

RGASC Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes June 25th, 2019

Attending: Miguel Cabral, Claudette Gasparro, Ilapreet Toor, Abdullah Farooqi, Michelle Troberg, Joe Leydon, Christoph Richter, Catherine Seguin, Jackie Goodman, Paula Hannaford (Megan Valant) Sharon Marjadsingh, Diane Matias, Michelle Kraus, Dianne Ashbourne, Cliona Kelly, Tyler Evans-Tokaryk

Absent: Fiona Rawle (submitted written feedback)

Minutes taken by Martin Carangal

Item One: Introduction

The Committee members introduced themselves.

The agenda was introduced.

Item Two: Recommendations and Actions Taken (2018 Advisory Committee Meeting)

The first item discussed was academic integrity. The Committee was advised that a 4-part online module was created in close collaboration with the UTMSU, Office of Academic Integrity, Office of the Dean, Library, and Career Centre. These modules are complete and on Quercus, and will be publicly released over the summer. The Committee agreed that implementing this across all first-year courses would be highly beneficial.

The Committee was also informed that the WDI could be a good opportunity to promote academic integrity. The RGASC's Writing Specialist, has been working on educating students about academic integrity across a number of WDI courses highlighting that a large number of initiatives have been put into motion due to last year's conversation.

The Committee was advised that the RGASC is moving to a new system for booking appointments which has the functionality for synchronous and asynchronous online appointments. With this change, the RGASC will allow for 2 different modes of online support making them more accessible for students. The Committee was informed that most Writing Centres at U of T are moving to this system (using a Single Sign On technology) and that many universities across North America already use it. The Committee was assured that all security risks have been addressed by U of T.

The Committee was informed that the Faculty Writing Fellowship has been changed to a SoTL fellowship in response to their feedback last year. Shay Fuchs has been awarded the first fellowship and plans to focus on active learning in large classroom sizes.

Finally, the Committee discussed discipline specific math support (addressed last year by the Committee). The Committee agreed that the embedded support was great but voluntary out-of-class supports would have limited effectiveness (only 15% - 20% of students attend these supports that are outside of scheduled class time slots).

Item Three: Individual Committee member's concerns/topics for discussion

A Committee member raised a concern about the need for more online resources. The Committee was advised that positions had been created to precisely this and were informed about a video series that focuses on improving one's memory, a series of 16 ELL grammar focused tip sheets that are their final editing stages and soon to be released. A number of WDI resources dedicated to outlining assignment types, rubrics, and exercises are also available online.

The Committee was shown examples of online resources available on the RGASC website and the "6 Essential Skills for Your Academic Career at UTM" tip sheet. All resources are AODO compliant.

A Committee member noted that individuals are unable to access the RGASC's page from the main UTM website. The Committee was advised that conversations have been underway for many years to address this.

Item Four: General Overview of RGASC

The Committee discussed "qualitative feedback" from the various stakeholders that is included in the Report. The Committee was advised that growth in programming and increased data collection has made it important to develop a comprehensive and unified assessment plan for the centre moving forward. This is underway.

Written feedback from a Committee member pointed out that the data in the current Report are interesting, not sufficient to base rigorous decisions upon. Data tables could be improved by including a percentage column, while including enrollment for other tables could help establish the context. Committee members agreed.

A Committee member observed that a percentage of unique students vs total student body would allow for utilization rates to be considered.

A Committee member noted that data could be broken down by program level. This could allow for a more powerful story since it adds all data up in terms of its reach across the institution through various forms of delivery.

A Committee member made the point that it is unclear who is or is not "dropping in" since some of these appointments are attached to various courses. This creates a problem when attempting to develop efficiencies within the centre and future programming

A Committee member noted that there was an increase in international students, but this was not showcased in the report since we cannot differentiate who is domestic and who is international. Programs meant for international students do not seem to be effective in reaching their target audience. The RGASC should be able to acquire information on international students regarding their program and what they are using on campus.

Discussion focused on data related to students' year of program, students who use multiple workshops, services, repeat visits, and one-time visits, the comparability of different data sets, etc. The Committee agreed that more data and better analysis of the data were priorities going forward.

A Committee member asked why the RGASC didn't have more admin support connected to the expansion of programming and other staffing at the centre. The Committee briefly discussed the challenges associated with expansion and the growth related to the EDU.

The Committee agreed that data analysis and data pulls, require competency, money, and time to be conducted correctly.

From the organizational structure chart, Tyler highlighted the following positions:

- **Michael DeBraga:** focus on work integrated learning and reflective writing.
- **Andie Burazin:** shared role between the math and computational science department and the RGASC
- **Writing Instructors:** Additional funding went to hiring more instructors for programming
- **ELL Specialist:** Xiangying was hired on a short term contract due to increased international students
- **Administrative Support:** 3 x 50% term positions were created and filled.
- **Jess Carlos:** New hire as the graduate support strategist who will focus on graduate programming.

