Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre Annual Report 2023-2024

Prepared by Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre (RGASC) Staff and Faculty

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UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO MISSISSAUGA

ROBERT GILLESPIE
ACADEMIC SKILLS CENTRE

Executive Summary

The Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre (RGASC) is the learning and teaching hub at the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM). We support the development of academic skills for student success and the development of instructors' pedagogical practices. The RGASC is housed within the Institute for the Study of University Pedagogy (ISUP). Our team of full- and part-time staff and students is dedicated to meeting the needs of our diverse student and instructor populations at UTM, working productively with campus partners and in alignment with UTM's Strategic Framework and Academic Plan.

In 2023-2024, one of our main initiatives as an RGASC team was to develop a 3-year strategic plan. In addition to a revision of our mission statement, our strategic priorities will give us direction for our work in the years ahead. We experienced minimal staffing changes this year; one Educational Developer was hired after a position became vacant.

While we maintained the work in our core areas of writing, numeracy and math, and study skills for students and pedagogical support for faculty and instructors, we refreshed and piloted several initiatives. Our Program for Accessing Research Training (PART) curriculum and completion pathways were redesigned to better meet students' needs. We piloted Study Skills drop-in hours, offering just-in-time support for students. For faculty and instructors, we piloted an Anti-Racist Pedagogies workshop series, developed on online resource hub, and rethought consultation support for instructors who are developing online courses. We reviewed and streamlined our Writing Development Initiative. We refreshed the look and feel of the RGASC with a vibrant visual identity and consistent design of print and digital materials. Together, we worked to address new challenges and needs, particularly regarding generative artificial intelligence.

While student and instructor attendance continue to vary from year to year, our engagement overall is positive in our in-person and virtual offerings. Some notable numbers include:

- 1117 unique students received writing, math and numeracy, study skills support in our one-on-one appointments, Writing Studio drop-ins, and dedicated course drop-ins
- 38 unique students attended the Caribbean and Black Writing Collective
- 577 students passed the Professional English Language Skills (PELS) program
- 4046 students attended Facilitated Study Group sessions
- 68 in-class writing workshops delivered
- 10 Co-Curricular writing workshops delivered
- 130 unique students participated in the Program for Accessing Research Training (PART)

- 69 graduate students attended two Graduate Professional Development Conferences
- 250 individual consultations with Educational Developers
- 25 unique participants from 10 departments joined 8 pedagogical reading groups

In 2024-2025, the RGASC team will continue to build our team, particularly in the areas of educational development and learning strategies, so we can meet unfulfilled needs at UTM. We will continue to develop and review programs for target groups (e.g., disciplinary groups, student cohorts). We will explore possibilities to develop or increase program offerings in Game Enhanced Learning and generative artificial intelligence. Overall, we will continue to review and work toward the action items identified in our strategic planning process.

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Land Acknowledgement

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

About the RGASC

The Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre (RGASC) is UTM's hub for learning and teaching. We support the development of academic skills for student success and the development of instructors' pedagogical practices.

Mission

- To provide a full range of individual consultations, workshops, and programs to help students identify and develop the academic skills they need for success in their studies.
- To work collaboratively with University of Toronto Mississauga faculty and teaching assistants to help them create the best possible environments for learning in their classes, labs, and tutorials.

Organizational Structure

In 2023-2024, the RGASC employed 11 permanent staff (listed in alphabetical order by last name):

- Dianne Ashbourne - Senior Educational Developer & Team Lead
- Corrine Bent-Womack - Educational Developer, Anti-Racist Pedagogies
- Jessica Bailey - Graduate Student Support Strategist
- Amanda Brijmohan - Educational Developer, Assessment and Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
- Ann Gagné - Educational Developer, Universal Design for Learning & Accessible Pedagogies (until Spring 2023)
- Adriana Grimaldi - Educational Developer, Universal Design for Learning & Accessible Pedagogies (from Fall 2023)
- Rob Huang - Educational Developer, Instructional Practices and Student Engagement
- Kerrie Martin - Learning Strategist and Program Manager
- Linda Duong - Learning Strategist
- Louis Nguyen - Program Administrator
- Laura Smith - Outreach and Engagement Coordinator
- Olivia Tenn - Administrative and Communications Assistant

