better they felt about their assignments

after the retreats. In fact, based on the success of the first POL346 retreat, the course instructor decided to dedicate an entire class later in the term to a writing retreat led by an RGASC Writing Specialist (30 students attended). After a 35-min break-out discussion, numerous students spontaneously commented in the chat how beneficial the discussions were.

Despite the low numbers, we believe course-specific writing retreats should be explored further next year, especially if online learning continues. Of course, this model of writing support should be explored only when students are working on assignments where this kind of collaboration and sharing of ideas is appropriate.

## ADJUSTING TO WORKING IN A PANDEMIC

To speak broadly, other than the writing retreats, our activities this past year differed more in terms of execution and modality than in terms of the basic nature of our support. We still gave presentations and workshops, but we did them online, and a significant number of them (24 all told, or roughly 24%) were in the form of asynchronous lectures or lecturettes. As mentioned above, our "dedicated drop-ins" turned into online WOHs, and these were quite successful: in future, even when in-person meetings become possible again, we will keep the WOH format, simply because it is efficient and because students respond positively to it: more students attended WOHs than they had dedicated drop-in sessions in 2019/2020. This year, we made more use than usual of course websites to spread information and promote events, which not only enhanced student uptake, but also integrated us more deeply into the courses that we supported. In last year's Annual Report, we wrote that "we expect that there will be somewhat less demand for workshops and presentations than in the past, but we hope that there will be opportunities to integrate this support more fully into the course"; the latter did happen, but the former did not—we were as busy as ever.

## NUMERACY SUPPORT

### FOUNDATIONAL MATH SKILLS FOR UNIVERSITY WORKSHOP SERIES

At the request of the Office of the Dean, the RGASC offered a free, voluntary math workshop series for incoming students to improve their chance in succeeding in their first-year math courses and better transition to an online university platform. The objective of

this workshop series was to help ensure that incoming students whose learning was impacted by COVID-19 would be adequately prepared for their first-year math courses.

In June 2020, the RGASC hosted a math high school teacher consultation to better understand the incoming students' math background and what to focus on in the workshop series. The dialogue with the math high school teachers helped in the design of the materials and delivery for the summer workshop series.

Foundational Math Skills for University took place over six weeks in July and August 2020. It provided a review and practice of basic concepts, formulas, algorithms, and techniques in arithmetic, algebra, and functions. The curriculum was informed by the consultation with high school teachers and UTM math instructors' knowledge that very often students do not do well in first-year university math courses because they do not have a solid understanding and technical skills of all basic concepts and techniques (e.g., fractions, simplifying, solving equations, graph of functions, recalling basic properties of exponents and trigonometric expressions).

The workshop series was also a great opportunity for incoming students to have exposure to online university teaching and expectations. The first week of the workshop series provided a snapshot of an online university-learning environment along with tips on how to succeed in a first-year math course and resources the RGASC provides during the year for math support. The instructors also used Quercus in much the same way as it is used for credit-bearing university courses (i.e., to post materials, activities, resources, and to host a Discussion forum). This approach was taken to help prepare students for what they would experience in September.

The total enrolment for Foundational Math Skills for University was 569 students while 179 completed all tasks within the course. Note that there was no incentive for completing all the tasks.

A total of 79 students provided feedback on this initiative through an anonymous survey administered immediately after the workshop series ended, and approximately 80% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the workshop series helped them understand foundational mathematical concepts, as well as taught them how to apply these concepts appropriately in their university math courses. Another survey administered at the end of the winter term had a much lower participation rate (19 students) but demonstrated very similar results. Perhaps more importantly, the survey at the end of the school year indicated that 68% of the summer workshop series participants subsequently took advantage of RGASC programming.

The following are some examples of positive student feedback on this new initiative:

- "As a student from a different education system, the Foundational Math Skills course helped familiarize myself with the method of teaching and understanding math that I could expect in a Canadian university."
- "Thank you for the opportunity for this prep workshop for math, I hope it is continued for future first-year students, and thank you to the instructors in session for taking the time to do this."
- "Really helpful for students to adapt, and it's a good revision. before starting classes. Especially if a student has taken a gap year."

Funding from the Office of the Dean has been approved for a Summer 2021 offering of the Foundational Math Skills for University Workshop Series and planning is already well underway.

## FIRST-YEAR MATH MEET UPS: FALL 2020 EXAMS

The RGASC offered just-in-time math support called First-Year Math Meet Ups for students in MAT132 /MAT135 and MAT134 /MAT136. Each session was two hours long and offered multiple times. The objective of a Meet Up is to discuss (in person or online) past final examination questions from the perspective of strengthening foundational math knowledge and understanding how to proceed in formulating a solution. One teaching assistant was trained by the RGASC Numeracy Specialist to host all final exam review Meet Ups.

As Table 11 below indicates, a total of 139 students attended the First-Year Math Meet Ups for the Fall 2020 Exams.

**Table 11: First-Year Math Meet Ups Attendance (Fall 2020 Exams)**

| Differential Calculus MAT132/MAT135 | | Integral Calculus MAT134/MAT136 | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Date | # of Students | Date | # of Students |
| November 30 | 4 | December 7 | 0 |
| December 8 | 38 | December 11 | 17 |
| December 15 | 36 | | |
| December 17 | 44 | | |

Note that differential calculus is the first course an incoming student takes which may explain the stronger attendance for the MAT132/MAT135 Meet Ups. Students taking integral calculus are repeating the course either because they dropped out or failed in a previous term.

At the end of Winter 2021 term, RGASC distributed a student feedback survey to the attendees of the final exam review Meet Ups. A total of 18 students responded to the survey, with well over 80% indicating that they were able to work with foundational mathematical concepts after attending the Meet Up. Some representative student feedback on this initiative are as follows:

- "I found the math final exam reviews helpful in revisiting concepts from earlier on in the semester."
- "It was a great experience that helped with my exam prep for calculus."

## FIRST-YEAR MATH MEET UPS: WINTER 2021

In the Winter 2021 term, the First-Year Math Meet Ups were extended to run throughout the academic term. The Meet Ups were developed in two streams: one for students enrolled in differential calculus (MAT132/MAT135), and the other for integral calculus (MAT134/MAT136). Table 12 below provides the total attendance for the Winter term Meet Ups.

One teaching assistant (TA) was trained by the Numeracy Specialist to deliver the workshop material. Sessions for each stream were taught for two weeks in each half of the term, where the same two-hour Meet Up ran in a given week. At the beginning of each Meet Up, the TA gave a mini-lecture on a particular foundational math concept needed which was aligned with the course material in the calculus courses. Then, the TA presented a foreshadowing segment, where the students were shown where this particular foundational math concept would be used in future course material. The foreshadowing segment was to show the connections among different mathematical concepts. At the end of each Meet Up, students had ample time to work on specifically selected examples with the TA and their peers.

**Table 12: First-Year Math Meet Ups Attendance (Winter 2021)**

|  | Differential Calculus MAT132/MAT135 | Integral Calculus MAT134/MAT136 |
|---|---|---|
|  | # of Students | # of Students |
| Session 1 | 4 | 3 |
| Session 2 | 4 | 6 |
| Session 3 | 2 | 4 |
| Session 4 | 2 | 3 |

Attendance for the First-Year Math Meet Ups during the term was disappointing. Some students (not included in the attendance data above) arrived at the online Meet Ups assuming they were office hours but left after learning there was a set curriculum. While

only five students completed the feedback survey, 80% of them indicated that they were able to work with foundational mathematical concepts after attending the Meet Up.

At the end of the winter term, each calculus stream had two or three repeated Meet Ups as an Exam Review for students to practice how to approach final exam questions. These were modelled on the Final Exam Review Meet Ups from Fall 2020. Here, the participation rate was much better, with a total of 76 students attending a Meet Up. Table 13 provides detailed attendance numbers:

**Table 13: First-Year Math Meet Ups Attendance (Winter 2021 Exams)**

| Differential Calculus MAT132H/MAT135H | | Integral Calculus MAT134H/MAT136H | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Date | # of Students | Date | # of Students |
| April 14 | 5 | April 9 | 6 |
| April 18 | 5 | April 14 | 43 |
| | | April 18 | 17 |

## MASTER OF MANAGEMENT OF INNOVATION (MMI) CALCULUS AND STATISTICS WORKSHOP SERIES

For the fourth year in a row, the Numeracy Specialist delivered a calculus and statistics workshop series in Fall 2020 to the incoming students in the Master of Management of Innovation MMI Program. Each workshop featured a mini-lecture accompanied by in-class exercises. At the end of each session, students were given tip sheets and homework questions with full solutions (all materials were accessible online) and were encouraged to visit the RGASC for further math support.

## NUMERACY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE (NDI) PROGRAM

The Numeracy Development Initiative (NDI) ran a second time in the 2020-2021 academic year. There were two returning projects and no new applications. With the numeracy support being provided through ISP130 and the new Numeracy faculty starting at ISUP this summer, it is unlikely that the NDI program will continue beyond this year.

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER (ELL) SUPPORT

In 2020/2021, international students faced challenges that extended far beyond their academic needs. There were just over 3,500 international students enrolled at UTM for the 2020/2021 academic year and 1,140 new students. Of these students, the majority were from China, India, Pakistan, South Korea and the Philippines, where English is not the primary spoken language. This cohort of international students is similar to those of

previous years, but in this particular year, the COVID-19 pandemic meant that many were studying remotely, in parts of the world where the culture, and the time zones, are very different to those in Mississauga. This had significant implications for ELL support and meant that RGASC faculty needed to engage with students in different ways. For example, we replaced face-to-face appointments (the RGASC office has been closed) with online appointments and increased our online synchronous and asynchronous programming.

ELL Specialists conducted 289 synchronous and 89 asynchronous writing appointments during the 2020/2021 academic year as well as 38 online graduate appointments. Most of these appointments focused heavily on time management and writing skills.

## ISP010: THE BASICS OF WRITING IN ENGLISH (BOWIE)

In 2020/2021, ISUP offered a new course, ISP100: Writing for University and Beyond, designed to support first-year students with the writing skills necessary for success at university. All students in the course wrote a writing diagnostic in the first week of class. For some students, this diagnostic indicated that they were unlikely to be successful in ISP100 and so they were transferred to a separate course, ISP010: The Basics of Writing in English (BoWiE). ISP010 is a non-credit-bearing half course focusing on foundational writing skills at the sentence and paragraph level; while ISP010 is not designed solely for ELL students, students that took ISP010 in both the Fall and Winter terms were predominantly ELL. Enrolment for BoWiE was moderate, with only 26 students completing the course, but steps have been taken to increase enrollment for subsequent terms by changing the entry requirements for ISP100 so that students who achieve a minimum grade in ISP010 gain direct entry into ISP100 in a future term, irrespective of their results on the writing diagnostic.

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER SUPPORT INITIATIVE (ELLI)

The English Language Learner Support Initiative (ELLI) has not attracted many applications in the past two years. Although projects in four different courses were recommended for ELLI funding in 2020/2021, only one (in FAH279) received funding and was implemented in practice. The low level of participation in ELLI can be attributed to the pandemic and the fact that faculty have little time and energy to take on additional projects. We expect ELLI applications to be low for 2021/2022 as well, but there is room to expand in the future.

## PROFESSIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS (PELS) WORKSHOP SERIES

ELL faculty continued to offer the Professional English Language Skills (PELS) Workshop Series. In addition to versions in CIN101, CCT110, RLG101, and VCC101, which offered targeted 'just in time' skill development, we also delivered a generic offering of PELS for any students not enrolled in the courses above. Students who complete the generic PELS

are eligible for a Co-Curricular Record (CCR) notation on their transcript. PELS was significantly redesigned in 2020 to become fully online with both synchronous and asynchronous components. Students developed English language and academic skills in eight different modules, each with videos, discussions, quizzes, written assignments, and RGASC online resources to support specific ELL-related needs. Synchronous student hours were held three times a week to accommodate different time zones, foster student interaction, and help students practice speaking and listening skills. Attendance at "student hours" in Fall 2020 was nil; however, total student hour attendance in Winter 2021 was 41 with 29 unique attendances. Tables 14 through 18 below provide details on PELS attendance.

**Table 14: CIN101 PELS Attendance**

| Date | Topic | Attendance Fall 2020 |
|------|-------|----------------------|
| Sept 28 | Strategies for Academic Success | 52 |
| Oct 5 | Reading and Outlining – Preparing to Write | 42 |
| Oct 19 | Introductions and Conclusions – Guiding Your Audience | 41 |
| Oct 26 | Body Paragraphs – Purpose and Structure | 38 |
| Nov 2 | Analysis and Argumentation – Make Your Point | 42 |
| Nov 9 | Learning to Revise, Edit, and Proofread – Submitting Your Best Work | 40 |
| Nov 16 | Cohesion and Flow – Making Sense | 39 |
| Nov 23 | Looking Ahead – Academic Strategies and Supports | 34 |
| Total Attendance | | 328 (213 in 2019) |
| Total Students Completed 7-8 Modules | | 38 |

**Table 15: CCT110 PELS Attendance**

| Date | Topic | Attendance Winter 2021 |
|------|-------|------------------------|
| Jan 25 | Strategies for Academic Success | 267 |
| Feb 1 | Reading and Outlining – Preparing to Write | 258 |
| Feb 8 | Introductions and Conclusions – Guiding Your Audience | 246 |
| Feb 22 | Body Paragraphs – Purpose and Structure | 212 |
| Mar 1 | Analysis and Argumentation – Make Your Point | 243 |
| Mar 8 | Learning to Revise, Edit, and Proofread – Submitting Your Best Work | 229 |
| Mar 15 | Cohesion and Flow – Making Sense | 242 |
| Mar 22 | Looking Ahead – Academic Strategies and Supports | 192 |
| Total Attendance | | 1889 (1377 in 2020) |
| Total Students Completed 7-8 Modules | | 215 |

**Table 16: VCC101 PELS Attendance**

| Date | Topic | Attendance Winter 2021 |
|---|---|---|
| Jan 25 | Strategies for Academic Success | 46 |
| Feb 1 | Reading and Outlining – Preparing to Write | 41 |
| Feb 8 | Introductions and Conclusions – Guiding Your Audience | 38 |
| Feb 22 | Body Paragraphs – Purpose and Structure | 36 |
| Mar 1 | Analysis and Argumentation – Make Your Point | 36 |
| Mar 8 | Learning to Revise, Edit, and Proofread – Submitting Your Best Work | 37 |
| Mar 15 | Cohesion and Flow – Making Sense | 40 |
| Mar 22 | Looking Ahead – Academic Strategies and Supports | 30 |
| Total Attendance | | 304 (278 in 2020) |
| Total Students Completed 7-8 Modules | | 30 |

**Table 17: RLG101 PELS Attendance**

| Date (Fall) | Date (Winter) | Topic | Attendance Fall 2020 | Attendance Winter 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sept 28 | Jan 21 | Strategies for Academic Success | 24 | 15 |
| Oct 5 | Feb 1 | Reading and Outlining – Preparing to Write | 12 | 13 |
| Oct 19 | Feb 8 | Introductions and Conclusions – Guiding Your Audience | 9 | 10 |
| Oct 26 | Feb 22 | Body Paragraphs – Purpose and Structure | 5 | 8 |
| Nov 2 | Mar 1 | Analysis and Argumentation – Make Your Point | 12 | 13 |
| Nov 9 | Mar 8 | Learning to Revise, Edit, and Proofread – Submitting Your Best Work | 13 | 15 |
| Nov 16 | Mar 15 | Cohesion and Flow – Making Sense | 4 | 14 |
| Nov 23 | Mar 22 | Looking Ahead – Academic Strategies and Supports | 5 | 3 |
| Total Attendance | | | 84 (141 in 2019) | 91 (138 in 2020) |
| Total Students Completed 7-8 Modules | | | 3 | 2 |

**Table 18: Generic PELS Attendance**

| Date (Fall) | Date (Winter) | Topic | Attendance Fall 2020 | Attendance Winter 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sept 28 | Jan 21 | Strategies for Academic Success | 5 | 9 |
| Oct 5 | Feb 1 | Reading and Outlining – Preparing to Write | 3 | 8 |
| Oct 19 | Feb 8 | Introductions and Conclusions – Guiding Your Audience | 2 | 5 |
| Oct 26 | Feb 22 | Body Paragraphs – Purpose and Structure | 2 | 5 |
| Nov 2 | Mar 1 | Analysis and Argumentation – Make Your Point | 3 | 6 |

| Date (Fall) | Date (Winter) | Topic | Attendance Fall 2020 | Attendance Winter 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nov 9 | Mar 8 | Learning to Revise, Edit, and Proofread – Submitting Your Best Work | 3 | 7 |
| Nov 16 | Mar 15 | Cohesion and Flow – Making Sense | | 6 |
| Nov 23 | Mar 22 | Looking Ahead – Academic Strategies and Supports | 3 | 3 |
| Total Attendance | | | 24 | 48 |
| Total Students Completed 7-8 Modules | | | 3 | 3 |

Attendance in PELS remained remarkably consistent (2,768 in 2020/2021 compared to 2,668 in 2019/2020) despite the shift to online asynchronous program delivery. In total, there were 468 unique attendances in PELS 2020-2021 (89 Fall and 379 Winter). This year PELS was not offered in FAH101 and there was a notable attendance decline in RLG101. However, overall numbers remained stable due to significant increases in CCT110 and CIN101, as well as consistent VCC101 attendance. The decline in RLG101 numbers can be explained by changes in the participation framework to lessen the online learning workload for students and increase options to earn bonus marks. The CCT110 collaboration with the PELS program continues to result in excellent numbers. There were 297 unique attendances for CCT110, and 215 students completed requirements to receive bonus marks. Responses to the PELS Fall and Winter surveys were positive and highlighted several aspects that benefited students:

- "The program is very informative. I acquired a lot of **resources** which I shall use moving forward."
- "I also enjoyed that I could listen to the **videos** countless times if need be."
- "I [sic] was a great experience, and I got to learn **new skills** every week and meet new people in the **discussion section**."
- "I personally liked how it was structured**, asynchronous** made it convenient."
- "PELS program was organized in an outstanding way and I felt I was **challenged**, yet not discouraged."
- "Overall, I really enjoyed PELS program and have had my full attention in each Module provided. PELS has really helped me in improving in my **academic skills**. Thank you for this great program!

