

RGASC Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes June 23rd, 2020

Attending: Anushka Sokhi, Tiger Wu, Ayah Abdeldayem, Janina Kowalski, Mairi Cowan, Paul Piunno, Rafael Chiuzi, Jessica Silver (in place of Jackie Goodman), Rob Makinson, Ania Joly, Christina Fortes, Michelle Kraus, Kerrie Martin, Cliona Kelly, Tyler Evans-Tokaryk

Absent/Regrets: Alan Walks

Minutes taken by Henna Salim

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Item One: Welcome and Introductions

Tyler welcomed all Committee members and reminded the members of online meeting etiquette. Tyler allowed for brief introductions, and the Committee was made aware that unlike previous years, there is no Office of the Dean representative in this Committee, and that decision was deliberate to allow for Committee members to speak freely.

Introductions were followed by an overview of the meeting agenda, and before proceeding further, the Committee was asked if there were any additional items they would like to add to the agenda. Several Committee members (Ania, Christina) wanted to discuss academic integrity, especially in the context of online learning. One Committee member (Rafael) wanted to discuss suggestions on advocating RGASC resources and services.

Item Two: Recommendations and Actions Taken (2019 Advisory Committee Meeting)

The Committee was informed by Tyler that suggestions regarding better data collection and analysis were not implemented as this process required additional time and resources that were not available this year, but the RGASC has improve their data collection methods.

The Committee learned that two new positions to support the Front Office have been posted internally: a 100% Administrative Assistant position and a new 50% Marketing and Communications Assistant position. These two positions will assist the RGASC with conducting data analysis and collection.

The Committee was informed that due to COVID-19, the year-end survey collection was disrupted and there was little to no participation in some of the surveys. Additionally, the Committee was informed that the RGASC staff was not yet able to fully analyze the data they did collected as they were preoccupied with transitioning to online programming.

The Committee was told of the RGASC's switch to a new booking system, WCONLINE. The new booking system will aid with long time data collection, but the Committee was informed that it had created short term data collection issues.

Finally, regarding data, the Committee was told that an assessment plan was initiated in the summer, but the RGASC has not gotten further than the initial plan.

Item Three: COVID-19 Impact on the RGASC

The Committee was informed that the RGASC was able to move most of its programming online, with a few exceptions like the PART Summer Institute and an off-site writing retreat for graduate departments. The Committee learned that one-on-one student and faculty appointments, the FSG program, Head Start, and other orientation events have been converted or are in the process of being converted to an online format.

The Committee learned that all staff, continuing positions, and faculty are working remotely, and the RGASC is planning to work remotely come September.

The Committee was informed about the online Foundational Math Skills for University summer program, an initiative not discussed in the Annual Report. This initiative will prepare incoming first year students for first year math, as many incoming students have had their high school math education impacted. Instructors have been hired and high school teachers have been consulted to identify the focus of the program. The Committee learned that this is the first time the RGASC has shifted its approach on academic support by offering a remediation program for incoming students.

A Committee member (Paul) asked if there was any recognition or CCR for the program. The Centre Coordinator (Cliona) informed the Committee that the program is completely voluntary. Another Committee member (Jessica) informed all members that unless there are non-academic skills being developed in addition to the academic skills, this program does not qualify for CCR.

A Committee member (Anushka) asked if the program was going to be covering first year university math, and the Committee was informed that no, this program will be covering the high school math curriculum. The Committee member (Anushka) also asked for the dates of the program and was provided that information.

Item Four: RGASC Organizational Chart, the Institute for the Study of University Pedagogy (ISUP), and Future Plans

Tyler commented that there has been significant growth in the RGASC's organizational structure. Tyler highlighted the RGASC's current Educational Developer and added that a second Educational Developer has been hired and another four Educational Developers will be hired with one-year terms to assist faculty with the shift to remote learning.

The Committee was informed that the RGASC is in the process of hiring a Graduate Student Support Strategist to a 100% position, continuing. This position was piloted in the previous year and was approved for a permanent continuing position.

Tyler also highlighted the Centre Coordinator position with the two new positions underneath: the Administrative Assistant position and the Marketing and Communication position.

