

RGASC Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

May 31st, 2018

Attending: Andres Posada, Ilapreet Toor, Abdullah Farooqi, Joseph Leydon, Christoph Richter, Catherine Seguin, Fiona Rawle, Jessica Silver, Paula Hannaford, Sharon Marjadsingh, Diane Matias, Dianne Ashbourne, Cliona Kelly, Tyler Evans-Tokaryk

Regrets: Laura Ferlito, Geordi Frere, Michelle Troberg

Minutes taken by Laura Krajewski

Item One: Welcome & Introductions

The RGASC Director welcomed all Committee members and allowed for brief introductions to occur, followed by an overview of the meeting agenda.

Item Two: Recommendations & Actions Taken from 2017 Advisory Committee Meeting

The RGASC Director began by discussing the actions taken by the RGASC to address recommendations from the 2017 Advisory Committee meeting. This discussion was based on the *RGASC Recommended Actions and Actions Taken* document distributed at the start of the meeting.

One point of interest was the Committee's recommendation to provide more support around academic integrity. The Committee discussed the increase in academic integrity cases over the past year and new marketing efforts by "tutoring companies".

The Committee learned about a new collaborative initiative organized by the Dean of Student Affairs to prevent the creation and use of shadow courses. Two websites were developed to advise students on how to identify a bad tutor; the websites are being advertised through a sticker campaign across campus.

The Committee discussed strategies for better engaging Student Associations around the issue of academic integrity and learned that UTMSU is working to support the Chinese community through Wee Chat.

The Committee discussed the value of creating videos on academic integrity (possibly one that is for a general audience and another targeting ELL students). The suggestion was made to advertise these videos in residence, but it was pointed out that only 20% of our entire student population live in residence.

Some Committee members agreed that some students may not understand the consequences of committing an academic offense. The Committee agreed that students should be presented with real life cases in order to understand the severity of these offenses.

Other Committee members suggested that an underlying cause of academic offenses is a lack of time management. The Committee was in broad agreement that academic integrity workshops need to be marketed better; for example, their titles should use simpler language, and departments across campus (including UTMSU) should collaborate and offer one consistent workshop. It was noted that the RGASC currently collaborates with UTMSU during their Academic Advocacy Week. It was also noted that the RGASC is working to create more online resources for students.

Committee members observed that it is difficult not to paint the RGASC as a remedial service; members agreed that, instead of waiting for students to arrive at the centre for support, the RGASC could enter classrooms to advertise the breadth of their services.

Some Committee members pointed out that the faculty perspective should be included in this conversation.

The Committee agreed that the Writing Development Initiative (WDI) provided good opportunities to promote academic integrity; the Committee also agreed that strategies for promoting academic integrity could be established as a priority for the TLC.

Item Three: Collaborations on Campus

The RGASC Director commented on the growing number of beneficial collaborations between the RGASC and a variety of units across campus; he added that the RGASC is looking to form additional partnerships. The Committee advised that more collaboration might be possible if a representative from the Dean's office were on the RGASC Advisory Committee.

Item Four: Marketing & Promotions

The RGASC Director discussed changes to the RGASC marketing strategy. By changing the wording of its outreach, the RGASC hopes to present its services as less remedial. Changes include replacing terms like "help" and "support" to "providing feedback". The Committee also recommended revisiting the Head Start session titles to make them more appealing and student friendly.

The Committee observed that students today receive information differently than in the past (primarily because of social media and information technology), and urged the RGASC to consider adapting accordingly. Suggestions for marketing included Instagram.

Committee members suggested the following:

- the RGASC could craft messaging advising all first-year students that it's okay to seek help. The Committee agreed that such messaging would be more effective if it came from Departments.
- the RGASC could create materials (e.g., standard language for course syllabi) for instructors that promoted the RGASC appropriately.
- updating the RGASC website.

The Committee learned that the RGASC had hired someone to redesign the website so it is more user-friendly, focuses less on remedial programming, aligns with the program plans, and is less text-heavy.

The Committee advised the RGASC Director to attend departmental meetings to provide 5-minute presentations on the RGASC. The RGASC Director agreed and informed the Committee that the RGASC will be tabling more frequently, hosting pop-up workshops to advertise its services, and hosting an Open House in their new location.

With regards to communicating with Graduate Students, the Committee discouraged the use of email and recommended, instead, posters in areas frequented by graduate students. The Committee also recommended direct communication with graduate supervisors.

The Committee discussed the RGASC's first graduate professional development conference (GPDC) held last year, the positive feedback it had received, and plans for running it again in October 2018. The GPS program was discussed along with options for replicating GCAC programming at UTM.

The Committee was reminded that the RGASC will be hiring a 50% one-year staff position (Graduate Student Support Strategist) before September to coordinate support for graduate students at UTM and develop a communications strategy.

The Committee acknowledged that new strategies needed to be explored to ensure that sessional instructors were aware of support for their TAs.

Item Five: Annual Report

RGASC Move, Organizational Structure & Future Plans

The Committee discussed the RGASC's organizational structure (in particular, the new positions since last year) and plans to move to the North Building. From the organizational chart, the RGASC Director highlighted the following positions:

- **Andie Burazin:** math instructor who will be continuing with the RGASC for the next two years
- **Michael DeBraga:** focus on work integrated and experiential learning and will liaise between faculty and the Experiential Learning Office

- **Kimiko Hill:** website developer
- **Graduate Student Support Strategist:** to be filled soon
- **Research Assistants:** conducting Writing Development Initiative assessment

Items highlighted in the new space plan include an Active Learning Classroom (ALC) “teaching lab” immediately adjacent to the RGASC’s new space, and the private offices for conducting student consultations.