Furthermore, 81% of the PELS Winter 2021 Survey respondents (n=36) indicated improvement in their ability to create accurate grammatical structures, and this figure rose to 95% for ELL students alone (n=20). Despite this success, the need for increased spoken and listening skills practice and opportunities for student interaction were identified in the survey. ELL Specialists will continue to address these needs through the development of student hour activities, collaboration with the UTM Indigenous Centre and the International Education Centre, and by expanding techno-pedagogical strategies that facilitate student and instructor online presence and exchange. Participating instructors' feedback on PELS has been overwhelmingly positive in terms of benefits to students and collaboration with the RGASC. Participation in PELS did not skew course grades, and one instructor remarked that PELS operated smoothly as a parallel track of student support without additional work for course TAs and instructors.

## ONLINE ELL RESOURCES

In addition to supporting students with PELS in courses, the ELL Specialists continue to build on over 20 online resources that were designed and developed specifically for ELL students. Each handout provides brief explanations related to different core skills (reading, writing, listening, and/or speaking) and offers simple examples of language-related challenges and how these might be corrected. While many relate to grammar (e.g., dangling modifiers, articles, or comma splices) others focus on broader components of language (e.g., developing reading skills, expanding academic vocabulary, or word choice). Most of these handouts have been published on the RGASC website https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/online-resources/english-language-learner-ell-resources.

## FUTURE CHALLENGES

One of the biggest challenges moving forward will be to re-establish relationships with faculty once we transition back to on-campus learning. We would also like to encourage more faculty to take advantage of ELLI.

More support can be offered through the writing appointments, both on-campus (when it is appropriate) and online. While there are already a significant number of appointments that are specifically designed for ELL students, many of them are used by a different population of students. This is a challenge that has been identified in previous years, and the pandemic has exaggerated it. Our goal in future years is to improve ELL students' engagement with the RGASC overall; this could be achieved by expanding PELS and facilitating closer collaboration between faculty teaching ISP100/ISP010 and the RGASC. Students in ISP100/ISP010 are already in small classes and in a better position to build rapport with faculty. We hope that these students will build the confidence to seek out additional support with their writing and other academic skills.

Finally, the addition of ISP100 to the Mathematics and Computational Sciences (MCS) program requirements will mean a dramatic expansion of ISP010 programming, which offers both new challenges and opportunities for the RGASC.

## GRADUATE STUDENT AND TA SUPPORT

The RGASC supports graduate students by offering programming accredited by either the School of Graduate Studies' MyGPD program or the Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation's Teaching Assistants' Training Program (TATP). These programs offer incentives—transcript notations and certificates—to students who complete the required programming. The RGASC also offers one-on-one appointments for writing support and term-long writing groups.

A significant development this year was the creation of a permanent (i.e., USW Staff Appointed) Graduate Student Support Strategist (GSSS) position in July 2020. The GSSS's role will continue to focus on coordinating academic and professional skills support to UTM graduate students, conducting research on UTM's current graduate student programming, and identifying opportunities for growth and development of graduate programming at UTM.

Another key development this year was the shift of all graduate programming—including workshops, conferences, one-on-one appointments, and graduate writing groups—to an online format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the shift to online graduate programming, the GSSS reviewed graduate programming offered by tri-campus partners, communicated with U of T and UTM stakeholders, and assessed data from the Graduate Needs Assessment Survey to coordinate graduate programming for 2020/2021.


GRADUATE PROGRAMMING RESEARCH

The continued growth and expansion of the RGASC's graduate programming is informed by data collected from UTM's graduate community. In December 2020, the GSSS distributed the annual Graduate Needs Assessment Survey to UTM graduate students. The goal of the survey is to help determine the RGASC's graduate programming priorities. The survey asked students to indicate their level of interest in a range of professional development topics and their preferences regarding session format, timing, and method of communication. New this year, the survey asked what workshop topics, services and/or resources they would like to see offered as a result of the shift to online programming due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A total of 91 graduate students completed the online survey, a decrease of 17 participants from 2019/2020. All degree types (MA, MSc, PhD, and professional programs) and a variety of departments (e.g., Anthropology, Biology, Chemical and Physical Sciences, Centre for South Asian Civilizations/Department for the Study of Religion, Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, Geography, MScSM, Biotechnology, MMPA, Biomedical Communications, and Psychology) were represented in the data. The results of the Graduate Needs Assessment Survey revealed writing support, online communication, mental health, online teaching, and career development as the top five topics, services, and/or resources graduate students would like to see offered particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Graduate students also indicated that workshops, as a standalone and series format, and conferences were a preferred session format and would be best scheduled between the hours of 1:00pm and 7:00pm. Lastly, the survey established that the best mode of communication was through the UTM graduate listserv, their department administrator, and through the University of Toronto Mississauga's Association of Graduate Students (UTMAGS).

ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL SKILLS SUPPORTS

The RGASC offers programming accredited by the MyGPD program, an initiative of the School of Graduate Studies' Centre for Graduate Professional Development (CGPD). In Winter 2021, the School of Graduate Studies revamped the MyGPD program, formally known as the GPS program. MyGPD offers a transcript notation for graduate students who complete approximately 60 hours of programming (20 GPS credits) and submit a reflection on how the offerings contributed to their professional development. All of the RGASC's graduate programming, with the exception of one-on-one appointments and Graduate Writing Groups, is eligible for GPS credits. The RGASC's Graduate Professional Development Conference, offered in both the Fall and Winter terms, is considered a core offering and other RGASC graduate programming (e.g., workshops) are considered elective offerings. Currently, graduate students are eligible to receive one GPS credit for every three hours of programming attended.

GRADUATE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE (GPDC)

In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the RGASC collaborated with U of T's School of Graduate Studies and UTSC's Centre for Teaching and Learning to pilot a one-day, tri-campus Graduate Professional Development Conference in June 2020 via Zoom. The conference was a shortened version of UTM's two-day Graduate Professional Development Conference (GPDC) and UTSC's Graduate Professional Day (GPD).

The theme of the conference was *Professional Development and Career Planning in Uncertain Times.* The event had 217 registered individuals and 104 unique attendees. Table 19 shows the workshops offered at the tri-campus summer mini-GPDC.

**Table 19: Tri-Campus Summer Mini-Graduate Professional Development Conference**

| Workshop Title | Facilitator |
|---|---|
| Graduate Professional Development During a Pandemic | **Jessica Carlos**, Graduate Student Support Strategist, Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre, UTM<br>**Liam O'Leary**, Graduate Programming Coordinator, School of Graduate Studies<br>**Greg Sharzer**, Graduate Development Coordinator, Center for Teaching and Learning, UTSC |
| Communicating Your Experience: Transferable Skills and Teaching Dossiers | **Michal Kasprzak**, Assistant Director, Teaching Assistants' Training Program/Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation |
| Career Strategies during a Pandemic | **Jen Davies**, Manager, Academic Advising & Career Development, UTSC |

| Workshop Title | Facilitator |
| --- | --- |
| | **Maria Mercado**, PhD Student, President of the Life Sciences Career Development Academy<br>**Yuxuan Wang**, Community Animator, Grad Room, School of Graduate Studies<br>**Daniel Zhan**, GPLLM Candidate at the Faculty of Law, Chair of the GSU Professional Graduate Students Caucus |
| Mindfulness Session | **Liam O'Leary**, Graduate Programming Coordinator, School of Graduate Studies |

In the Fall 2020 semester, the RGASC once again collaborated with UTSC's Centre for Teaching and Learning and combined UTM's GPDC and UTSC's GPD. UTM hosted the conference on October 14th and UTSC hosted on October 15th. On October 14th, the event had 154 registered individuals and 57 unique attendees. On October 15th, the event had 168 registered individuals and 119 unique attendees. Table 20 shows the workshops offered during the Fall 2020 GPDC.

**Table 20: Fall 2020 GPDC Workshops**

| Workshop Title | Facilitator(s) |
| --- | --- |
| Creating a Plan for your Graduate Professional Development | **Liam O'Leary**, Graduate Programming Coordinator, School of Graduate Studies |
| Staying Well in Graduate School during COVID-19 | **Ravinder** Gabble, Health Education Coordinator, Health and Counselling Centre, UTM<br>**Jordan Berard**, Graduate Wellness Lead, Health and Counselling Centre, UTM |
| Five Strategies for Integrating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Practice into your Online Remote Teaching | **Michal Kasprzak**, Assistant Director, Teaching Assistants' Training Program/Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation<br>**Cristina D'Amico**, Curriculum Developer, Teaching Assistants' Training Program/Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation |
| Using the "Virtual" UTM Library for Researching Effectively Off-Campus | **Rob Makinson**, Coordinator, Library Communications and Liaison Librarian, UTM Library |
| Careers and You: Online Networking and More | **Anne Gaiger**, Assistant Director, UTM Career Centre Ron Wener, Employment Strategist, UTM Career Centre |
| How to Advance your Career on LinkedIn | **Kareen Ndema**, Account Manager, Higher Education, LinkedIn |
| Keynote: Unconscious Bias and Challenges to Fair Assessment and Inclusion | **Maydianne Andrade**, Professor of Biology, Vice-Dean Faculty Affairs and Equity, UTSC |
| Panel Discussion: Grad Career Development and Equity | **Sara Ahmed**, Researcher, Service Learning and Diversity Outreach, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto<br>**Roopali Chaudhary**, PhD, Founder, CEO, Lead Researcher, Lotus STEMM<br>**Nana Lee**, PhD, Director of Graduate Professional Development and Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream of Biochemistry, Immunology and Graduate Life Sciences and Education, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto |

| Workshop Title | Facilitator(s) |
|---|---|
| | **Dimpho Radebe**, PhD student with experience in Equity, Diversity and Inclusion work, Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering, University of Toronto |

In the Winter 2021 semester, the RGASC hosted another GPDC. The event had 134 individuals registered and 72 unique attendees. Table 21 shows the workshops offered during the Winter 2021 GPDC.

**Table 21: Winter 2021 GPDC Workshops**

| Workshop Title | Facilitator(s) |
|---|---|
| Getting Started with Python pt. 1 | **Ahmed Hasan**, President of U of T Coders, PhD Candidate, Dept. of Cell and Systems Biology, UTM |
| Success in and after Graduate School | **Nana Lee**, Director of Graduate Professional Development and Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream in Departments of Biochemistry, Immunology and Graduate Life Sciences and Education, Faculty of Medicine, U of T |
| Alumni Career Panel & Networking | **Vanisa Dimitrova** and **April Forbes**, Events and Employment Services Coordinators, UTM Career Centre |
| The Publishing Process | **Jonathan Vroom**, Writing Specialist and Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream, Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre, UTM |
| Getting Started with Python pt. 2 | **Ahmed Hasan**, President of U of T Coders, PhD Candidate, Dept. of Cell and Systems Biology, UTM |
| Using Mendeley and Zotero to Manage your Research | **Andrew Nicholson**, Graduate Student Liaison Librarian, UTM Library |

After each conference, the GSSS distributes an online survey to collect feedback from participants. This year, the RGASC received less feedback from graduate student attendees compared to previous years. However, feedback conveyed overall satisfaction with the dates, times, and variety of sessions offered. The RGASC should implement additional strategies to obtain more feedback from graduate students. One strategy may be requiring attendees to complete a feedback survey to obtain GPS credits for their attendance. Another strategy may be to collect feedback during the conference.

Additionally, while the conferences saw an increase in attendees from the St. George and Scarborough campuses, there was a noticeable decrease in the number of UTM-affiliated graduate student attendees who historically represent the majority of attendees at GPDC.

RGASC GRADUATE WORKSHOPS

Table 22 below outlines the workshops independently offered by the RGASC this year. Workshop topics were determined by feedback from students last year, needs assessment

data, requests from various UTM stakeholders, and a review of offerings by partners with tri-campus mandates.

**Table 22: 2020/2021 RGASC Graduate Workshops**

| Webinar Title | Date & Time | Facilitator(s) | Registered | Attended |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Writing Literature Reviews | Sept. 24, 2020 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. | **Michael Kaler**, Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream & Writing Specialist, RGASC | 24 | 15 |
| Writing a Grant/Research Proposal | Nov. 3, 2020 2 – 4 p.m. | **Michael Kaler**, Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream & Writing Specialist, RGASC | 17 | 10 |
| Getting Started with Python pt. 1 | Nov. 9, 2020 1 – 2:30 p.m. | **James Santangelo,** PhD Candidate, Dept. of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, UTM | 47 | 21 |
| Getting Started with Python pt. 2 | Nov. 10, 2020 1 – 2:30 p.m. | **Ahmed Hasan**, PhD Candidate, Dept. of Cell and Systems Biology, UTM, President of U of T Coders | 47 | 19 |
| Presenting your Research in Three Minutes | Nov. 23, 2020 2 – 4 p.m. | **Cristina D'Amico**, Faculty Liaison Coordinator, Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation | 12 | 5 |
| Writing an Abstract | Nov. 24, 2020 1 – 3 p.m. | **Jonathan Vroom,** Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream & Writing Specialist, RGASC | 27 | 8 |
| Getting the Most out of Research Articles pt. 1 | Jan. 19, 2021 3 – 4 p.m. | **Jonathan Vroom,** Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream & Writing Specialist, RGASC | 9 | 4 |
| Time Management for Graduate Students | Jan. 20, 2021 10 – 11 a.m. | **Kerrie Martin,** Program Strategist, Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre | 20 | 12 |
| Getting the Most out of Research Articles pt. 2 | Jan. 26, 2021 3 – 4 p.m. | **Michael Kaler**, Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream & Writing Specialist, RGASC | 9 | 3 |
| Writing Literature Reviews | Feb. 2, 2021 2 – 4 p.m. | **Michael Kaler**, Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream & Writing Specialist, RGASC | 9 | 3 |
| Introduction to R and R Studio pt. 1 | Mar. 1, 2021 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. | **Raheleh Saryazdi,** PhD Candidate, Department of Psychology, UTM | 26 | 11 |
| Introduction to R and R Studio pt. 2 | Mar. 8, 2021 | **Raheleh Saryazdi,** PhD Candidate, Department of Psychology, UTM | 23 | 5 |

| Webinar Title | Date & Time | Facilitator(s) | Registered | Attended |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. | | | |
| Writing about Science for a General Audience | Mar. 9, 2021 3 – 4 p.m. | **Michael Kaler**, Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream & Writing Specialist, RGASC | 9 | 2 |

After each workshop, a feedback survey was distributed to all participants via email, a change from distributing hard copies of the surveys. This year, there was a significant decrease in the amount of feedback received from workshop attendees. However, the overall feedback indicated that attendees found the workshops they attended to be relevant and useful. Most students would recommend the workshops to other graduate students. To improve the amount of feedback received, programming may incorporate survey completion as part of the requirements to obtain GPS credits.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the shift to online made more workshops at the St. George campus easily accessible to UTM graduate students, which may have impacted attendance at some RGASC graduate workshops. The accessibility of online graduate workshops from tri-campus partners does raise the question of how the RGASC can better work with tri-campus partners when developing and implementing programming during and after the pandemic.