Tyler informed the Committee that the last stage of the approval of the EDU-A, the pilot phase of a formal academic department, will be occurring this week by the Governing Council. If approved, the RGASC will be a self-contained unit under ISUP. Tyler emphasized for the Committee members that the student side of the RGASC will not change. The lines of reporting and operation of the RGASC will not be affected in any visible way, but rather the Centre will be better resourced.

A Committee member (Rafael) commented that based on their own department (IMI) restructuring, branding is extremely time-consuming and will be a major challenge for the incoming Marketing and Communications position. Tyler acknowledged this comment and added that branding and marketing has been a challenge for the RGASC, and this restructuring will add to the difficulty.

A Committee member (Paul) asked regarding the launch of the Writing Foundations Course and how new university courses will look like and how they will be adopted. Tyler was unable to comment but informed the Committee that the compliment plan shared with the department chairs approved seven positions for ISUP. One position was a 100% teaching stream position in numeracy, with 25% budgetary cross appointment with the Mathematical and Computational Sciences department. This individual will be responsible for the Math Foundations Course creation and will identify students required to take a Math Foundations Course, similar to the Writing Foundations Course process.

Item Five: Student Appointments, Waitlisted Students, and Appointment Feedback

Tyler directed the Committee's attention to the RGASC appointment data and emphasized that the increase of unique students is a significant achievement as many of the appointments occur in the last two weeks of terms. While online appointments were offered, students either cancelled or did not use the available time slots. Tyler informed the Committee that had the RGASC been physically open, the number of unique students, total appointments, and number of drop-ins would have been significantly higher.

Tyler highlighted the major spike in waitlist data for student appointments. This has been attributed to increased methods of advertising and making students aware of appointments. With the previous booking system, waitlisted students would be informed of any available appointment time during the day via email. Now with WCONLINE, because students can now also highlight a specific time slot in addition to any appointments

available, more students are adding themselves to the waitlist. The Committee was informed that WCONLINE does not track how many of those waitlisted students were actually able to book an appointment.

A Committee member (Ayah) asked for clarification whether students would be informed of all appointment times in a day or the times they have specified. The Centre Coordinator (Cliona) confirmed that students would be notified of the appointments they have selected, and that students have the option to be notified of a specific time slot, of any appointments in a day, or both.

Tyler asked if there was an option to inform students about drop-in times, and the Centre Coordinator (Cliona) confirmed that at the top of the WCONLINE main screen, the drop-in schedule is posted.

Tyler asked the Committee members if there were any additional suggestions to meet student demand.

A Committee member (Rob) congratulated the RGASC for their social media content and asked if there was a way to follow-up with students who were unable to get off of the waitlist to provide them with support. The Centre Coordinator (Cliona) acknowledged that an automated tool may help facilitate providing this type of support as generating individualized responses can be time consuming.

A Committee member (Jessica) asked if no-shows, missed appointments, and cancellation policies are impacting student appointments, and mentioned their experience with their own online booking system. The Centre Coordinator (Cliona) informed the Committee of the RGASC's penalty policy and limits to booking appointments on WCONLINE. However, if students are in need of the additional support and there is availability, then the RGASC will try to accommodate the student.

A Committee member (Michelle) shared their experience with their online booking system and offered to share best practices with the RGASC. Tyler acknowledged the suggestions and added that they were uncertain if additional features could be added to WCONLINE.

A Committee member (Paul) asked if the functionality for waitlist tracking could be added to WCONLINE. The Centre Coordinator (Cliona) acknowledged that waitlist tracking is a crucial piece of information, as it would inform the RGASC of how many waitlisted students were actually able to book an appointment. The Centre Coordinator (Cliona) informed the Committee that the RGASC is working with WCONLINE to add this functionality and are awaiting a response, however, asked the Committee to recognize that WCONLINE is a large corporation and any features for the system would need to be adapted for all customers. Tyler also informed that Committee that the RGASC has partnered with several other writing centres across UofT to enable certain WCONLINE features.

Tyler also noted that students can add their names to a waitlist multiple times, so the high waitlisted number may not be too dire of a concern.

Tyler discussed student feedback after their appointments and informed the Committee that it is not unusual to get highly positive feedback. Tyler noted that while a significant number of students listed the most helpful aspect of their appointment was getting assistance with their grammar, spelling, and style, the RGASC's focus is on higher level writing concerns.