RGASC employed 1 contract staff member:

- Shivani Mistri - Program Strategist (Winter 2024)

RGASC was supported by ISUP Administrative Staff:

- Aimy Lieu - Associate Director, ISUP

- Bukky Okege - Business Officer
- Mitchell Pedicelli – Program Assistant

RGASC employed 13 part-time Writing, Numeracy and Math, and Study Skills Instructors:

- Tara AlHadithy - Writing
- Nadya Askaripour - Math and Numeracy
- Joel Benabu - Writing
- Susan Hopkirk - Writing & Study Skills
- Monique Kampherm - Writing
- Patti Luedecke - Writing
- Carter Man - Math and Numeracy
- Sean McPhail – Writing & Study Skills
- Paul Raymont - Writing
- Carlos Restrepo Cunha - Math and Numeracy
- Penny Saeedi - Writing
- Yulia Smirnova - Writing
- Jack Zapotochny - Writing

RGASC programs were designed and/or delivered by ISUP Faculty:

- Kristen Allen – Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream (LTA)
- Sheila Batacharya – Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream
- Mark Blaauw-Hara – Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream
- Tyler Evans-Tokaryk – Professor, Teaching Stream
- Jordana Garbati – Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream
- Sheliza Ibrahim – Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream
- Phoebe Kang – Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream (LTA)
- Rita Karrass – Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream
- Amanda Paxton – Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream
- Janine Rose – Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream
- Laura Taylor – Associate Professor, Teaching Stream
- Oguzhan Tekin – Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream
- Jonathan Vroom – Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream

Notable Achievements in 2023-2024

RGASC's New Strategic Priorities

In May 2023, the Director and RGASC staff began strategic planning. As a team, we first developed a set of strategic priorities; then, each staff member identified action

items and a corresponding timeline for achievement. Our strategic priorities guided our work in 2023-2024 and will continue to do so until Summer 2026.

The RGASC's Strategic Priorities (2023-2025):

1. Nurture trust and collaboration with community partners to support student and instructor success and belonging.
2. Create an inviting, safe, dedicated space for student and instructor learning.
3. Impact equity and access in higher education by courageously challenging systemic barriers and modeling equity-minded pedagogies.
4. Advocate for learning environments where all members of the UTM community can thrive.
5. Develop research-informed programming that supports student and instructor success.
6. Create an environment where members of the RGASC feel valued, connected, and empowered to become leaders within their areas of expertise.

The work you read about in this annual report meets one or more of our strategic priority areas.

Notable Program Improvements

In 2023-2024, our team made notable improvements to our program offerings. Some of these changes are as follows:

- Educational Development: Piloted an Anti-Racist Pedagogy workshop series, developed a new resource hub available on Quercus, and increased individual consultations in the areas of generative artificial intelligence and online teaching.
- Program for Accessing Research Training (PART): Revised curriculum and program completion pathways to better meet students' needs.
- Professional English Language Skills (PELS): Reviewed and revised the PELS 2.0 offering. Onboarded more students than in recent years.
- Learning Strategy: Piloted drop-in hours to offer just-in-time study skills support.
- Outreach: Increased opportunities to connect with undergraduate and graduate students and faculty and instructors through focus groups, tabling, and over 50 campus-wide events.
- Communication: Refreshed the look and feel of the RGASC through the design and roll-out of new print and digital materials and a vinyl sticker on the Centre's front window.

Future Directions

In 2024-2025, we will:

- Continue to align our work with our strategic priorities.