GRADUATE WRITING GROUPS

Graduate Writing Groups are informal weekly group writing sessions designed to help graduate students connect to a writing community, stay focused, and make writing progress. Each writing group meeting is hosted by an RGASC Writing Specialist. This year, the RGASC hosted Graduate Writing Groups via Zoom.

In Summer 2020 and Fall 2020, Graduate Writing Groups continued to run as weekly two-hour drop-in writing sessions supported by an RGASC Writing Specialist. A total of six unique students attended in Summer 2020 and nine unique students attended in Fall 2020. Attendance at these events was not consistent, with many sessions having no attendees. These attendance data inspired a complete revision of our approach to group-based writing support for graduate students.

Modelled on the York University Writing Centre's Digital Dissertation Writing Group Café, the RGASC made the following changes for the Winter 2020 Graduate Writing Group: increasing the duration of each meeting from two hours to three hours, including an opportunity to book up to four one-on-one appointments with a Writing Specialist, and structuring the three-hour period with time designated to both independent writing and group

discussions about technical and non-technical aspects of writing. Additionally, rather than offering drop-in sessions, the Graduate Writing Group focused explicitly on supporting graduate students currently working on a thesis, dissertation, publication or a similarly large writing project. Finally, students were required to register for the Group and strongly encouraged to attend all 11 sessions.

Topics (selected by the students themselves) for the group discussions included editing, effectively communicating with supervisors, imposter syndrome, incorporating non-prose materials in text, paragraphs, perfectionism, procrastination and motivation, structuring, and workaholism. These discussion periods were also an opportunity for graduate students and the Writing Specialist to share resources with one another. A total of three students took advantage of the opportunity to meet one-on-one with an RGASC Writing Specialist to discuss their writing.

While 13 students registered for the Winter 2021 Graduate Writing Group, seven students remained enrolled at the end of the 11 sessions. The majority of students who stopped attending the Graduate Writing Group did not explain their decision, but others indicated that the group did not suit their writing needs at the time (i.e., they did not have a large writing project to work on) or that they had moved to a different time zone and so the timing of the session was not ideal.

A survey was distributed at the end of the Winter 2021 Graduate Writing Group. Only three students responded, but they all agreed that the format of the Graduate Writing Group (i.e., length of each meeting, length of discussion, length of writing times, length of breaks, inclusion of discussion, and availability of one-on-one appointments) worked well. Additionally, when asked about the overall experience of participating in the Graduate Writing Group as well as general comments about the group, graduate students shared the following:

- "Very positive!"
- "great! I want to continue to see this offered in the future!"
- "phenomenal. 10/10 would recommend."
- "This was really helpful, especially during the pandemic, and I see how this could be useful beyond COVID."
- "Hopefully this continues, especially when we are back in person, I loved those groups."

The RGASC will continue to offer the new format of the Graduate Writing Group over the Summer 2021 semester.

## ONE-ON-ONE APPOINTMENTS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

Graduate students have the opportunity to meet with RGASC faculty one-on-one for writing support. RGASC faculty conducted a total of 26 appointments with UTM-affiliated graduate students in 2020/2021. Appointments for graduate students included topics related to grant applications, course work, and preparing for a PhD examination.

## ONE-ON-ONE APPOINTMENTS FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATIONS

The RGASC provides supports for undergraduate students applying to graduate school. Because these appointments are more complicated and take much longer than typical face-to-face consultations with undergrads, we try to book these manually with faculty members who have experience providing this kind of support. Rather than the 30 minutes allocated for a normal appointment, we allow a full hour for graduate school applications. Moreover, most students meet with an instructor more than once to discuss their personal statement or letter of intent. This year, RGASC faculty conducted a total of 83[2] hour-long appointments on undergraduate students' graduate school applications. A number of other students (we don't know precisely how many) were unaware of the option to book longer appointments and used the standard appointments in WCONLINE to get feedback on their graduate school applications.

## GRADUATE PROGRAMMING WITH THE VICE-DEAN, GRADUATE

As previously mentioned, the GSSS position became permanent in July 2020. While the position reports directly to the RGASC Director, the GSSS continues to work closely and regularly with the Vice-Dean, Graduate to support the Office of the Dean's priorities and to ensure the graduate student support provided by the RGASC aligns with these priorities.

In an effort to improve communication with all its stakeholders, one of the Vice-Dean, Graduate's priorities last year was to develop a calendar highlighting all graduate events taking place at UTM. The Graduate Events Calendar is hosted on the Office of the Dean's website and includes both department-specific events and those events open to all graduate students. The GSSS continues to support the Vice-Dean, Graduate in updating the Graduate Events Calendar.

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[2] This number includes those seen by ELL Specialists and included in the ELL Support section above.

## TEACHING ASSISTANTS' TRAINING PROGRAM (TATP)

The RGASC works in partnership with the Teaching Assistants' Training Program (TATP), a tri-campus training program for any student working as a teaching assistant at the University of Toronto. TATP provides certification of professional teaching development and supports departments in their efforts to provide general training for TAs, especially new TAs and TAs teaching in new contexts. In previous years, the RGASC hosted TATP's extensive training days at the beginning of each semester at the UTM campus. This year, TATP hosted an Online TA Week. The RGASC collaborated with TATP during the Online TA Week, leading a session titled, *TAing at the University of Toronto Mississauga.* The session was co-facilitated by the RGASC's GSSS and TATP's UTM Liaison. A total of 46 individuals attended the session.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The circumstances of the 2020/2021 year provided a unique opportunity to shift UTM's graduate programming online. While there were many successes in moving graduate programming online (i.e., improving current programming, developing additional programming, and more collaborations with tri-campus partners), the GSSS will reflect on how to build on these successes. We also need to reflect on what programming will remain online or transition back to in-person delivery when the campus reopens.

The 2020/2021 year also saw a noticeable drop in feedback data received from graduate students. The GSSS will explore various strategies to obtain data to evaluate graduate programming in addition to the post-event feedback surveys.

## FACULTY SUPPORT

### INDIVIDUAL CONSULTATIONS

In 2020/2021, the Educational Development team supported instructors in over 150 individual consultations. These consultations do not include those related to the WDI, ELLI, or NDI performed by other members of the RGASC team. They also do not include consultations conducted during the drop-in sessions that were offered to instructors on a weekly basis from April 2020 to April 2021.

*Consultations by Term*

Close to half of the total number of consultations for the year (43%) occurred during the summer 2020 term. This is much higher than we have seen in prior years as a majority of these focused on the pivot to remote teaching. Consultation requests subsequently declined each term, with the fewest submitted during the Winter 2021 term. The number of consultations conducted during the Winter 2021 term were slightly below average compared to previous years; however, the number of consultations conducted in Fall 2020 were above average and the number of consultations conducted in the Summer 2020 term were well above average.

**Chart 6: Faculty Consultations**



*Total Consultations by Topic*

Topics for individual consultations included curriculum and course design, teaching dossiers, remote teaching, accessible and inclusive pedagogy, active learning strategies, assessment, academic integrity, and teaching and learning research.

**Chart 7: Faculty Consultation Topics**
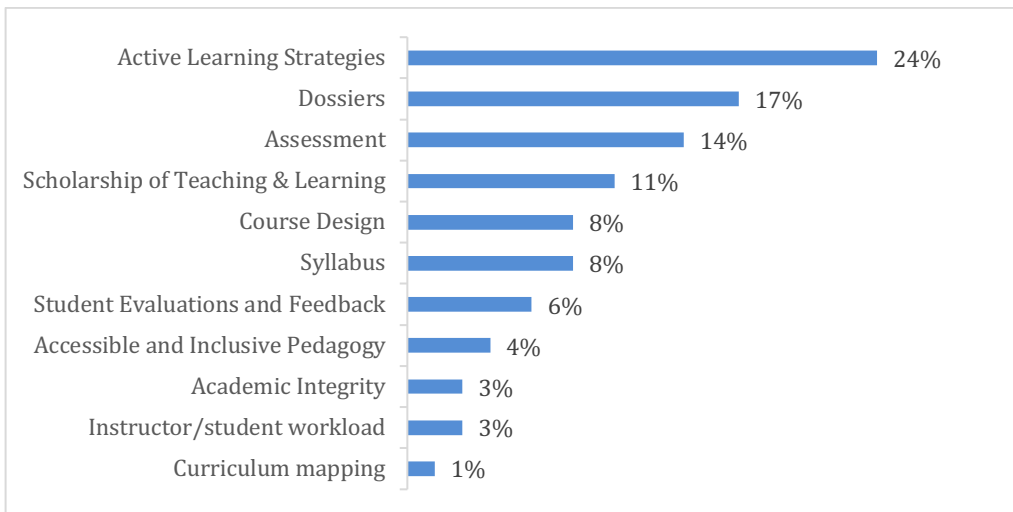


*Consultations by Department*

The RGASC supported instructors across departments at UTM. Instructors from Historical Studies, Mathematics and Computations Sciences, Visual Studies, Language Studies, English, and Biology most often sought one-on-one consultations focused on pedagogical

support. The RGASC provided pedagogical support to one instructor from Economics and one from Sociology. We did not receive any one-on-one pedagogical consultation requests from instructors in Philosophy or Psychology this year; however, instructors from both those departments regularly attended the weekly drop-in sessions.

**Chart 8: Faculty Consultations by Department**

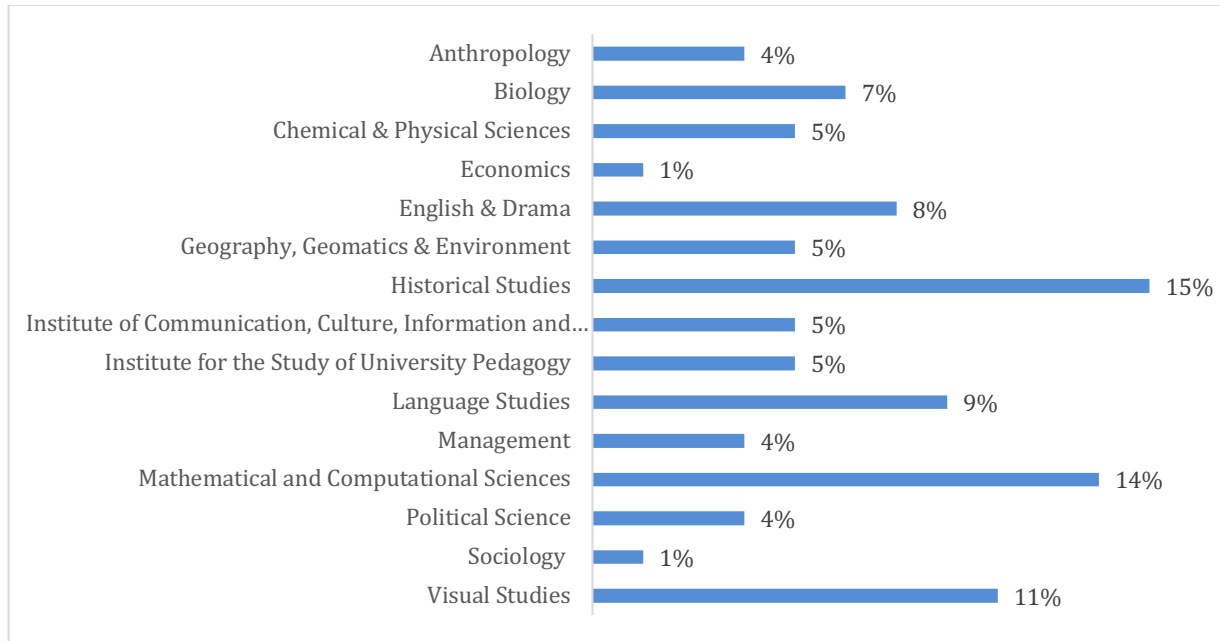| Department | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Anthropology | 4% |
| Biology | 7% |
| Chemical & Physical Sciences | 5% |
| Economics | 1% |
| English & Drama | 8% |
| Geography, Geomatics & Environment | 5% |
| Historical Studies | 15% |
| Institute of Communication, Culture, Information and... | 5% |
| Institute for the Study of University Pedagogy | 5% |
| Language Studies | 9% |
| Management | 4% |
| Mathematical and Computational Sciences | 14% |
| Political Science | 4% |
| Sociology | 1% |
| Visual Studies | 11% |

The RGASC Educational Developers conducted 10 teaching observations for UTM instructors this year. Each teaching observation consisted of a pre-observation meeting, a teaching observation either for one or two hours, and a post-observation consultation meeting where feedback was provided along with formative questions to help guide the instructor's or teaching assistant's pedagogy. This feedback averaged three pages in length.

The majority of the consultation requests (96%) received by the RGASC Educational Development team came via personal emails to individual Educational Developers. The remaining four percent were received through the UTM Instructional Support Portal which was launched in September 2020. More than half of the tickets received through the Instructional Support Portal were created by an I&ITS staff member rather than by the instructors themselves. The RGASC continues to encourage instructors to submit consultation request through the Instructor Support Portal, but instructors seem to prefer reaching out to specific members of the Educational Development team via email as a first point of contact.

## KNOWLEDGE BASE ARTICLES

The RGASC has currently published five Knowledge Base articles on the UTM Instructional Support Portal. Intended to provide support and resource documentation for the UTM teaching and learning community, these articles focus on the following topics: meaningful assessment, formative assessment, constructive alignment, writing learning outcomes, and Universal Design for Learning. Articles on academic integrity, supporting first generation students, equitable assessment deadlines, actively engaging students online, rubrics, student workload planning, and creating community online are nearly complete and will be published in the coming months.

## TEACH ANYWHERE QUERCUS COURSE SHELL

To supplement TLC professional development opportunities, the RGASC contributed to the development (by the UTM Library Instructional Technology team) of a Quercus shell to house resources, recordings of previous webinars, Quercus information, engagement strategies, inclusive and accessible pedagogy and documentation strategies, pertinent UTM and UofT policy information, and academic integrity supports. By the end of Winter term, 834 instructors had enrolled in the Teach Anywhere Quercus site, and more instructors are joining every day.

## UTM SUMMER CAMP FOR INSTRUCTORS

In collaboration with the UTM Dean's Office, the RGASC developed a four-day summer institute called UTM Instructor Summer Camp to help instructors preparing to teach remotely. The institute was developed with the following three goals in mind:

1) Develop approaches to community building synchronously and asynchronously
2) Plan platform, content, and assessment strategies for remote and hybrid delivery
3) Identify barriers to learning in a remote and hybrid delivery mode

The UTM Instructor Summer camp combined synchronous and asynchronous delivery of content and activities to model for instructors the kinds of expectations they could encounter in their own course facilitation. It was particularly meant to support instructors with little to no experience with teaching online or designing courses for remote delivery. The UTM Summer Camp was offered twice in the Summer 2020 term (once in July and once in August) and instructors were given continued access to the course shell and resources through the Fall 2020 and Winter 2021 semesters.

## UTM WINTER CAMP FOR INSTRUCTORS

In collaboration with the UTM Dean's Office, the RGASC developed and facilitated a two-day institute that aimed to share strategies related to course policies and syllabi,

assessments, synchronous and asynchronous lectures, Universal Design for Learning and inclusive pedagogy, building community, and managing instructor and student workload. Similar to the Summer Camp for Instructors, instructors were given continued access to the course shell for this event which contained resources to support their teaching for Winter 2021 term.