Tyler informed the Committee that the student feedback on math support was a new additional to the appointment feedback survey.

Tyler noted that students indicated an area of improvement would be to have longer appointment times. Tyler mentioned that while this may not necessarily be a concern, it would be useful for the Committee to discuss if any changes should be made to the current 30-minute appointment window.

A Committee member (Ayah) asked if there was an option to book for longer appointments. Tyler informed the members that the appointments could potentially be 45 minutes long, as the RGASC books appointments in 45 minute windows, where the additional 15 minutes are used for the instructors to take notes and prepare for the next appointment. Tyler also noted that students can receive additional support or follow-ups during drop-ins or writing retreats.

A Committee member (Michelle) shared their experience with their appointment lengths and noted that while the 30-minute window for the RGASC is currently working for most students, there could be some availability made for the student to make follow-up appointments for any additional issues.

A Committee member (Rafael) voiced their support to keep the 30-minute long appointments as there are no visible red flags that would support the change to longer appointments.

Item Six: Writing Retreats

Tyler acknowledged that the Writing Retreats have been significantly disappointing this year as fewer students attended. Tyler informed the Committee that a reason for the decline may be connected to an issue during a session, where one student's behaviour may have had an impact on the other students who would have been in regular attendance. Tyler informed the Committee that the Crisis Response Team was extremely helpful in resolving this issue and that the student was offered accommodation through other means.

Tyler noted that this type of writing support may be great for some students but not for others. Tyler informed the Committee that the RGASC is discussing changes to the rules of engagement and expectations in the session, as well as advertising the kinds of students the Writing Retreats are most effective for.

A Committee member (Rob) commented that although the fall numbers are disappointing, the winter numbers look more promising, even with the cancellation of the Writing Retreats in the latter half of the semester due to COVID-19.

Tyler informed the Committee that the number of hours for the Writing Retreats was higher this year than previously. Tyler noted that it would be more useful to analyze the data in terms of number of students per hour of labour but that data analysis has not yet been conducted.

A Committee member (Mairi) asked if the Writing Retreats have been offered at different times of the day. Tyler informed the Committee that the Writing Retreats had been offered in the early afternoon previously and although the response was great, students asked for the retreats to be held in the evenings. Tyler did acknowledge that varying the schedule may be a good solution. Tyler also added that the location of the Writing Retreat makes a significant impact on attendance, as seen in the Grad Writing Café attendance.

A Committee member (Kerrie) suggested offering the Writing Retreats online through platforms like Zoom and highlighted how those features could mimic both group and individual support given during Writing Retreat. The Centre Coordinator (Cliona) mentioned that the Writing Retreats do not run in the summer, but this suggestion is being explored for the incoming fall semester. Tyler also noted the success of similar online writing retreats.

Item Seven: Numeracy support

Tyler informed the Committee that the RGASC does indeed offer math support, and that it is quite effective. Tyler noted that while the numbers for math support were higher, it is proportional to the number of hours offered. Tyler explained that unlike the Math Help Centre where students receive TA support with their homework, the RGASC math instructors provide more foundational support.

Tyler informed the Committee that online math appointments were being conducted through Zoom, as WCONLINE's whiteboard is designed for writing appointments and not math, and this workaround appears to be effective so far.

Item Eight: Writing Development Initiative (WDI) and Dedicated Drop-Ins

Tyler highlighted that the RGASC was able to offer 80 different sessions of drop-ins, and noted it is an exploding area of support. Tyler informed the Committee of the process for booking dedicated drop-ins. The RGASC writing instructors are already aware of the assignment and the instructions, and so these drop-ins are generally shorter as the context has already been provided. Tyler encouraged the Committee members to share this type of RGASC support to their own departments or populations.

Item Nine: Elements of Academic Reading and Writing Series (ERWS)

Tyler highlighted the low attendance for this program. Tyler asked the Committee asked for their suggestions on improving attendance. The Centre Coordinator (Cliona) disclosed that the ERWS is based on scaffolded learning, where students are building on their learning with each week of the program. The RGASC has tried advertising this series in several different ways, one of which being pick the workshop topic that best aligns with your course assignment. The Centre Coordinator (Cliona) recognizes that ERWS is a huge time commitment for students and has asked the Committee for feedback on how to market this program.