The RGASC Director mentioned that the RGASC is in the process of becoming an Extra Departmental Unit (EDU-A) and emphasized that this transition would not impact the student facing component of the RGASC.

The Committee discussed the future of utmONE courses and other programming after the possible creation of the EDU-A. Questions were also raised regarding the Foundational Writing Skills Working Group’s discussion of a mandatory writing course for first year students; the RGASC Director advised the Committee that such a course was in the very early stages of discussion, but, if approved, may be taught by faculty appointed to the EDU-A.

[Break]

Decrease in number of Face-to-Face consultations

The RGASC Director asked the Committee what strategies the RGASC could implement to serve more students. The Committee agreed that the lower attendance numbers are not unique, and that the university as a whole has been experiencing a visible decline in student engagement. Many members reported lower attendance and participation rates in their units. Some members suggested that this could be due to an increase in online resources available.

Drop-ins, Writing Retreats, and other forms of face-to-face support

The Committee discussed the RGASC’s plans to extend writing retreats and institute day-long “writing rooms” where students are encouraged to write in the presence of peers and get support from a writing instructor as needed. The Committee agreed that this seemed a good strategy for lowering waitlist numbers.

The Committee agreed that the shift to drop-in and just-in-time models of support contradict the Centre’s mandate to promote “distributed practice” and positive time-management skills. The Committee also agreed that these service delivery models seemed necessary, to a degree, as a means of lowering waitlist numbers.

The Committee discussed the option of using online support as a hook to provide students with last minute support, but in a way that would encourage them to come to the Centre at a later date for more in-depth support. The Committee was advised that software is available for live

online sessions, but that the RGASC needed to address privacy and security concerns before adopting this kind of support.

The Committee discussed the RGASC's operating hours and the fact that students tend to prefer appointments and programming in the afternoons and evenings. The RGASC does not currently offer many appointments or much programming in the evening. The members agreed that this was an issue faced by all departments, and that it is difficult to respond to since we want to create a sense of community on campus but also want to support students to the best of our ability. Again, the strategy of using online resources as a teaser to attract students to the RGASC was emphasized. The strategy of sharing student testimonials with TAs and encouraging TAs to promote the RGASC (by using those testimonials and other resources) was recommended.

UTM Faculty Writing Fellowship

The Committee discussed the low level of interest in the UTM Faculty Writing Fellowship. Many members agreed that it would attract more applications if the mandate was expanded to something like a "pedagogical research fellowship." Others argued that timing was a concern, as well as the logistics of finding a replacement instructor to cover the teaching release.

Discipline-specific math support

The Committee reviewed the current model and agreed it seemed effective. Some members argued that it could be even more effective if the embedded math support was mandatory rather than voluntary. The scheduling challenges this presents were discussed.

Other strategies for improving students' math skills were also discussed; the Committee was interested to know that the RGASC had recently been involved with a workshop to help high school teachers better prepare students for university math.

ELL Support through ELLI

This discussion began by reviewing page 24 of the annual report. ELLI is the RGASC's new English Language Learning Initiative, similar in structure to the WDI, but focused explicitly on the needs of ELL students. The RGASC Director explained the application process and funding criteria and advised the Committee that 2 of the 3 applications received this year had been funded.

Priorities for new Graduate Student Support Strategist

The Committee was asked for input on the new Graduate Student Support Strategist's priorities. The Committee discussed a variety of possible initiatives including another Grad Student PD Conference in October, a possible second end-of-term conference / PD day, a communications strategy, and discipline-specific skills instruction.

The Committee again discussed the need to revise the RGASC's workshop titles to better reflect their offerings. Members agree that graduate student workshops should be tied to and advertised as transferrable skills workshops and should work to target both Masters and PhD students. Members also discussed the fact that workshops should address industry as well as teaching career opportunities to reach a broader range of students. All agreed that the RGASC should communicate the value of specific workshops to graduate supervisors who could then encourage their students to attend.

Finally, the Committee agreed that a good approach to graduate student support was scaffolded discipline-specific workshop series in which years 1-2 focus on specific skills essential to grad school, while years 3-5 are more career related.

Support and PD for UTM Instructors

The Committee members were asked for their 'wish list' of PD topics. Congratulations were offered to Dianne Ashbourne (RGASC Educational Developer) who has done a lot of work improving and expanding the Teaching Learning Collaboration Group's programming. Members discussed the growing need to support instructors with Work Integrated Learning (WIL) and Experiential Learning; they also discussed the emerging need to support students (and instructors) with the reflective writing assignments often assigned in WIL and Experiential Learning courses. The Committee agreed that a survey should be sent to all UTM faculty to get a needs assessment for the TLC. The current Communities of Practice are not entirely successful so may not continue, while the pedagogical reading groups seemed to work well so will likely continue.

Promoting Academic Skills for Success (PASS) Program

The Committee looked at data demonstrating the positive impact the PASS program has had on student performance and discussed plans to employ a similar approach with the summer ACE program.

Head Start Program

The Committee looked at the data from last year's Head Start program and observed that while the schedule had been shortened from 5 to 3 days, overall enrolment went up.

Item Six: General feedback, advice, or questions

The Committee asked about the WDI assessment project and learned that funding was conditional upon the submission of a Final Report which must include some kind of assessment.

The Committee asked about the FSG program and requested improved communication with Program Assistants to ensure that instructors know what is happening in the FSG sessions.

[End of Meeting]

* Minutes published to the RGASC website on June 22nd, 2018