## INVITED PRESENTATIONS AND REQUESTED RESOURCES

During the summer, the RGASC Educational Developers created and presented six workshops/presentations focused on remote teaching to support individual departments and service areas with their identified needs (CPS, DVS, Biology, UTM Student Services, Accessibility Services, and Sociology). We also supported two professors from Language Studies at UTM in the creation of a department-wide resource focused on module chunking, pedagogical considerations for assessments and activities in a remote environment, and other student supports.

The RGASC collaborated with UTM Library Instructional Technology team and the Information and Instructional Technology Services (I&ITS) in the Winter 2021 term to develop two workshops, one focused on using rubrics to support student learning and the other focused on developing alternative assessments. These workshops allowed instructors to share their assessment strategies and practices and provided the facilitators with the opportunity to promote approaches to remote teaching that include multimodal and alternative assessments with rubrics align with Quercus capabilities.

## TLC SESSIONS

This year there were a total of 891 attendances at TLC sessions. The individuals who participated in these events represented 42 departments and service areas from across the University of Toronto.

**Table 23: TLC Workshops and Webinars (2020/2021)**

| Workshop or Webinar Title | Date | Registered | Attended |
|---|---|---|---|
| Classroom Management & Cultivating Community in an Online Environment | May 12, 2020 | 39 | 27 |
| Inclusive Assessments & Academic Integrity | May 19, 2020 | 36 | 26 |
| Mid-Term Instructor Check In | May 28, 2020 | 17 | 6 |
| Just-in-Time Exam Clinic | June 10, 2020 | 16 | 10 |
| End of Term Debrief | June 22, 2020 | 23 | 17 |
| Just-In-Time Syllabus Clinic | June 25, 2020 | 15 | 8 |
| Prepare for Fall Term: How to Create a Course Map | July 6, 2020 | 9 | 7 |

| Workshop or Webinar Title | Date | Registered | Attended |
|---|---|---|---|
| Prepare for Fall Term: Syllabus Clinic | July 7, 2020 | 17 | 9 |
| July Summer Camp | July 6-July 9, 2020 | 102 | 83 (average) |
| Prepare for Fall Term: Using Quercus | July 14, 2020 | 84 | 59 |
| Prepare for Fall Term: Dealing with Difficult Issues in the Classroom | July 21, 2020 | 34 | 25 |
| Dual Delivery Instructor Session | July 24, 2020 | 73 | 54 |
| Mid-Term Check In | July 28, 2020 | 8 | 6 |
| August Summer Camp | August 10-13, 2020) | 131 | 94 (average) |
| Prepare for Fall Term: Inclusive Assessment Design | August 25, 2020 | 36 | 21 |
| Prepare for Fall Term: Community Building for Remote Courses | August 27, 2020 | 49 | 29 |
| Ready Set Teach Day | September 8, 2020 | 93 | 73 |
| Facilitating Synchronous Tutorials for Teaching Assistants | September 9, 2020 | 6 | 4 |
| Creating an Equitable Classroom | September 24, 2020 | 14 | 6 |
| Academic Integrity Panel | September 29, 2020 | 35 | 24 |
| Mid-Term Instructor Check-In | October 13, 2020 | 5 | 4 |
| Indigenous Student Panel and Curriculum Workshop | October 15, 2020 | 42 | 23 |
| Multimodality: Pedagogy and Technology | October 19, 2020 | 16 | 13 |
| TDI Grant Winner Showcase | October 28, 2020 | 7 | 6 |
| Compassion Fatigue Workshop | October 29, 2020 | 8 | 5 |
| Organizational Strategies for Teaching | November 3, 2020 | 14 | 10 |
| Creating Accessible Documents and Inclusive Course Design | November 12, 2020 | 9 | 6 |
| Racially-Inclusive Pedagogy | November 18, 2020 | 17 | 11 |
| Winter Camp for Instructors | December 14, 15, 2020 | 62 | 56 |
| Voice Care for Instructors | January 19, 2021 | 11 | 9 |
| Help Students Develop Their Foundational Academic Skills | January 29, 2021 | 20 | 14 |
| Compassion Fatigue Workshop | February 4, 2021 | 17 | 8 |
| Statistics for SoTL | February 9, 2021 | 10 | 10 |
| Inclusive Pedagogy-Equity Approaches | February 25, 2021 | 19 | 11 |
| Indigenous Lunch & Learn | March 11, 2021 | 20 | 15 |
| Community Engaged Learning | March 17, 2021 | 7 | 3 |
| Preparing the Teaching Dossier | March 24, 2021 | 16 | 10 |
| Curriculum Mapping | March 31, 2021 | 24 | 18 |
| Dish with One Spoon Treaty Workshop | April 1, 2021 | 27 | 14 |
| Mental Health Syllabus Workshop | April 8, 2021 | 18 | 11 |
| Teaching with Technology Showcase | April 20, 2021 | 49 | 34 |
| TLC Year-End Reflection | April 27, 2021 | 26 | 18 |

The Teaching & Learning Collaboration thanks the following contributors to this year's programming:

**Alysha Ferguson**, Manager, Community Engaged Learning, Centre for Student Engagement

**Andie Burazin**, Assistant Professor, Mathematical and Computational Sciences

**Ange Loft**, Jumblies Theatre

**Bogdan Simion,** Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream, Department of Mathematical and Computational Sciences

**Carly Prusky**, Educational Developer, RGASC

**Chet Scoville**, Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream, Department of English

**Elizabeth Parke** Senior Research Associate, Collaborative Digital Research Space

**Enid Selkirk** Sessional Instructor, Biomedical Communications

**Fran Odette**, Professor, George Brown College

**Jake Simons,** Vocal coach

**Jasjit Sangha,** Learning Strategist, Academic Success Centre

**Jennifer Adese**, Canada Research Chair in Métis Women, Politics, and Community. Associate Professor, Department of Sociology

**Jennifer Esmail**, Assistant Director, Experiential Learning and Centre for Community Partnerships

**Jessica Carlos,** Graduate Student Support Strategist, RGASC

**Joanna Szurmak**, Research Services & Liaison Librarian

**John Currie,** Assistant Professor Teaching Stream, Institute of Communication, Culture, Information and Technology

**Kristen Bos,** Assistant Professor, Women and Gender Institute Department of Historical Studies. Co-Director of the Technoscience Research Unit

**Laura Taylor,** Associate Professor Teaching Stream ISUP

**Lisa Devereaux**, Manager, Academic Integrity and Affairs

**Lucy Gaspini**, Director, Academic Success & Integrity Panel)

**Marie-Paule Lory,** Assistant Professor, Language Studies

**Michael DeBraga,** Associate Professor, Teaching Stream Experiential Learning Faculty Liaison

**Michael Kaler**, Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream, Writing Specialist RGASC

**Michael Kasprzak,** Assistant Director TATP/CTSI

**Monika Havelka** Associate Professor Teaching Stream, Geography, Geomatics and Environment

**Navdeep**, Student panelist

**Nicole Charles** Assistant Professor Historical Studies

**Nicole Laliberte,** Associate Professor, Geography, Geomatics and Environment

**Nythalah Baker**, Director, Equity Diversity, and Inclusion UTM

**Rafael Chiuzi,** Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream, Institute for Management and Innovation

**Robert Martins,** I&ITS

**Rosa Junghwa Hong**, Assistant, Professor, Teaching Stream, French Program Department of Language Studies

**Sanja Hinic-Frlog** Associate Professor Teaching Stream, Biology

**Shawna Percy**, Life Voice

**Sheila Batacharya,** Assistant Professor Teaching Stream, ISUP

**Simone Laughton,** Head, Library & Instructional Technologies UTM

**Steve Szigeti**, Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream, ICCIT

**Steven Dorland,** Lecturer, Department of Anthropology

**Tingting Zhu**, Lecturer (CTLA), Department of Geography, Geomatics, and Environment

**TJ Yusun**, Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream, MCS

**Vivienne Luk,** Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream, Department of Chemical and Physical Sciences and Department of Forensic Science

All TLC session participants were asked to complete feedback surveys; these surveys had an average response rate of 23%. When asked to provide an overall rating for the TLC session they attended, 67% gave the session they attended five out of five stars, with the remaining respondents rating the session they attended either four out of five stars (25%) or three out of five stars (7%). When asked if the session they attended met their needs, resulted in their learning something new, and resulted in their being able to apply some of what their learned, over 95% of respondents indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with all three statements. When asked what they found most useful about the session they attended, hearing about colleagues' experiences and the value of different perspective were the most common responses, followed by resource sharing opportunities. The most common concerns related to sessions being too long for an online format. Feedback about sessions being too long was most commonly shared on the Winter 2021 programming. Moving forward we will cap workshops at one and half hours and opt to offer multiple sessions rather than longer sessions if more engagement is necessary for the topic.

## INSTRUCTOR DROP-IN SESSIONS

Through the TLC, the RGASC hosted a series of drop-ins in response to COVID with a once-per-week format from April 2020 until April 19, 2021. The RGASC's Educational Developers co-facilitate these drop-in webinars with members of the Library Instructional Technology team and I&ITS. The drop-ins were hosted on Zoom and allowed faculty, instructors, staff, and graduate students to ask questions about pedagogy, assessment, or technology related to remote teaching. The average attendance was six participants. Attendance peaked during the summer term and steadily declined such that during the sessions held in the Winter 2021 term often only one or two instructors attended each week. The instructor drop-in sessions have been put on hold for the Summer 2021 term due to low engagement during the Winter 2021 term but will return during the first week of September as instructors prepare for the Fall 2021 term.

## PEDAGOGICAL READING GROUPS

Through the TLC, the RGASC Educational Developers facilitated eight pedagogical reading groups: two in Summer 2020, three in Fall 2020, and three in Winter 2021. The groups met biweekly with a set chapter or selection to discuss. Participants were encouraged to share how the readings intersected with their pedagogical practice or how the readings suggested strategies that they would implement in their courses. This year's reading groups focused on the following books:

- *Small Teaching Online* by Flower Darby
- *Online Teaching at Its Best* by Linda Nilson and Ludwika Goodson

- *99 Tips to Creating Sustainable Online Videos* by Karen Costa
- *So you want to talk about race* by Ijeoma Oluo
- *Teaching to Transgress* by bell hooks
- *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer
- *Distracted* by James Lang
- *Creating Engaging Discussions* by Jennifer H. Herman

A total of 39 members of the UTM teaching and learning community participated in the pedagogical reading groups, with 11 in the Summer 2020 reading groups, 12 in Fall 2020, and 16 in Winter 2021. Participants included 12 faculty members, 11 sessional instructors, two librarians, two staff members, and one graduate student. Seven participants joined reading groups in two of the three terms they were offered. One sessional instructor and one faculty member participated in a reading group in all three terms this year. The following departments were represented in the reading groups: Biology; Mathematical & Computational Sciences; Historical Studies; Geography, Geomatics & Environment; Anthropology; English & Drama; Visual Studies; Economics; Management; Sociology; Language Studies; Institute for the Study of University Pedagogy (ISUP); and Institute of Communication, Culture, Information and Technology (ICCIT).

## TLC COMMUNICATIONS

The TLC website continues to expand with new content to support instructor needs and developments in pedagogical research. Several new resources have been added to the TLC website under a new section called "Remote Teaching Resources" and these resources continue to be supplemented based on feedback and needs identified.

The TLC newsletter is published once a term and allows faculty, instructors, and sessional lecturers to showcase their teaching and learning innovations, award and grant successes, and SoTL projects. The TLC Newsletter is sent via MailChimp. The number of subscribers has grown this year, as have the number of contributions submitted by the UTM community for inclusion in the newsletter. There have been additions made to the TLC newsletter to highlight remote delivery successes.

The TLC Twitter now has 330 followers, which is an 18% increase (59 followers) compared to May of last year. The TLC Twitter is used to share information about upcoming TLC events as well as resources and links of pedagogical importance. It serves as yet another format for instructors to engage with the TLC and thus modeling UDL guidelines for multimodality and authentic connection opportunities.

## EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

The ongoing pandemic during 2020/2021 has had a significant impact on Experiential Learning (EL) at UTM and has required a number of innovative approaches to ensure continued support and delivery of EL programming.

### COLLABORATION WITH EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION UNIT & EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING GROUP

The EL Faculty Liaison continued to work closely with the Experiential Education Unit (EEU) in the Office of the Dean. The bulk of this work related to writing the Experiential Learning Group (ELG) report which examined the state of EL programming at UTM through a broadly focused survey that solicited feedback from all key stakeholders (i.e., faculty, staff, students, and community partners). The Report made recommendations that were submitted to the Office of the Dean in December 2020, which in turn provided a response and further feedback in the Spring of 2021. The ELG is currently considering the feedback on the report to determine which actions should be taken to promote EL at UTM and hopes to submit its final recommendations by Summer 2021.

The EEU also invited the EL Faculty Liaison to contribute to the development of the Experiential Learning Matters: A Resource Handbook for Faculty and Staff, a handbook aimed at providing EL-engaged faculty and staff at UTM with an overview of resources to support EL programming. This handbook was completed for the Fall 2020 and sent out to Department Chairs and other stakeholders.

The EL Faculty Liaison collaborated with the EEU and staff at the RGASC to use existing RGASC programming as internship options for EL courses at UTM (see below). This resulted in the establishment of placements for students in ECO400 and PSY442 thereby adding to the existing internship opportunity that the RGASC had developed for students in EDS325. While this internship option was developed in response to the needs that arose in response to the pandemic, it has highlighted a potential opportunity to further grow internships within ISUP or on campus.

The EL Faculty Liaison along with members of the EEU met with administrators from Bow Valley college in January 2021 to explore strategies for establishing effective EL programming and assessing the efficacy of EL programming at the institutional level. We believe this is evidence that the approach to EL taken by the EL Faculty Liaison and the EEU is effective and may serve as a model for other institutions.

## EL COURSE INSTRUCTION & SUPPORT

The EL Faculty Liaison continued to provide three contact hours per week of support (engaging students with topic relevant questions and discussion) for the EL component of BIO356. In addition, in an attempt to more deeply engage students with lecture topics and course readings, students were enrolled in an asynchronous discussion tool (Packback - https://www.packback.co/), which required them to submit weekly questions and respond to peer questions over a 10-week window during the course. The EL Faculty Liaison evaluated the questions and responses and provided detailed feedback for each submission. In addition, the EL Faculty Liaison developed a formal reflection exercise that students submitted at the end of term

## OTHER COURSE SUPPORT

1. ECO400Y5Y - Economics Internship (SSc EXP). Delivered workshop on Team Building focusing on the Kolb Learning Styles Inventory. Total support limited to a single 90-minute presentation delivered on November11th, 2020.

2. VST410H5S - Internship in Visual Studies (HUM EXP). Delivered workshop on Reflective Practice and worked with course instructor to produce a template for the application of RP. Total support limited to a single 1-hour presentation on January 13th, 2021.

3. MGT480H5S - Internship (SSc EXP). Delivered workshop on Reflective Practice, with a specific focus on how to ensure the reflections are constructive and useful as a tool for further academic and/or professional development. Total support limited to a single 2-hour presentation delivered on March 10th, 2021.

4. GGR305H5S - Biogeography (SCI). Delivered workshop on writing a formal literature review. Focus examined the attributes of a literature review as well as the APA 7th edition process. Workshop was for one hour and was delivered on March 12th, 2021.

5. SOC334H5S - Aging and Society (SSc EXP). Delivered workshop on Reflective Practice, with a specific focus on how to ensure the reflections are constructive and useful as a tool for further academic and/or professional development. Total support limited to a single 2-hour presentation delivered on March 17th, 2021.

6. PSY442Y5Y - Practicum in Exceptionality in Human Learning (SCI EXP). Supported the development of an in-house internship placement at the RGASC for two students enrolled in PSY442. Facilitated the placement process with RGASC staff and PSY442Y instructor.

## INTERNSHIP DEVELOPMENT

As a result of the pandemic, there were a number of EL courses at UTM that were unable to find suitable placements for all of their students. To address this problem, the EL Faculty Liaison, the instructors of PSY442 and ECO400, and the FSG Program Manager at the RGASC collaborated to provide an in-house internship option for EL designated courses at UTM. While this collaboration was initially considered as an alternative to community placements that were unavailable due to the pandemic, the students experiences were such that the course instructors have decided to continue this collaboration moving forward. The RGASC is currently exploring additional opportunities for hosting internship students into the future.