A Committee member (Rafael) stated that they were happy to see the writing supports being offered to students but was also embarrassed to see so few students actually attend the program. The Committee member (Rafael) suggested that the RGASC reach out to faculty, as faculty can advertise and direct their students to participate in ERWS via Quercus announcements or posting the information in their syllabus.

Another Committee member (Anushka) suggested reaching out to classes where the workshop topics align with specific course assignments. For example, the member highlighted that the workshop topic “Identifying Arguments and Counter-Arguments” would be incredibly useful in first year biology and political sciences classes where students have a critiquing assignment. Tyler informed that Committee that the RGASC has previously promoted ERWS to the first year biology course but it did not seem to be very effective.

The Centre Coordinator (Cliona) redirected the Committee’s attention to the list of WDI courses and explained that those participating faculty members allow for the RGASC to make in-class presentations or to distribute marketing materials to their students. The Centre Coordinator (Cliona) recognized that students could be experiencing an information overload and that the value of ERWS needed to be expressed by senior students and faculty.

A Committee member (Ania) asked if there was any programming for graduate school preparation. The member explains that upper year students are looking for assistance with effective writing. Positioning ERWS as a program to assist with graduate school preparation may be a new way of marketing the program to students.

The Centre Coordinator (Cliona) was hesitant to adopt this marketing strategy as ERWS is targeted for first and second year students. For graduate school preparation, some of the workshops offered through the PART program may be a better resource for those upper year students. Tyler informed the Committee that there will be a PART Advisory Committee meeting and that committee is planning for a substantial overhaul of the program. Tyler commented that the Committee member(Ania)’s suggestion of offering higher level writing for students could be offered through PART rather than ERWS, and that ERWS should remain structured for first and second year students.

A Committee member (Janina) shared their teaching assistant experience and how they advertise the RGASC's writing support in their tutorials. The Committee member only learned of ERWS recently and that the workshop topics would have been great to share with students. The member suggested sharing workshop information with TAs as they can align course or tutorial assignments with the workshop topics as an alternative way for students to get the writing support they need. By preselecting the workshops for students, this may be a way to minimize the noise and information overload that students experience.

A second Committee member (Paul) echoed the previous comments and reinforced that faculty endorsement is important. The member suggested providing additional incentives alongside the CCR, and that this member was happy to attribute participation marks to their students for attending ERWS. Tyler was cautious of this suggestion as integrating course grades into extracurricular marks is dangerous territory. The member commented that they would be happy to discuss this topic in more detail at a later time.

A third Committee member (Anushka) asked for the workshop dates. The Centre Coordinator (Cliona) provided the member with the dates. The Committee member suggested advertising this program during Orientation, and also suggested to have in-class announcements at the beginning of lecture to further market the program to students.

A fourth Committee member asked how the RGASC plans on continuing ERWS alongside the first year writing courses and will the content be similar? As well, this member (Jessica) added onto the second Committee member's (Paul) comment, that a course-specific reflection activity could be developed and graded for participation marks in a course as to not conflict with the CCR awarded. Tyler noted that this course-specific reflection activity is a good suggestion. Regarding the link between ERWS and the writing courses, Tyler clarified that there may be some overlap but the writing course curriculum would be structured in an alternative way to minimize any overlap with ERWS.

Item Ten: ISP100

Tyler informed the Committee of ISP100, the first year writing course. Four teaching stream writing instructors have been hired to teach the course, and that ISP100 will be offered in the Fall, Winter, and Summer semester. The RGASC Writing Specialist and Tyler will each be teaching one section of ISP100. The RGASC has assisted with writing the template for the syllabus to guide the ISP100 curriculum committee. Tyler informed the Committee that some of the Committee members already have ISP100 as a required course for some students in their department.

Item Eleven: Numeracy Workshops and Numeracy Development Initiative (NDI)

Tyler informed the Committee that the RGASC piloted a series of workshops in the Winter semester that covered the core material for students in a scaffolded way to improve their math skills. The workshops were linked to specific math courses because the topics were relevant to students in those courses, but the workshop was not reteaching course content.

Tyler informed the Committee about the NDI and that five departments had received funding to integrate numeracy into their core courses. Tyler commented that this year had fewer proposals, likely as faculty was preoccupied with transferring their courses to an online format.