Item Five: Face-to-face appointments

The Committee discussed a decline in the number of appointments that was mostly due to the 119 hours that instructors could not work due to factors that were out of their control. The number of drop-ins available have not increased.

A Committee member noted that the increase in student population was not reflected in the data and suggested that FSGs could be a reason for this as they are attending those sessions in place of appointments.

The Committee was informed that the number of appointments not booked are decreasing indicating that the overall efficiency is increasing. This is due to the waitlist protocol where students are emailed if there are any available appointments for that day.

A Committee member pointed out that the increase in student population has not led to an increase in participation in the RGASC programming. Perhaps a different form of engagement is needed.

The Committee discussed the possibility of the RGASC creating an online chat or question box. Fewer students are coming into office hours and more are sending emails or communicating using an online format, so this may be a good way to engage with students.

Fewer students are using in-person office hours and more are using online office hours hosted via Blackboard. The library uses an online chat that is open between 12pm and 7pm; online chat can be useful for questions with short answers, but complex questions require in-person visits. The Committee was advised that an online chat would expose instructors to a great amount of risk due to the complex nature of most questions.

The Committee discussed the RGASC's increase in business hours which has led to the RGASC hiring more instructors and offer more writing retreats.

The Committee discussed the RGASC's increased use of social media to engage students.

With regards to social media, Tyler Evans-Tokaryk noted that an increase in engagement is due to the recent enhancements made across the various platforms. Evans-Tokaryk added that the RGASC does not have a dedicated person for social media and that the front office can get very busy.

The Committee agreed that the 15% response rate for student surveys was insufficient and did not tell the RGASC what it needed to know when planning out programs.

Item Six: Writing retreats

The Committee was informed about the mode of pedagogy employed in Writing Retreats and the kind of student they attracted. Some discussion about the value of this approach ensued.

Item Seven: Marketing & Communications

The Committee discussed a number of new initiatives including:

- Website overhaul and online content creation
- Enhance social media presence
- Strategic Tabling using staff, faculty, and work study students

- Posting of flyers and posters across different departments

The Committee agreed that website and social media stats would be beneficial to have in the annual report.

Item Eight: Dedicated Drop-ins

The dedicated drop-in model was explained. The Committee was advised that they were more popular in the Fall and the Winter and discussed some possible explanations for this. A Committee member who uses dedicated drop-ins in their course pointed out that self-sign up and a supportive professor are keys to success.

A Committee member pointed out that major issue is the level of engagement by faculty with programs like the WDI. With more faculty and courses, we should expect an increase in engagement in from the younger faculty. The RGASC needs to reach out to the Dean for better faculty engagement.

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Item Nine (Numeracy)

A Committee member pointed out that the data in the Report must be considered in context of first year math. The numbers represent a very small percent of the overall enrollment in first year math courses.

The Committee discussed the kind of support provided during math drop-ins and the connection between the RGASC and math/science departments. The Committee also discussed the kind of support provided through the NDI (embedded workshops, etc.) and the challenges with student attendance, regardless of the form of support.

Item Ten: ELL Support

The Committee discussed the substantial increase in the international student population and how this did not seem to be reflected in RGASC programming. A Committee member pointed out that ELL programming may not have targeted the academic streams that the international students populated which could be an area for improvement.

The Committee was informed that students who require ELL support must identify themselves making it difficult to target students for this type of programming. Many students who may benefit from this type of support may not be paying international fees.

The Committee was impressed by the increased RGASC presence in the ACE program. A Committee member asked whether past students who used ELL support could be hired to

recruit and promote. The Committee discussed ways that this is already being done in some departments.

Item Eleven: Grad Support

The Committee discussed the significant growth in this area this year.

A Committee member pointed out how the TATP workshops were cancelled due to low enrollment showcasing that graduate students are not taking the teaching responsibility seriously. Another Committee member mentioned that individual workshops are currently experiencing low enrollment and low attendees and offered some suggestions for why this is the case.

The relationship between TATP and GPS was discussed.

Strategies for engaging grad students were discussed.

Item Twelve Agenda items from committee

The Committee was impressed by the Head Start numbers last year.

The Committee was advised that Head Start will run on the 28, 29, and 30 of August this year

The Committee advised changing the titles of some sessions (removing the word “critical” for example) and discussed other possible names.

The Committee discussed the problem of the centre being labelled as remedial and strategies for addressing this.

A Committee member pointed out the need for support with reflective writing and journals.

[End of the meeting]

* Minutes published to the RGASC website on June 19th, 2020