## LINKING SKILLS PROJECT

The EL Faculty Liaison participated in the EEU's [Linking Skills](#) project, a new research and experiential learning initiative at UTM intended to enhance the career outcomes of Humanities graduates. One of the most important aspects of this project is a survey of graduating students, alumni, and employers about the career ambitions, trajectories, and outcomes of UTM Humanities Graduates. The rationale is to identify and map the skills that are currently being applied by former graduates with the hopes of linking these skills to specific course experiences. The first step focused on the development and administration of a survey; we are currently analyzing the survey data to determine how to proceed. The EL Faculty Liaison contributed to the survey development process and developed resources for students enrolled in the courses that are piloting the project. The following eight courses are currently involved in the Linking Skills project: DRE201H5S; ENG206H5S; ENG289H5S; ENG381H5S; HIS498Y5Y; & ITA388H5S; WGS435Y5Y; VST410H5S.

## REFLECTIVE PRACTICE SUPPORT FOR RGASC PROGRAMMING

The EL Faculty Liaison collaborated with the RGASC's Graduate Student Support Strategist to develop a formal reflective practice module and assignment for the PART program that guided students through the steps associated with DEAL model of reflection. This asynchronous module includes a [YouTube video](#) that walks students through the basics and provide a series of activities to help guide the reflective process. The EL Faculty Liaison provides feedback on all the reflections submitted to the PART program.

The EL Faculty Liaison created a similar synchronous module on reflective practice for the FSG program. The synchronous reflective practice sessions were run over two days in March and included an overview of the DEAL model of reflection along with activities that

encouraged the PFSG leaders to explore their facilitating philosophy. An asynchronous session was also created for FSG leaders to access on their own.


## ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The EL Faculty Liaison developed a number of other online resources and tools to support EL programming at UTM. These include tips on writing reflections and the application of the DEAL model of reflection. Links to the resources are below.

- Fundamentals of Reflective Practice (Tip Sheet)
- Metacognition (Tip Sheet)
- Writing and Thinking Reflectively (Tip Sheet)
- Reflective Practice: Thinking about Thinking (Tip Sheet)
- Reflective Writing Sample (an example of a student's reflective writing)


## EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING DEVELOPMENT GRANT

A total of eight proposals were submitted to the EEU seeking grant support for EL course development. The EL Faculty Liaison participated in the review process.

# Part Three: RGASC Programs

In addition to its core focus areas, the RGASC provides academic support to UTM undergraduate students through four formal programs:

1) **Head Start**
2) **Facilitated Study Group Program**
3) **Program for Accessing Research Training (PART)**
4) **Promoting Academic Skills for Success (PASS) Program**

The following is a brief overview of each program's activities in 2020/2021.

## HEAD START

Head Start has been an interactive on-campus event for first-year students at UTM for many years. Situated in the days prior to Orientation Week (O-Week), Head Start has consistently provided an opportunity for students to enhance their academic skills while engaging in dialogue with peers, senior students, and faculty. COVID-19 disrupted the way in which content for Head Start was delivered, as face-to-face interactions became impossible. As Head Start occurred in August, students and faculty were still coming to terms with the fact that courses would no longer function in the way that they traditionally had. Therefore, it was imperative that Head Start not only support students with their academic skill development, but also foster community building during these challenging times.

In order to meet the needs of students and provide an additional element of flexibility, we expanded Head Start from its two-and-a-half-day model to a two-week model. Through an online Quercus shell, students were provided with daily synchronous and asynchronous content on academic skills. Short (less than 10 minutes) asynchronous videos provided a basic overview of upcoming synchronous content, allowing students to engage with as much or as little information as they wanted. This amounted to approximately 28 hours of synchronous opportunities and two hours of asynchronous content.

In addition, faculty across UTM came together to offer inspiring messages to students through the synchronous faculty panels, as representatives from the following departments participated in a variety of different kinds of sessions: Anthropology; Biology; Chemical and Physical Sciences; Economics; English and Drama; Geography, Geomatics, and the Environment; Historical Studies; Institute for the Study of University Pedagogy; Language Studies; Mathematics and Computer Science; Philosophy; and Sociology. Attendance numbers were strong, as indicated in Table 24 below.

**Table 24: Head Start Sessions and Attendance (2019 and 2020)**

| Session Name | Attendance 2020 | Views 2020 | Attendance 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Writing and Reading Focus | Synchronous | Asynchronous | |
| Deep Reading for Deep Learning | 156 | 163 | 339 |
| Critical Writing | 120 | 168+135* | 131 |
| Lab Report Writing | 149 | NA | 149 |
| Academic Vocabulary | NA | 73 | 65 |
| Numeracy Skills | | | |
| Problem Solving | 156 | 164 | 457 |
| 1$^{st}$ year Math | 129 | 150+162+218* | 195 |
| First Year Science Uncovered | 157 | NA | 157 |
| General Skills | | | |
| Study Planning/Getting the most out of first year | 70 | 99 | 70 |
| Time Management | 168 | 229 | 180 |
| Note Taking | 107 | 128 | 215 |
| Critical Thinking | | 273 | |
| Faculty Panel | 149 | NA | 315 |
| Student Panel | 136 | NA | 410 |
| How to Learn Online | 107 | NA | NA |
| What is the Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre? | NA | 319 | NA |

* *multiple asynchronous videos were created*

As the data above show, Head Start numbers remained strong this year. Head Start attendance comparing 2020 to previous years is included in Table 25 below.

**Table 25: Comparative Head Start Attendance Data**

| Year | Total Attendance | Unique Attendance | Presenters | # of Total Sessions | # of Total Hours |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2016 | 828 | 246 | 26 | 35 | 40 |
| 2017 | 1319 | 287 | 23 | 26 | 14 |
| 2018 | 2698 | 539 | 23 | 24 | 14 |

| Year | Total Attendance | Unique Attendance | Presenters | # of Total Sessions | # of Total Hours |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2019 | 3094 | 592 | 33 | 28 | 14 |
| 2020 | 3821 (2208 views of Asynchronous content) | 328 (545 Asynchronous content) | 27 | 28 | 30 |

In addition to the academic content delivered in each session, students were provided with additional resources and opportunities for engagement. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) were posted to the Quercus shell along with a list of useful links. Students were also invited to informal chats with senior students and staff to provide other opportunities to meet people and build relationships.

After the completion of Head Start, a survey was sent to all students asking for feedback on the program. A total of 54 students participated in the survey. In this survey, 93% of respondents indicated that they thought their Head Start experience helped them prepare for their university studies.  Students were also asked to recommend what format would be best for hosting Head Start, suggesting preferences for online only (N=16, 30%), online and in-person (N=32, 59%), and in-person only (N=2, 4%).  These data seem to support an argument for a blended format in future years; however, due to public health measures that appear to limit the ability to have large in-person gatherings this summer, we will be hosting Head Start fully online again in 2021.

A follow-up survey sent in February focused on eliciting information about how students had applied what they learned during Head Start during their first year and to get feedback on what academic skills and information they found important or needed more support with. In total 94 students participated in the follow-up survey.

According to the follow-up survey, the most important topics covered in Head Start were Time Management Strategies (N=60, 64%), Effective Note-taking (N=54, 57%), and Academic Integrity (N=49, 52%). In recent focus groups, students agreed with these top topics, but placed more emphasis on Academic Integrity.  In the follow-up survey, students were also asked what skill they felt they needed more support with during the year.  This question was open-ended and currently requires more analysis, but writing, math, and time-management are strongly represented in the responses.  Another interesting theme that came from this survey, in response to the question "What would you have liked to know more about before you started your classes this year?", was program planning and PoST information.  In addition, respondents wanted more interaction with upper-year students, a focus on international students, and more support related to stress, anxiety, and balancing workload.

Two focus groups were hosted in early May to provide a space for students who had experienced Head Start 2020 to discuss their experience and provide input on how to improve the event and support incoming first-year students during Head Start 2021. Analysis of this focus group data is pending, but anecdotally the conversation was vibrant, the students engaged with the questions, and they openly provided their input. One question, at the end of each group, was "Of all the things we've discussed, what is most important element to making Head Start a successful program for new students?" Participants strongly agreed that more upper-year student involvement was the top priority. Given that the event will be fully online, focus group participants urged that there be more opportunity for participants to interact and create relationships with each other outside of the workshops and sessions.

## FACILITATED STUDY GROUP (FSG) PROGRAM

### PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Based on the Supplemental Instruction model developed by the University of Missouri at Kansas City, facilitated study groups are a non-remedial approach to learning enrichment that uses peer-assisted study groups to integrate essential academic skills with course-related material. The study groups employ a wide range of collaborative learning techniques to help students build a structured study routine in order to process their study material more effectively. The essential features of the RGASC's Peer Facilitated Study Group Program are as follows:

- FSGs are only offered in support of courses in which there is active collaboration between the course instructor and the RGASC.
- FSGs target historically difficult courses rather "at-risk" students.
- Participation in the FSG program is voluntary and open to all students enrolled in the course.
- The impact of this intervention on the academic performance of the class as a whole is measured by the RGASC at the aggregate level.
- The sessions are peer-facilitated by a team of facilitators, model students who volunteer or who are hand-picked by the course instructor and intensively trained by the RGASC in proactive learning and study strategies.
- The opportunity for students to attend the study groups is made available at the beginning of the term, before students encounter academic difficulties.

The goal of the FSG program is two-fold:

1. To provide course instructors and their students with a non-remedial approach to learning enrichment by deploying peer-assisted study groups to integrate essential academic skills with course-related material.
2. To provide senior students, who are in the process of transitioning out of the undergraduate phase of their university career, with an experiential learning opportunity through which they acquire skills and competencies critical to their professional development and commensurate with Degree Level Expectations.

The FSG Program operates through volunteer participation from the Facilitators. The opportunity to gain experience in a facilitation role is a key motivator for them, particularly as many of them have ambitions to teach in the future. Facilitators also receive a Co-Curricular Record (CCR) annotation on their transcript and guidance from RGASC faculty and staff on how to construct a facilitator portfolio. Throughout the year, facilitators have appointments with the RGASC's Learning Strategist, Program Strategist, and Program Assistants (who are experienced, senior Facilitators themselves) to receive feedback on the portfolio as a "work-in-progress."

## FACILITATOR TRAINING

All facilitators get two kinds of training: initial training and in-service training.

Initial training comprises 15 hours of instruction and activities, with three objectives:

1. To define the role of facilitators as role models who are aware of the keys to their success and their learning style tendencies. While a TA acts in the role of a "content expert" in a course, the facilitator learns to see her/himself as a "course expert", with meta-cognitive awareness of how to be success in a course.
2. To present the concept of the study group as the anti-tutorial. Much of the training is devoted to understanding the role of collaborative learning techniques and different learning preferences in building learning networks within the study sessions and breaking the students' cycle of learned helplessness.
3. To emphasize the importance of incorporating a "scaffolding" approach into the design of the study sessions. The study sessions model the process of effective study and exam preparation strategies by practicing study skills and eventually building the students into self-directed learners.

In-service training is offered once per term, and each session is one hour. The objectives of the in-service training are:

1. To correct misconceptions about Supplemental Instruction for facilitators. While facilitators have received their initial training, applying Supplemental Instruction

techniques in practice can be challenging. The in-service training is an opportunity for facilitators to reflect upon the challenges they have faced, the actions they took, and how they can improve moving forwards.

2. To develop additional strategies to implement Supplemental Instruction techniques. Based on the facilitator experiences, the Supplemental Instruction techniques are re-visited, and their application is discussed.

3. To share best practices for Supplemental Instruction. Facilitators and Program Assistants share best practices in leading FSGs and working with students (Supplemental Instruction techniques, overcoming challenges with students, engaging activities, advertising strategies, etc.).

4. *To collect qualitative data based on facilitator experience to improve training processes. Facilitators are surveyed by the Program Assistants on their current experiences with leading sessions and communicating with the RGASC (resources, use of Quercus, suggestions for improvement, etc.).*

## PROGRAM ASSISTANT MANUAL

Although a program manual has been available for the training and guidance of Program Assistants since 2013, the manual has been greatly expanded during 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 to incorporate new material on the monitoring and mapping of FSG sessions, monthly and end-of-year reports, in-service training, e-Portfolios, tracking attendance (both students and Facilitators), sample Facilitator feedback for the PA for FSG sessions and reflections, and sample materials for the online pre-training modules and the in-person training sessions. (Note: The Manual currently stands at 83 pages, but material is currently being added to address various the aspects and issues of adapting FSGs to an online environment.)

## PARTNERSHIP WITH EL FACULTY LIAISON TO ENHANCE FACILITATOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The FSG program continued to explore new ways to encourage Facilitators to give more priority to the professional development potential of the Facilitator portfolio, by establishing a closer relationship with the EL Faculty Liaison's reflective writing workshop initiative, especially with respect to training Facilitators in the writing of reflective comments. An online portfolio development model was introduced into the In-Service Training process during the Winter term, as a precursor to the ongoing development of an e-Portfolio mechanism within the FSG Quercus shell. The FSG PA program manual and the FSG Quercus shell were updated to incorporate sample reflections, session plans and session maps as examples of the building blocks of an effective e-Portfolio.

## OUTREACH AND PROGRAM SUPPORT

The FSG program continued to expand its model of academic support beyond the FSG program to the following additional areas: Residence Peer Academic Leader (PAL) program, Academic Societies, Exam Jam; Living Learning Communities in the Residence, the International Education Centre, and the LAUNCH program. The RGASC continued to provide Facilitator training and FSG academic support for the Peer Academic Leaders in the Residence, with one day devoted to facilitator training for the 15 Residence PALs every August. The PALs also supported and advertised RGASC FSG sessions. The RGASC has also trained members from various academic Societies, to assist in the delivery of FSGs within their affiliated first-year courses. The RGASC and the Centre for Student Engagement have steadily developed over the years a close working partnership in planning and delivering FSGs in support of the end-of-term Exam Jam (Fall and Winter terms).

## EDS325: SUPPLEMENTAL INSTRUCTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The RGASC continued to collaborate with Language Studies to run EDS325, a credit-bearing course that introduces students to the theory and practice of Supplemental Instruction in higher education. The course focuses on the history and evolution of SI, the rationale for its use, current research, and tools and resources that Facilitators need to run study groups. It also incorporates the RGASC's FSG program as a mandatory internship for every student in the course. Noteworthy developments in EDS325 this year are as follows:

- Steady increase year-by-year in course enrollment (students completing course): Fall 2018: 23 students; Fall 2019: 51 students; Fall 2020: 36 students; Winter 2021: 28 students.
- All students successfully placed as Facilitators within discipline-related courses
- Winter section to EDS325 added in Winter term 2021
- Division of labour (workflow) established between EDS325 Course Instructor and the FSG Program

One beneficial aspect of the EDS course that had not been foreseen was how effective the course would prove in producing well-trained and motivated Program Assistants for the FSG program. The FSG program now considers enrollment in the EDS325 course as a pre-requisite for becoming a Program Assistant in the FSG program.

## MOVING ONLINE: PROGRAM CHANGES AND RESULTS

A program such as the FSG program is particularly vulnerable to transformative events such as the COVID pandemic.  The FSG program has been successful, in large part, because of the intimate, interactive and synergistic community-building mechanisms that

lie at the core of its distributed practice dynamics. The following features of the program have been developed through **in-person** delivery:

- Highlighting the effectiveness of collaborative learning that builds learning networks through various formats and levels of small group activities.
- Creating a comfort zone and a "dissipated" learning community structure that helps students process course knowledge laterally and exchange course information mutually.
- Emphasizing the concept of group ownership of study group knowledge.
- Cultivating "alpha" students within the study group and reinforcing their role in building a learning community atmosphere.
- Defining academic success and what constitutes effective study and legitimate study material and then transferring the debate about effective study to the study group environment.
- Using the FSG session routine to model the construction of an effective study plan over the course of a term (distributed practice).
- Emphasizing the Facilitator as a role model who is "meta-cognitive" (i.e., reflects on and articulates the keys to their own academic success)

COVID-19 and the shift to online learning threatened each of these features of the FSG program and required us to continually adjust our approach throughout the year.