Item Twelve: English Language Learners (ELL) Support

Tyler informed the Committee that ELL support was conducted through drop-ins led by instructors with ELL training. Over 500 appointments were labelled as ELL drop-ins, however, the RGASC estimated that about 65% of those appointments were actually utilized by ELL students, based on anecdotal evidence. Tyler informed the Committee of the challenge for the ELL program as to how to get students to take advantage of ELL resources and asked the Committee if there were any suggestions on how to improve student utilization of ELL support.

A Committee member (Kerrie) asked for clarification regarding a comment made in the Annual Report that the international population was lower but the number of appointments was higher. The member wanted clarification as to whether the increase in appointments was due to more appointments being available. As well, the Committee member asked why are only 65% of the appointments being used by ELL students?

The Centre Coordinator (Cliona) answered the second question and informed the Committee that the ELL drop-ins are occasionally used for writing drop-in overflow. If there are no students for ELL drop-ins, the RGASC will utilize the drop-in time for general writing drop-ins. Tyler answered the first question, stating that there is a tenuous link between international students and ELL students, as many ELL students are not international fee-paying students. Tyler also added that the RGASC has done a better job of marketing ELL support.

A Committee member (Anushka) asked for the clarification regarding the ELL program and Tyler explained what ELL support is for the member. Tyler informed the Committee that in addition to the ELL drop-ins, there is a new non-credit bearing course, ISP010, for ELL students. The Committee member (Anushka) suggested that the RGASC connects with the ACE program as a way to advertise ELL support. Tyler commented that the RGASC has connected with the ACE program and that ACE students were used to pilot ISP010.

Item Thirteen: ISP010

Tyler informed the Committee that the RGASC will be conducting a writing diagnostic in the first week of ISP010, and that those students who indicate that they will not be successful in ISP100 will be enrolled in ISP010 instead. Tyler commented that ISP010 will focus on more basic writing instruction.

Item Fourteen: Graduate Support and Programming

Tyler commented that the RGASC has conducted extensive research and has consulted with a number of stakeholders to determine what support graduate students need.

A Committee member (Jessica) informed the Committee and RGASC Director that the Graduate Professional Development Conference (GPDC) meets the criteria for CCR accreditation and would be happy to provide the RGASC with more information. The Centre Coordinator (Cliona) raised concerns that CCR may not be awarded as GPS already provides graduate students with credits for attending these conference sessions.

Tyler informed the Committee that a RGASC resource that is under-utilized is the one-on-ones graduate student appointment with RGASC faculty members. Tyler asked the Committee to share with any graduate students and supervisors that the RGASC has the capacity to meet with graduate students.

Item Fifteen: Faculty Support

Tyler informed the Committee that the TLC has expanded their programming recently and asked the Committee, specifically the faculty members, if they have additional comments regarding faculty support. The Committee did not provide any suggestions.

The Centre Coordinator (Cliona) informed the Committee that there is new technology available to contact the Educational Developers for faculty support.

Item Sixteen: Promoting Academic Skills for Success (PASS)

Tyler opened the floor for Kerrie Martin, the RGASC member responsible for overseeing the PASS program.

Kerrie informed the Committee that the second term of the PASS program was based on the research conducted by the San Diego State University (SDSU), where students received continued support after PASS ended. The RGASC has had some contact with students who have completed PASS through a half-day reconnect session but felt that a larger approach was necessary. In response, PASS term two was developed to focus on working with students as they returned to their studies. PASS term two is being developed over the summer with the intention of launching in the upcoming fall semester.

Tyler informed the Committee that the Office of the Registrar and the Dean's Office has helped the RGASC with data analysis for the PASS program, and that the Winter 2020 numbers were strongly impacted by COVID-19.

Item Seventeen: Accessibility Services Collaborations

Tyler informed the Committee that the RGASC works closely with the Accessibility Services, and that Kerrie is the RGASC member that works one-on-one with accessibility students. The Peer Mentor Learning Communities (PMLC) was developed, which is a series of workshops and group supports for accessibility students.

The Committee member (Kerrie) expanded on the accessibility supports for the summer term, the Summer Academic Skills Institute program, for incoming and some returning students to develop their academic skills with accommodating and accessibility needs. There was a lack of opportunity for connection during the school year, and as a result, the PMLC was developed to focus on building both study skills and a sense of community during the school year.