The approach for transitioning to online delivery during the Fall and Winter term was to host all FSG sessions, for all courses supported by FSGs, within a single Quercus shell. We set up two FSG Quercus shells for the 2020/2021 year: 1) a "Student-Facing" FSG shell, populated by students taking FSGs, where we used Bb Collaborate rooms to book and run all of the FSG sessions; 2) the FSG administrative Quercus shell, populated by the Facilitators, for the Program Assistants to conduct training (both synchronous and asynchronous) of the Facilitators, assemble materials for their portfolios, assign Facilitators to FSG teams, give feedback and award grades on session plan submissions. Training was streamlined to be primarily delivered in an asynchronous format, with a final teambuilding session delivered synchronously. During the Fall term, students who were interested in attending an online FSG simply followed a link to the FSG Quercus shell where they could enter the specific Bb Collaborate FSG room for their course.

The FSG sessions were not recorded – students simply joined a live (synchronous) FSG session. We consulted with the FIPPA office regarding policies protecting student privacy when collecting attendance during the online sessions, and we incorporated the necessary changes into the FSG program during the Fall term. Students are able to opt-out of having their attendance collected during an FSG session, or they can ask to have their records of attendance removed retroactively.

Throughout the Summer and Fall 2020 terms, the Program Assistants (there are currently 18 Program Assistants in the FSG program) were placed into teams of two or three, with each team focusing on producing online resources and training methods for their respective "discipline cluster." This year the discipline clusters were Psychology, Languages, Chemistry, Math, and Biology. Each Program Assistant team produced demonstration videos for modeling proper online facilitation techniques during the Facilitator training, as well as "tip-sheets" and strategy guides to provide direction for the Facilitators in designing their session plans for the online FSGs. We also adapted the monitoring methods that the Program Assistants had previously used for the in-person FSG sessions; this approach allowed us to continue to provide the Facilitators with Program Assistant feedback during on-line sessions and ensured that we could identify and make any necessary adjustments to a session immediately.

We created a series of demonstration and training videos showcasing our training and facilitation techniques for on-line FSGs and shared these videos along with a literature review of recent scholarship on online Supplemental Instruction with all Course Instructors participating in the program. We also provided all Course Instructors with access to the FSG administrative Quercus shell so that they could keep informed about the program and understand the changes that had been made in the shift to an online format.

We used the following strategies to sustain the FSG program and encourage attendance during the Fall and Winter terms:

- Increased in-lecture advertising by the Instructor and presentations by the Facilitator teams
- Increased efforts to recruit new Facilitators to compensate for Facilitator attrition
- Increased focus in Facilitator training on engagement strategies in Bb Collaborate
- Recruit new courses to participate in the program. A total of nine new courses were added in 2020/2021, while 22 existing courses dropped out. Four courses that opted out in Fall returned in the Winter term.
- Established regular synchronous online Town to help facilitators to connect with Program Managers, Program Assistants and each other.
- Streamlined session mapping and feedback on facilitators' sessions by focusing on annotating the session plans (rather than mapping the sessions via iPad application).
- Paired new Facilitators with experienced Facilitators during training.
- Formed a working group with other SI program supervisors from across Canada to explore strategies for fully re-engaging students through the online (or hybrid) FSGs.

**Chart 10: FSG Program Data (2016-2021)**
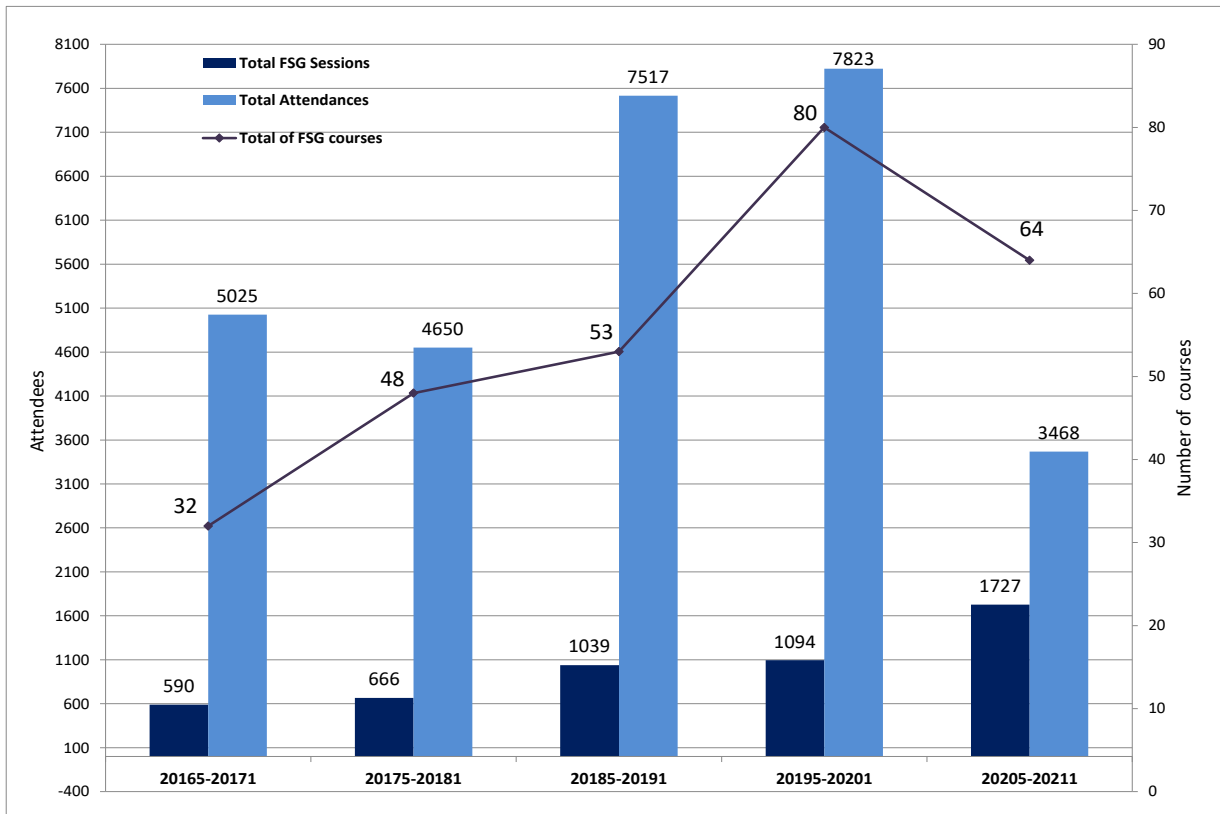


## IMPROVEMENTS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The unprecedented disruption caused by the need to shift the FSG program to an online environment has completely changed the complexion of the future of FSG program delivery. **The priority for the 2021/2022 academic year is to address the reality that we will not return to the same in-person model of FSGs that existed prior to the pandemic.** We need to continue to explore ways to implement a delivery model specifically designed for online (as well as hybrid in-person/online) delivery of the FSG program. This will involve:

- Continued testing of the Quercus Bb Collaborate Ultra platform and, if necessary, compare its functionality with that of ZOOM.
- Fully develop the criteria for maintaining an effective (compared to the previous in-person model) level of facilitation for FSGs in an online environment.
- Providing more demonstration sessions, continuing to update our surveys of recent literature and FAQs, in order to establish the validity of an online SI model, and most importantly, to persuade faculty who are hesitant to continue their partnership with the FSG program.
- Developing streamlined methods for Program Assistants to monitor and provide feedback of FSGs to ensure quality control.

- Improving a Facilitator training plan (both initial and in-service) fully adapted to the online environment (both asynchronous and synchronous sessions).
  - This training will need to continue to emphasize the creation of new techniques that use online tools such as chat, microphone and whiteboard; polls; breakout rooms; surveys; external applications and software (e.g., MS Office, Kahoot!). It will also need to consider methods for accurately tracking participants' attendance
- Continuing to develop new methods for adapting the professional development of Facilitators (portfolios and CCR participation) to the online environment.
- Expanding the Program Assistant Manual to incorporate new procedures and best practices for conducting the FSG program in an online environment.

In order to achieve all of the above, the program will need to clearly define metrics for an effective online FSG. It will also need to change strategies for recruiting and training Program Assistants and Facilitators in this new approach to Supplemental Instruction. Most importantly, we must maintain an ongoing dialogue with all course instructors in order to retain their confidence in the FSG program.

## PROMOTING ACADEMIC SKILLS FOR SUCCESS (PASS) PROGRAM

The PASS Program was launched in February 2015 to provide dedicated support to academically "at-risk" students. The Program's goal is to rebuild students' motivation, model successful behaviors, and raise students' self-awareness (i.e., to build students' resilience).

The PASS Program typically comprises a six- to seven-week course (non-credit-bearing) in one term followed by individualized support in the subsequent term. Each week of the course includes the following:

- A two-hour "class meeting" focusing on foundational academic skills (listening, note-taking, reading, writing, problem-solving, critical thinking, research skills).
- Weekly written reflections
- Assessed writing exercises
- Senior student mentoring

In addition, all PASS participants are required to attend both an intake and exit interview. The exit interview includes a one-on-one consultation with a writing instructor to discuss their PASS writing assignment submissions.
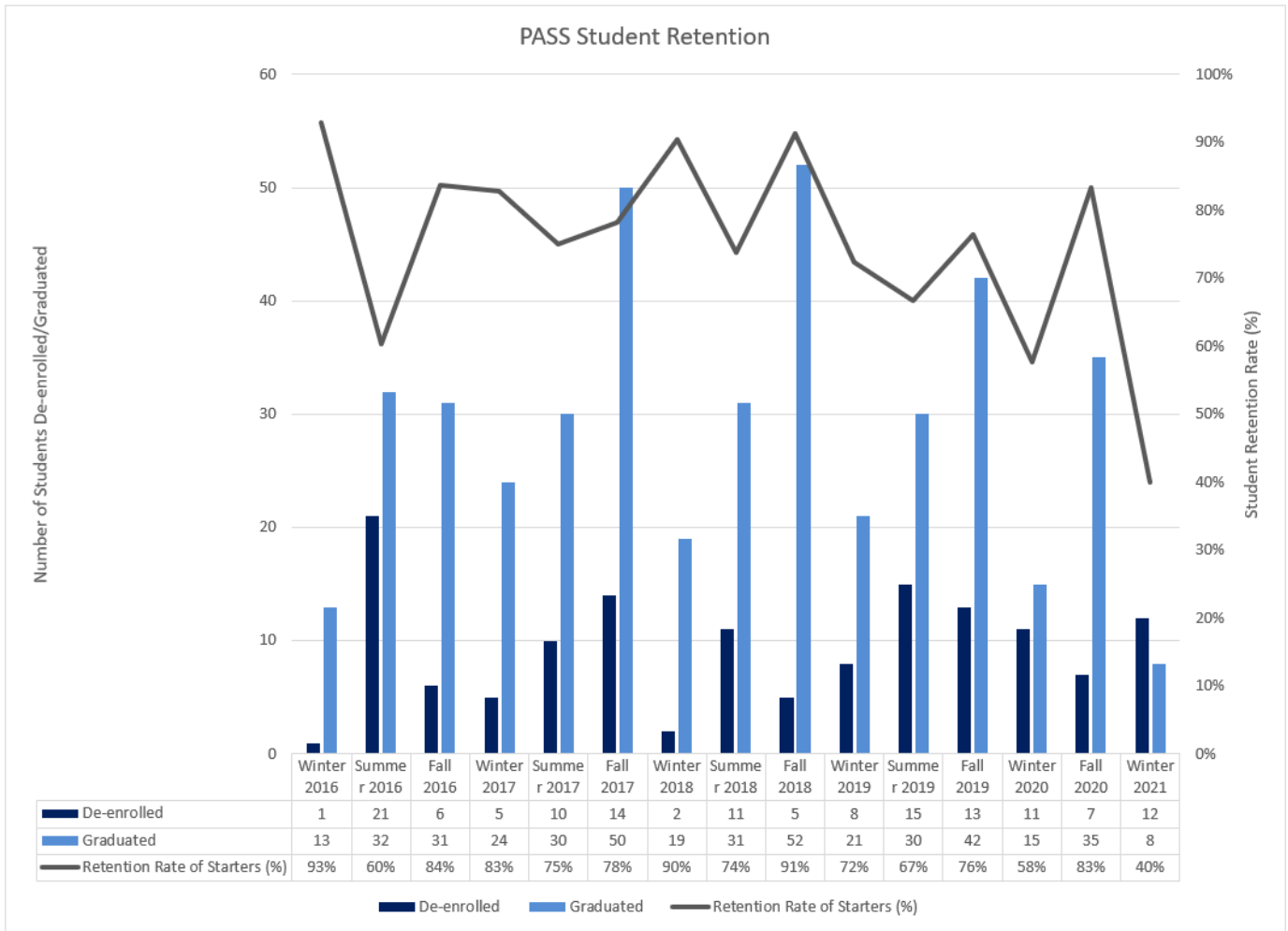
## ENROLMENT AND COMPLETION DATA

PASS has run 18 times, and the data generated by the PASS program is sufficiently large that the program can be measured for its effectiveness, both quantitatively and qualitatively. One metric used to assess PASS is to compare it with the Bounce Back Retention Program (BBRP) at San Diego State University, on which the PASS program is modelled.  The 2011 report on the BBRP compared three groups of students among its at-risk population: students who had graduated from the BBRP; students who had started the BBRP but failed to complete the program; and students who were invited to join the BBRP but did not take part in the program. While 65% of students who started BBRP completed it, the completion rate for the 18 versions of PASS is 75%.

PASS usually runs in all three academic terms, but due to logistical challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, for the first time since its launch in 2015, the program was only run in two terms (Fall and Winter) this past year. In both terms, the program was run entirely online with a total of 62 students enrolled and 43 completing the program, leading to a 69% completion rate. In 2019/20, the completion rate was also 69%.

**Table 26: PASS Completion Rates in the 2019/20 and 2020/2021 Academic Years**

|  | Students Enrolled | Students Completed | Retention Rate |
|---|---|---|---|
| Summer 2019 | 45 | 30 | 67% |
| Fall 2019 | 55 | 42 | 76% |
| *Winter 2020 | 26 | 15 | 58% |
| Summer 2020 | No sessions were run | | |
| Fall 2020 | 42 | 35 | 83% |
| Winter 2021 | 20 | 8 | 40% |
| *PASS was suspended at the end of Week 5 on March 16th, 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Weeks 6 and 7 were completed online. | | | |

**Table 27: PASS Student Retention (2016 to 2021)**



PASS Student Retention

| | Winter 2016 | Summer 2016 | Fall 2016 | Winter 2017 | Summer 2017 | Fall 2017 | Winter 2018 | Summer 2018 | Fall 2018 | Winter 2019 | Summer 2019 | Fall 2019 | Winter 2020 | Fall 2020 | Winter 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| De-enrolled | 1 | 21 | 6 | 5 | 10 | 14 | 2 | 11 | 5 | 8 | 15 | 13 | 11 | 7 | 12 |
| Graduated | 13 | 32 | 31 | 24 | 30 | 50 | 19 | 31 | 52 | 21 | 30 | 42 | 15 | 35 | 8 |
| Retention Rate of Starters (%) | 93% | 60% | 84% | 83% | 75% | 78% | 90% | 74% | 91% | 72% | 67% | 76% | 58% | 83% | 40% |

The Office of the Registrar also considers the completion of the PASS program when assessing whether a student's suspension status should be lifted. In 2020/2021, following referrals by the Office of the Registrar, nine students with a conditional suspension lift were enrolled in PASS, all of whom successfully completed the program.

## TRANSITION TO ONLINE DELIVERY IN FALL 2020

Due to the substantial required to deliver the PASS program fully online in the Summer term, it was decided that the PASS program would not run in the Summer term of 2020. The additional time provided the program instructors with the opportunity to reimagine how PASS could be delivered and an opportunity to work with our campus partners to create efficient systems for online delivery.

In the Fall 2020 term, the PASS program moved to fully online delivery. In preparation for this transition the following changes were implemented:

- Both intake and exit interviews were conducted online.
- Students were allowed to self-enroll in a PASS Quercus shell so they could book their intake interview.
- Virtual 'office hours' were created so students could ask questions and speak to the Program Assistants as they usually would at the end of in-person classes.
- The MINDSET Inventory assessment was conducted using a web link at the beginning and end of PASS, whereas when on campus, students typically complete the assessment at the RGASC on an iPad.
- Board games normally play a significant role in both the Week 1 and Week 5 on-campus sessions, but because we were unable to run board games or simulate a similar experience, we decided to reduce the content and number of sessions in PASS from seven weeks to six weeks.
- The intake and exit writing assessments were removed and replaced with a variety of writing exercises that could be discussed in the follow-up writing appointments with a writing instructor.

PASS TERM 2 LAUNCH

In 2019/2020, the RGASC received confirmation funding for a second term of PASS, with the first classes launching in 2020/2021. Studies of the Bounce Back Retention Program (San Diego State University) indicate that follow-up activities such as "PASS Term Two" contribute to improved grade point average (GPA) and persistence to graduation. The additional term of PASS aims to provide continued support and skill development to students who remain on academic probation or suspension after the completion of the original version of PASS (now known as PASS Term 1).

While PASS Term 1 aims to help students to develop the learning strategies and habits that lead to academic success, PASS Term 2 builds on this foundation by focusing on helping PASS students better integrate themselves into the university community by creating opportunities for engagement with staff and faculty. It also aims to increase accountability by facilitating a more self-directed learning process. The curriculum in PASS Term 2 is modular, with students being required to select and successfully complete four out of the following eight modules:

- Note-taking & memory
- Time management & study planning
- Writing
- Reading strategies and lecture listening

- Academic (course) planning and goal setting
- Numeracy & problem-solving
- Academic integrity
- Academic resilience & wellness

To successfully complete each module, students must complete all assignments, submit a written reflection, and meet with a university staff or faculty member who has expertise in their module topic. In addition to the modular activities, all students are required to:

- Attend an intake and exit interview
- Attend a minimum of two Program Assistant drop-in sessions
- Complete a culminating task that reflects on their PASS experience, which will be presented to staff and peers.

In the Winter term of 2020, PASS Term 2 was launched with only 16 students enrolled. A total of nine students successfully completed the program, resulting in a retention rate of 56%. PASS Term 2 will run again in Summer 2021 but will increase in duration from five to seven weeks to allow more time for students to arrange meetings with staff and faculty.

## PASS TERM 2 NUMERACY MODULE

The RGASC's Numeracy Specialist developed a Numeracy Module comprising four assignments for PASS Term 2. Each assignment had a different focus: Probability & Odds; Linear & Exponential Relationships; Correlation & Causation; and Estimation. Students selected one of these assignments and consulted with an RGASC math instructor while working on it before submitting it for feedback. Each assignment included a video and required students to read news articles and scholarly papers, think about and interpret their mathematical and statistical calculations in order to develop a better number-sense, and communicate their findings using mathematical expressions and words.

## PASS TERM 2 WRITING MODULE

The writing module for PASS Term 2 was developed by an RGASC Writing Specialist and consisted of a short research essay that was guided by detailed instructions that walked students through the process of finding, reading, and responding to two research sources. This module builds on the skills students initially developed in PASS term 1. In Term 1, students had a series of scaffolded exercises with specific prompts that guided them toward taking a position on a scholarly debate. In Term 2, students had to work more

independently to apply those same skills toward research sources of their choosing. A Writing Specialist provided feedback on the students' work. Two students completed the module in the Winter 2021 term.

## NEW PROGRAM ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

In 2020/2021 the PASS program worked with an OISE graduate student to review the use of the pre-PASS reflection as an intake assessment and the use of the exit interview questions as a corresponding exit assessment. Following this process, a pre- and post-PASS assessment was developed with items based on the PASS core themes of academic skills, motivation, self-regulation, and connectedness. In 2021/2022, the PASS program will pilot the use of this assessment instrument to consider whether it can be a long-term replacement for the MINDSET inventory that has been used throughout the PASS program. While the MINDSET has provided useful insights, it is felt that it may not be consistently suited to the unique academic situation of some of the PASS students.

## IMPROVEMENTS TO STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

One of the most significant challenges in running the PASS program online has been the decrease in student interaction during the sessions. While engagement using the chat function on Blackboard Collaborate has been strong, the students have been reluctant to appear on camera or use their microphones. This has led to group discussions that have lacked depth and activities that have lacked the level of collaboration typically seen in PASS sessions. In 2021/2022, the plan is to explicitly provide students feedback on their class participation and to implement mid-point meetings where staff and Program Assistants can discuss the students' submissions up to that point, as well as discuss their contribution to class activities. It is believed that increasing direct contact with individual students may result in a greater sense of connectedness and therefore improved engagement and stronger student retention.

## PROGRAM FOR ACCESSING RESEARCH TRAINING (PART)

PART is a research training program designed to prepare UTM students for possible participation in research opportunities on campus and provide students with the opportunity to acquire foundational skills needed for graduate studies. PART currently includes 16 distinct training modules and a separate module on preparing for an ROP. Modules are

categorized into three types of research methods: Core, Quantitative, and Qualitative. Each training module comprises up to four hours of classroom instruction and a homework exercise or assessment. Classroom instruction includes both conceptual discussion and hands-on practice of research methods. PART is offered throughout the Fall and Winter term and offered again in a compressed format in the summer as a "Summer Institute."

In the summer of 2020, the RGASC hired a permanent, full-time Graduate Student Support Strategist (GSSS) whose role includes coordinating the PART program. Over the summer, the RGASC's GSSS began the process of mapping the PART program. The GSSS developed learning outcomes for the program and analyzed feedback data completed by students from 2015 to 2020. The GSSS also distributed a survey to PART instructors and ROP faculty. The data analysis was presented to the PART Advisory Committee in August 2020. Based on the data and discussions with the PART Advisory Committee, the committee made three significant changes or decisions:

1. PART would have the following program-level learning outcomes. After completing the PART program, students will be able to:
   - Discuss concepts, theories, and practices that are integral to research
   - Identify research methods, methodologies, and research design for qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method research
   - Apply concepts through hands-on learning opportunities
   - Develop skills in communicating research
   - Reflect on discipline specific research needs
2. PART would add the following three new core modules:
   - Communicating your Research
   - Working with Supervisors
   - Writing Graduate School Applications
3. PART would no longer offer modules over the Fall and Winter reading weeks (a 2019/2020 pilot)

With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the summer provided a time to shift the PART program online. A Quercus shell for the program was created to facilitate online delivery of the modules. Through Quercus, students could register for modules, access module content (e.g., slides), submit assigned homework, and attend synchronous modules via Bb Collaborate or view pre-recorded asynchronous modules. The mode of delivery for each module—synchronous, asynchronous, or a hybrid of synchronous and asynchronous—depended on the module's content and the instructor's preference.

This year, PART had a total of at least[3] 298 registrants and 400 attendees, whereas in 2019/2020, PART had a total of 131 registrants and 81 attendees. The program had 281 *unique* registrants in the Quercus shell and a total of 103 *unique* attendees. Table 28 below compares PART attendance in 2019/2020 and 2020/2021.

**Table 28: PART Attendance 2019/2020 and 2020/2021**

| Module Name | Fall/Winter 2019/2020 Attendance | | Fall/Winter 2020/2021 Attendance | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Part 1 of Module | Part 2 of Module | Part 1 of Module | Part 2 of Module |
| Annotated Bibliography/Literature Review Writing | 3 | 2 | 32 | 18 |
| Conducting Interviews | 1 | 1 | 9 | 4 |
| Conducting Literature Searches | 5 | 5 | 29 | 17 |
| Lab Protocols | 3 | 3 | 13 | 11 |
| Research Design in the Humanities | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Research Design in the Sciences | 2 | 2 | 16 | 14 |
| Research Design in the Social Sciences | 0 | 0 | 5 | 4 |
| Research Ethics | 12 | | 49 | |
| Working with Supervisors | N/A | N/A | 36 | 20 |
| Writing Graduate School Applications | N/A | N/A | 17 | 11 |
| Leading a Focus Group | 4 | 4 | 13 | 10 |
| Conducting Archival Research | * | * | 7 | 5 |
| Statistics | 7 | 6 | 9 | 7 |
| Data Analysis | 4 | 3 | 9 | 8 |
| Transcribing and Coding | 3 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Communicating your Research | N/A | N/A | 10 | |

N/A – Session not offered

* - Cancelled due to COVID-19

The PART Summer Institute 2021 had a total of 600 registrants and 378 attendees, whereas the PART Summer Institute in 2019 had a total of 228 registrants and 247 attendees. No data are available for the PART Summer Institute 2020 because the program was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The PART Summer Institute 2021 had 81 unique registrants in the PART Quercus shell and a total of 50 unique attendees. Table 29 below outlines PART attendance in Summer 2019 and Summer 2021.

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[3] Because of a technical error, registration data were not collected in the Fall 2020 term.

**Table 29: PART Summer Institute Attendance (2019-2021)**

| Module Name | Summer 2019 Attendance<br>Total Attendance (Part 1 and Part 2) | Summer 2020 Attendance | Summer 2021 Attendance<br>Part 1 of Module | Summer 2021 Attendance<br>Part 2 of Module |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Annotated Bibliography/Literature Review Writing | 58 | Cancelled due to COVID-19 | 35 | 29 |
| Communicating your Research | N/A | | 19 | |
| Conducting Archival Research | N/A | | 7 | 7 |
| Conducting Interviews | 7 | | 8 | 10 |
| Conducting Literature Searches | 53 | | 33 | 30 |
| Data Analysis | 18 | | 11 | 12 |
| Lab Protocols | 10 | | 12 | 12 |
| Leading a Focus Group | 10 | | 5 | 6 |
| Research Design in the Humanities | 4 | | N/A | |
| Research Design in the Sciences | 12 | | 9 | 12 |
| Research Design in the Social Sciences | 3 | | N/A | |
| Research Ethics | 26 | | 27 | |
| Statistics | 36 | | 13 | 12 |
| Transcribing and Coding | 10 | | 5 | 7 |
| Working with Supervisors | N/A | | 16 | 13 |
| Writing Graduate School Applications | N/A | | 17 | 11 |

N/A – Session not offered

Students are eligible to receive a CCR annotation as either a Qualitative Methods or Quantitative Methods PART participant if they complete the following:
1. Complete all three of the following Core modules: Annotated Bibliography / Literature Review Writing, Conducting Literature Searches, Research Ethics
2. Complete one of the following Core modules: Communicating your Research, Working with Supervisors, Writing Graduate School Applications
3. Complete at least two Quantitative or two Qualitative modules
4. Complete a Reflective Writing Exercise.

Table 30 below shows the number of students who obtained CCR for Fall/Winter 2020/2021 and Summer 2021.

**Table 30: PART Students Completing CCR Requirements (2020/2021)**

| Semester | Stream | Number of Students |
|---|---|---|
| Fall/Winter 2020/2021 | Qualitative | 5 |
| | Quantitative | 16 |
| Summer 2021 | Qualitative | 6 |
| | Quantitative | 13 |

*One student achieved both Qualitative and Quantitative CCR notations*

Over the past five years, PART has not seen a steady increase or decrease of attendees during the Fall/Winter term or the PART Summer Institute. That said, the Fall/Winter term saw a large increase in registrations and attendees this year relative to previous years. The increase in registrations and attendees may be due to the online availability of the program. Table 31 below shows PART Fall/Winter attendance from 2016-2021. The PART Summer Institute, on the other hand, over the years has had higher registrations and attendees compared to the Fall/Winter term which may be due to a number of factors, including but not limited to the Summer Institute's schedule coinciding with the UTM's Research Opportunity Program (many students are required to complete PART before beginning summer ROPs) or students' availability to attend program modules. Table 32 shows the attendance for the PART Summer Institute 2021. At the module level, Core modules continue to have the highest attendance while modules such as Research Design in the Social Sciences and Research Design in the Humanities continue to be under-enrolled.

**Table 31: PART Attendance (Excluding Summer Institutes) 2016-2021**

| Fall/Winter Modules | 2016/17 | | 2017/18 | | 2018/19 | | 2019/20 | | 2020/21 | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Reg.[7] | Attend.[8] | Reg.[7] | Attend.[8] | Reg.[7] | Attend.[8] | Reg.[7] | Attend.[8] | Reg.[7] | Attend.[8] | |
| Research Ethics | 61 | 36 | 50 | 31 | 23 | 23 | 18 | 12 | 39 | 49 | 151 |
| Conducting Literature Searches | 44 | 29 | 41 | 21 | 12 | 11 | 8 | 10 | n/a | 46 | 117 |
| Annotated Bibliography and Literature Review[1] | 45 | 30 | 42 | 23 | 13 | 11 | 8 | 5 | n/a | 50 | 119 |
| Communicating your Research[2] | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 10 | 10 |
| Working with Supervisors[2] | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 56 | 56 |
| Writing Graduate School Applications[2] | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 61 | 28 | 28 |
| Data Analysis | 44 | 11 | 19 | 15 | 20 | 5 | 14 | 7 | 62 | 17 | 55 |
| Lab Protocols | 42 | 10 | 39 | 18 | 7 | 2 | 13 | 6 | n/a | 26 | 62 |
| Research Design in the Sciences[3] | 38 | 15 | 45 | 15 | 14 | 5 | 6 | 4 | n/a | 30 | 69 |
| Research Design in the Social Sciences[4] | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 8 | 0 | 1 | 0 | n/a | 9 | 9 |
| Statistics | 48 | 11 | 21 | 15 | 18 | 3 | 16 | 13 | 40 | 16 | 58 |
| Conducing Archival Research | 41 | 4 | 16 | 4 | 15 | 3 | 12 | n/a | 23 | 12 | 23 |
| Conducting Interviews | 46 | 5 | 16 | 9 | 13 | 1 | 6 | 2 | n/a | 13 | 30 |
| Leading a Focus Group | 46 | 8 | 15 | 9 | 21 | 2 | 11 | 8 | 26 | 23 | 50 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Research Design in the Humanities[5] | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 5 | 2 | 6 | 5 | n/a | 3 | 10 |
| Transcribing and Coding[6] | 42 | 8 | 10 | 3 | 19 | 5 | 12 | 9 | 47 | 12 | 37 |
| # of Students achieved CCR Annotation | 7 | | 7 | | 4 | | 8 | | 21 | | |
| Total # of Students Registered and Attended | 497 | 167 | 314 | 163 | 188 | 73 | 131 | 81 | 298 | 400 | |

[1] module was Data Management in 2015/16
[2] modules were added in Fall 2020
[3] was called Experimental Design before Fall 2017
[4] added in 2018
[5] added in Fall 2018
[6] separate modules in 2015/16
[7] total registration for both session parts
[8] total attendance for both session parts
n/a module not offered

### Table 32: PART Summer Institute Attendance (2017-2021)

| Summer Module | 2017 | | 2018 | | 2019 | | 2020 | | 2021 | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Reg.[5] | Attend.[6] | Reg.[5] | Attend.[6] | Reg.[5] | Attend.[6] | Reg.[5] | Attend.[6] | Reg.[5] | Attend.[6] | |
| Research Ethics | 25 | 21 | 48 | 47 | 28 | 26 | | | 56 | 27 | 121 |
| Conducting Literature Searches | 24 | 20 | 42 | 75 | 38 | 53 | | | 53 | 63 | 211 |
| Annotated Bibliography and Literature Review | 26 | 21 | 44 | 82 | 38 | 58 | | | 60 | 64 | 225 |
| Communicating your Research[1] | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | | | 45 | 19 | 19 |
| Working with Supervisors[1] | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | | | 41 | 29 | 29 |
| Writing Graduate School Applications[1] | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | | | 43 | 28 | 28 |
| Data Analysis | 23 | 15 | 29 | 40 | 27 | 18 | | | 50 | 23 | 96 |
| Lab Protocols | 19 | 7 | 32 | 41 | 14 | 10 | Cancelled due to COVID-19 | | 43 | 24 | 82 |
| Research Design in the Sciences[2] | 23 | 15 | 39 | 65 | 17 | 12 | | | 43 | 21 | 113 |
| Research Design in the Social Sciences[3] | n/a | n/a | 13 | 4 | 9 | 3 | | | n/a | n/a | 7 |
| Statistics | 17 | 8 | 34 | 46 | 26 | 36 | | | 39 | 25 | 115 |
| Conducing Archival Research | 11 | 7 | 12 | 4 | n/a | n/a | | | 28 | 14 | 25 |
| Conducting Interviews | 16 | 3 | 24 | 37 | 14 | 7 | | | 31 | 18 | 65 |
| Leading a Focus Group | 13 | 9 | 11 | 12 | 6 | 10 | | | 31 | 11 | 42 |
| Research Design in the Humanities[4] | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 4 | 4 | | | n/a | n/a | 4 |
| Transcribing and Coding | 15 | 7 | 17 | 13 | 7 | 10 | | | 37 | 12 | 42 |
| # of Students Achieved CCR Annotation | 7 | | 19 | | 14 | | N/A | | 18 | | |
| Total # of Students Registered and Attended | 212 | 133 | 345 | 466 | 228 | 247 | N/A | | 600 | 378 | |

[1] modules were added in Fall 2020

[2] was called Experimental Design in Summer 2017
[3] added in 2018
[4] added in Fall 2018
[5] total registration for both session parts
[6] total attendance for both session parts
n/a module not offered

Unfortunately, the participation rate for the PART feedback survey was very low this year so we have no meaningful data to share regarding students' perceptions of the program. We will explore more effective ways to collect feedback in future years.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The RGASC and the PART Advisory Committee should re-evaluate the decision to continue offering modules that do not attract many students whether they are offered in-person or online.