Item Eighteen: Agenda Items From the Committee - Academic Integrity

A Committee member (Ania) explained that instructors are looking for guidance on how to restructure their online teaching to minimize cheating. An example of cheating brought forth by the member was the use of a group chat. Instructors have implemented a few strategies to prevent cheating but the class average is still higher than normal. As well, the instructors are noticing that students are not replicating the same level of understanding in their assignments, which leads the instructors to believe that there is a level of cheating.

Tyler informed the Committee that the Dean's Office has put together four working groups to investigate best practices in a) labs, b) small learning environments, c) research, and d) large lectures. All of those working groups will be addressing academic integrity in each of those four working groups. As well, Tyler informed the Committee that there is an effort to investigate the use of third party proctoring software. Tyler also shared the Academic Integrity module available on the RGASC website and explained that instructors can download the module and incorporate it into their Quercus shell. Instructors can also reach out to the RGASC to have an RGASC instructor conduct a workshop regarding academic integrity.

The Centre Coordinator (Cliona) also suggested for instructors to reach out to the Educational Developers for assistance. Tyler informed the Committee that the Educational Developers will be looking at improving summatives and assignments with online learning and academic integrity in mind. Tyler recognized that there will always be students who commit academic offences, though they are in the minority, but believed with the proper guidance, students can be steered away from committing academic offenses.

The Committee member (Ania) further comments that from analyzing the participants and the dialogue in the previously mentioned group chat, it was the highly achieving students participating in the group chat. The comments in the group chat also did not indicate a sense of wrong doing from the students. The member wondered if there was a plan to add an element of online learning to the Academic Integrity module. Tyler agreed, and informed the Committee that the Academic Integrity module was developed before COVID-19.

Tyler added that the student population, the UTMSU and student groups, need to be in the conversation about educating students about academic integrity. The Centre Coordinator (Cliona) informed that Committee that the UTMSU has their Academic Advocacy Campaign and that the RGASC normally partners with the UTMSU, however, there needs to be both faculty and senior student engagement in order to educate students about academic integrity.

A Committee member (Anushka) quickly explained the UTMSU's Academic Advocacy Campaign. The member explained that the campaign educates students about what is academic integrity, how an academic offence stays on your university record, and which resources students have access to. The campaign also advocates for student rights and policies as first year students are not aware of the resources they have access to, like the credit/no-credit program. Tyler acknowledged the Committee member's comments and added that the RGASC will reach out to the UTMSU for further discussions.

Tyler also added that for the incoming cohort, the Centre for Student Engagement has put together Eagles Connect which will be a good online tool to communicate and share resources regarding academic integrity.

Item Nineteen: Agenda Items from the Committee - Advocacy

Regarding advocacy, a Committee member (Rafael) suggested that to spread awareness about RGASC initiatives, the RGASC should create a condensed slide deck or document to share with faculty and students. The member emphasized streamlining communication to faculty and students and offered two suggestions: an executive summary of the Annual Report and a simple slide deck for faculty to share in their department meetings. Tyler commented that the new Marketing and Communications position would be able to assist with that task.

A Committee member (Paul) commented in regard to PART, a valuable addition to the program would be developing communication and presentation skills. Tyler noted the suggestion and added that they would present the idea in the PART Advisory Committee Meeting. Another Committee member (Rob) commented that presentation skills were a key focus for the Researcher Professional Development Day event before it was cancelled.

Tyler also informed the Committee that PART is primarily taught by graduate students, with the rationale that teaching technical skills in their field is a great opportunity for professional development, and that finding instructors is a challenge. Tyler added that

communicating to graduate students that teaching a PART module can help their professional development may encourage more graduate students to participate.

Item Twenty: Meeting Conclusion

Tyler asked the Committee if there were any additional comments or concerns to be raised and the Committee had no further questions.

Tyler thanked the Committee for their input and asked for the Committee to share the information discussed in the Annual Report and this meeting with their departments and their groups, and noted that the RGASC would work towards implementing the advocacy suggestions proposed by the Committee (Rafael).

[End of Meeting]

*Minutes published to the RGASC website on June 14, 2021