Additionally, the GSSS will need to determine how to implement successful aspects of the online version of the program when in-person learning returns. For instance, the GSSS should consider the continued use of a Quercus shell for sharing content and as a tool for assignment submissions when in-person learning returns. The GSSS will also need to consider how modules will be offered when in-person learning returns (i.e., online only, in-person only, a hybrid of online and in-person).

# Part Four: Collaborative Programming

This final section of the Report focuses on those collaborative initiatives that have not been addressed above. Here, we address the RGASC's increasingly important collaborations with Accessibility Services, work with multiple campus and community partners on Game-Enhanced Learning, and involvement with UTM's many different student organizations. Please note that other collaborative work has been identified in other sections of this Report if it falls within a specific program or service area.

## ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

### ONE-ON-ONE LEARNING STRATEGY APPOINTMENTS

The RGASC offers support to students registered with Accessibility Services in the form of weekly one-on-one learning strategy appointments. Two full-time, permanent RGASC staff members offer this support, with the Program Strategist taking most appointments and the Program Manager providing additional coverage when needed. Appointments typically focus on helping the students to develop effective study skills and habits primarily through modelling. Common areas of focus include note-taking, reading comprehension, memory strategies, test-taking techniques, and study planning.

Throughout 2020/2021, all one-on-one appointments took place online using Zoom. The Program Strategist booked 119 hours of learning strategy appointments with Accessibility Services students, and after accounting for cancellations and students failing to attend, conducted 94 hours of appointments. In contrast, in 2019/2020, 169 hours of appointments were scheduled, and 91 hours of appointments were completed. The appointment utilization rate, therefore, increased from 54% in 2019/2020 to 79% in 2020/2021. Anecdotally, some students noted that attending appointments online was easier and more convenient for them than having to make their way to campus for their appointment. The improved utilization rate is likely to be a result of the greater convenience of online appointments.

### ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES PEER MENTOR LEARNING COMMUNITIES (PMLCS) AND GAME CAFÉS

Following the success of the Summer Academic Skills Institute (SASI) transition program in August 2018 (see below), the RGASC and Accessibility Services collaborated to provide Accessibility students with a series of activities throughout the year to build on the skills developed in that program. This new initiative, known as Peer Mentor Learning Communities (PMLCs), comprised of a series of peer-facilitated sessions on specific learning skills and game cafés to help build a sense of community among Accessibility students. It was agreed that peer mentors would lead the PMLC activities, and so a Program Assistant was jointly hired by the RGASC and Accessibility Services to train and supervise

the peers. In 2020/2021, the Program Assistant contract was divided between two senior students to increase program capacity through the division of tasks and roles.

In 2019/2020, six learning skills sessions and five game cafés were run, whereas, in 2020/2021, eight learning skills sessions, eight social events, and eight wellness activities were run. While game cafés could not take place due to all PMLC activities being delivered online, total attendance to the PMLC activities increased from 40 in 2018/2019, to 120 in 2019/2020, and to 196 in 2020/2021. A total of 94% of mentors participated in PMLC events, compared to 93% the previous year.

When asked for suggestions for new topics for PMLC sessions, writing support was most requested by Accessibility students. In response, for the first time, the PMLC program hosted a joint learning session with a writing instructor from the RGASC, which was the best attended session of the academic year. The writing instructor facilitated the content delivery, while the peer mentors led the related small-group activities. The positive feedback from the session and the high attendance suggest that such collaborations should continue to be an ongoing feature of the program.

Increasing engagement with Accessibility students was a priority for the PMLC program in 2020/2021. Consequently, the Program Assistants took a more direct role in the marketing of the events, with a specific focus on increasing the social media presence of the program. In the Winter term, the Twitter following of Accessibility Services increased by 57%, and a new Instagram account was set up and attracted 180 followers. In 2021/2022, the Program Assistants will continue to take a lead with marketing as it is believed their effort has positively impacted attendance to PMLC events and increased the reach of the program.

## SUMMER ACADEMIC SKILLS INSTITUTE

The Summer Academic Skills Institute (SASI) transition program aims to equip incoming students registered with Accessibility Services with the academic skills and strategies to make a successful transition to postsecondary education. In a typical academic year, RGASC staff organize and deliver approximately 10 hours of programming over two days during a weekend in early August along with the support of faculty and staff from Accessibility Services and the UTM Library. Early in the summer of 2020, Accessibility Services and the RGASC determined that it would be better to run SASI over a full week in ten standalone sessions to allow more flexibility in scheduling and to reduce the amount of continuous time students spent online. To help facilitate the running of the sessions, the newly-trained peer mentors were given a prominent role in the planning process and session delivery, whereas, in previous years, their role was more focused on supporting the sessions led by staff and faculty. In August 2020, 21 unique students attended the ten online sessions, in comparison to the 19 unique students who attended the two-day version of SASI in August 2019. All attendees (100%) said they felt the program effectively prepared them for the upcoming academic year and indicated that they would attend future academic workshops after attending SASI.

## UTMSU, ACADEMIC SOCIETIES, AND CLUBS

The RGASC works collaboratively with the UTMSU Executive, Academic Societies, Clubs and Associations to provide a variety of skills development and training opportunities through UTMSU-promoted events. This year, the RGASC worked hard to collaborate on a number of different initiatives but the limitations of working entirely online proved to be challenging with respect to communication and coordination.

This year, the majority of requests received through the UTMSU Clubs and Associations Academic Skills Development Fund (UCAASDF) involved guest speakers and alumni reimbursements for speaking at events. Unfortunately, we cannot approve these requests as "guest speakers" are not permitted under this fund.  We were unable to approve any UCAASDF proposals this year and so did not have the usual level of collaboration with student groups on academic skills development events and activities.

The RGASC did collaborate with multiple UTMSU Clubs and a couple of societies throughout the year on other activities (see Tables 33-35 below) and did extensive work with the Academic Integrity Office and the UTMSU Executive members on the Academic Integrity Initiative.  The Academic Integrity Awareness initiative involved an extended offering during Academic Advocacy Week and a renewed effort to enlist professors and instructors to incorporate the Academic Integrity Modules into their course Quercus.  We ran an Academic Integrity contest and entered any student who completed the Academic Integrity Modules and the final quiz before the end of Academic Advocacy Week. Over 64 students completed the modules and were entered into a competition for a $50.00 UTM Bookstore gift card. We also held monthly meetings to discuss initiatives and plan events throughout the fall and winter and we are continuing these discussions during the summer to ensure smooth transition for fall term.

**Table 33: RGASC Partnership with UTMSU Executive**

| UTMSU Initiative | Description of Activity |
|---|---|
| UTMSU Orientation Week | • Academic Skills Workshops and FSG training for Societies |
| UTMSU Academic Advocacy Week Extended Version | • Distributed of UTMSU/RGASC "Six Essential Skills for Success" booklet<br>• Promoted of the Academic Integrity Modules and final quiz contest<br>• Offered "writing" focused Academic Integrity Session<br>• Offered "numeracy" focused Academic Integrity Sessions<br>• Promoted winter term offerings and raised awareness |
| Head Start Refresh | • Worked with UTMSU/ AI Office re: initiative for winter term to "Refresh" skills and repackaged Head Start asynchronous content. |

**Table 34: RGASC Partnership with UTMSU Academic Societies**

| Academic Society Name | Description of Activity |
|---|---|
| The Society: Sociology and Criminology Undergraduate Review | • Workshop: Journal Editing |

**Table 35: RGASC Partnerships with UTMSU Clubs and Associations**

| Club / Association Name | Description of Activity |
|---|---|
| UTM Against Dragons (UTMAD) | • Skills development and funding for networking and de-stressor initiative |
| Erindale Gaming Organization | • Skills development and funding for networking and de-stressor initiative |
| UTM Anime | • Skills development and funding for networking and de-stressor initiative |
| UTM eSports | • Skills development and funding for de-stressor initiative |

# GAME ENHANCED LEARNING

The use of board games as pedagogical tools has a wide range of benefits. Previous applications of this game-based approach consistently show that students acquire a deeper understanding of the core curriculum content, and that students experience an expansion in their motivation and level of engagement within the course. In addition, games can contribute to the process of building communities of students and promote positive models for social engagement that in turn can boost resilience. Several projects were launched during 2017/2018 that explore the potential benefits of game-enhanced learning on the UTM campus in both a pedagogical and social context. These continued until the closure of the UTM campus because of COVID-19 in the spring of 2020. The rationale for the use of games is supported by four assumptions:

- Learning is collaborative, based on the Constructivist proposition that knowledge is constructed socially. A learning community will emerge spontaneously, as students collaborate within the social space of the boardgame.

- Learning is active and experiential. The dynamics of boardgame participation creates the possibility that a high proportion of the students involved will become actively engaged as actors as they become more immersed in the gameplay.

- Learning is meta-cognitive. The game experience creates for each student a framework for an authentic narrative incorporating self-reflection (based on the concept of situated cognition - that the context and nature of an activity will shape understanding).

- Learning proceeds through scaffolding.  The integration of knowledge modelled within the game and the acquisition/mastery of game strategy through the various

stages of gameplay will follow a learning curve/scaffold (based on the concept of cognitive puzzlement – that inconsistency and conflict will stimulate learning and problem-solving).

## GEL-RELATED ACTIVITIES

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the closing of the UTM campus, all in-person support for activities such as the Boardgame Cafés, the AIRLab, PASS, the CCT 419 Boardgame Design course, Head Start, Orientation, and Accessibility Services were cancelled for 2020/2021. Instead, the efforts of the RGASC Work Study students and the volunteer Game Facilitators from several UTM Gaming Clubs affiliated with the RGASC were dedicated to exploring and testing online options for GEL, focusing specifically on Discord and similar tools.

## DISCORD

Discord is a server-chat application that allows the creation of several "channels" that either use text or voice chat. Game facilitators created several Discord "rooms" to serve as virtual clubhouses for their virtual events. For example, they made some Q&A channels specifically for players who had questions, an "Announcement" channel where people could find important information, an "Adventurer's Guild" for general chat, etc. They also created a "suggestions" chat, which was useful for getting direct feedback from the members in real time. However, because activities such as D&D are often visual or conversation-heavy (roleplaying or finding one's position on a map, etc.), they sometimes had difficulty hosting on Discord because the application does not really support that kind of activity.

Other available resources were explored, such as online site roll20.net, which was built specifically for D&D. The game facilitators reported that the lack of video made it hard to role-play with players, especially if they were new. The disembodied default setting for Tabletop Simulator was uncomfortable, so they improvised by opening another app to create a video call. They also experimented with Zoom, with its simpler interface, as an alternative to Discord. For the virtual Game Cafés, the game facilitators used Discord to talk as they played and created a Discord channel for the people interested in playtesting and helping with the GEL project. There is a chat function in Tabletop Simulator, but they found that using that chat function to be incompatible with voice chatting. For future Game Cafés or other playtesting, the game facilitators recommended Discord, as it is more versatile in creating different rooms for people to play different games.

## TABLETOP SIMULATOR

The game facilitators reported that Tabletop Simulator was suitable for a variety of different gaming activities. The in-game models and sets added an immersive dimension to the session, and the ease of customizability was useful (for example, they could import an

image of a language to be decoded and write notes while having an in-game reference. Although Tabletop Simulator costs money, it provides accessibility for people who are not auditory-oriented and require either visual or other stimulus in order to be engaged in the game (e.g., people with ADHD or other focus-related disabilities). Game facilitators have documented the strengths and weaknesses of Tabletop Simulator to help decide what platform to use (if any) for future online GEL events.

## TABLETOP SIMULATOR ALTERNATIVE

The game facilitators conducted tests using webcams rather than Tabletop Simulator. They tried several card games, and the webcam method worked very well. If possible, players should use an external webcam with a tripod.

## EVENTS

After an initial period of testing platforms, the game facilitators were able to expand their efforts to collaboration with several UTM clubs: EGO (Erindale Gaming Organization), the Esports Club, the Anime Club, and the Dungeons & Dragons Club.

Regular gaming events were organized through Discord, and Tabletop Simulator was the preferred platform for most club events. The clubs hosted game events on a rotating bi-weekly basis, with an average attendance of between six and ten students. A D&D charity campaign was scheduled for the end of March in collaboration with club executives from Algonquin, Carleton, Laurier, uOttawa, Trent, and Western. Multiple sessions were run at the same time, with each session specific to a university.

EGO, the Anime club, and Esports club collaborated with the RGASC to run an online GEL event towards the end of the Winter term. They began by testing the event to gauge its feasibility, and then collaborated with the RGASC to advertise and host it as end-of-term exam de-stressor in April. The clubs chose to play Concept as it is an easy game for people to both watch and play, and it does not need people to buy Tabletop. The event was hosted on Tabletop Simulator, and the organizers used a waiting room to allow people from Discord to join. Approximately 30 students attended this event.

Attendance at other Café events was modest throughout the year and served mainly to maintain the social connectivity of the clubs.

## GEL RESEARCH

During the 2019/2020 academic year, the GEL program collaborated with three faculty members on a LEAF-funded research project. This work continues, with the RGASC providing design and development support in the form of playtesting and development feedback during phase two of the project. In the Summer 2021 term, an ROP team will be set up to begin the design process for the game. Thus, much of what has been learned

about the functionality of Tabletop Simulator from 2020/2021 will be applied to this ROP design process and will involve playtesting by the same UTM students who had worked so hard to sustain online gaming activities at UTM throughout 2020/2021.

# Appendix A: RGASC Advisory Committee Membership (2020/2021)

| Seat | Individual | Term Expiry |
|------|-----------|-------------|
| UTMSU Representative | VP University Affairs | N / A |
| Undergraduate Student | Rachel Stubits | 2022 |
| Graduate Student | Ayah Abdeldayem (CPS) | 2022 |
| Teaching Assistant | Janina Kowalski (Geography) | 2022 |
| Humanities Instructor | Mairi Cowan | 2022 |
| Social Sciences Instructor | Alan Walks | 2022 |
| Sciences Instructor | Marc Laflamme | 2022 |
| Management / Prof. Schools Instructor | Raphael Chiuzi | 2022 |
| Manager, Orientation, Transition, and Engagement | Jackie Goodman | N / A |
| Librarian | Rob Makinson | 2022 |
| Undergraduate Advisor: Social Science / Humanities | Ania Joly (Sociology) | 2022 |
| Undergraduate Advisor: Sciences | Christina Fortes (CPS) | 2022 |
| Office of the Registrar | Michelle Kraus | 2022 |
| RGASC Staff / Faculty Member | Kerrie Martin | 2022 |
| RGASC Coordinator | Cliona Kelly | N / A |
| Director, RGASC | Tyler Evans-Tokaryk | N / A |
| Acting RGASC Director July 2021 through June 2022 | Fiona Rawle | N / A |
| Director, ISUP | Ruth Childs | N / A |