- Continue to develop and promote in-person programming (e.g., for Head Start and PART).
- Continue to develop programs for target populations.
- Fill staff vacancies in the area of Educational Development
- Advocate for additional staff support in the area of Learning Strategies
- Explore opportunities in the area of Game Enhanced Learning
- Build our understanding of generative artificial intelligence and opportunities in learning and teaching

Undergraduate Support

Writing

Appointments

One-on-one writing support continues to be a significant RGASC program for UTM students. Undergraduate and graduate students can book 50-minute appointments with our writing instructors in person and online (synchronous and asynchronous). Scheduling is done through the WCONLINE platform, and online appointments use Zoom. Students also have access to daily drop-in hours through our Writing Studio.

In 2023-24, we offered 1708 hours of in person, online, and drop-in writing support.

Online synchronous appointments (in which instructor and student meet over Zoom) accounted for about 58% of writing appointments. About 29% of writing appointments were in-person, and 7.5% were online asynchronous (in which students upload their drafts for feedback). Finally, 85 Writing Studio drop-in hours were offered in the RGASC boardroom four days a week in the Fall and Winter semesters.

Summer 2023

In Summer 2023, we offered 234 hours of appointments in person (63 hours) online synchronous (149 hours) and online asynchronous (22 hours). Demand for these writing appointments was modest with 66% of hours used by 86 unique students.

Fall 2023

Demand for one-on-one writing support was strong in the Fall 2023 semester. We offered 646 hours of appointments of which 79% (509 hours) were used. These appointments were made by 254 unique students. Online asynchronous appointments were particularly popular, with 95% of offered appointments (55 hours) used. Writing Studio drop-in hours were also popular, with 75 unique students attending the 44 hours offered over the semester.

Winter 2024

In Winter 2024, appointment demand continued to be relatively strong. We offered 743 hours of one-on-one appointments of which 72% (535 hours) were used. Demand remained on par with trends in Fall 2023, with asynchronous appointments particularly popular. These appointments were attended by 250 unique students. The 41 Writing Studio drop-in hours offered, attracted 45 unique students. Many of these students made repeat visits to the drop-in hours.

Table 1

Writing Appointments (individual consultations and Writing Studio drop-in) Yearly Comparison

	2021/22	**2022/23[1]**	**2023/24**
Unique Students	464	643	538
Total Available Appointment Hours	1991	2180	1708
Total Utilization Rate	84%	86%	70%

[1]Excludes summer data

Course-Embedded Writing Support

General

The RGASC offers additional writing support embedded in a wide range of courses. Because the support is customized for each course, it can take a variety of forms, including:

1. Presentations/workshops: These can cover a wide variety of writing topics and genres (e.g., lab reports, thesis statements, argumentative writing, first-year writing, research essay introductions, research proposals).
2. Dedicated drop-ins: Blocks of time where students from particular courses can drop in to the Centre (without an appointment) to receive writing support on specific assignments; the blocks of time correspond to each assignment's due date, and the writing instructors familiarize themselves with the assignment instructions prior to each session.
3. Benchmarking and TA training/harmonization: Sessions specifically designed to help TAs with providing feedback about writing.
4. Writing Retreats: Course-specific sessions facilitated by faculty are scheduled (in person or virtually) for students to work on and get support from their peers on specific writing assignments.

In 2023-2024, we offered 68 (63 in 2022-2023) in-class or in-tutorial presentations and workshops. We saw 740 students attend 150 Dedicated drop-in sessions for 41 courses (compared to 438 Writing Office Hours appointments in 2022-2023). We held four (18 in 2022-2023) writing retreats.

Writing Development Initiative

The RGASC also offers the Writing Development Initiative (WDI), which provides resources, support, and financial assistance, for innovative course- and discipline-specific projects to enhance students' use of writing in the target course.

In 2023-24, 21 courses had WDI-supported projects, involving roughly one-third of UTM's overall student population. All of these projects were provided funding for extra TA hours, and many projects benefitted from planning support by RGASC and ISUP faculty.

In 2023-2024, we offered 12 (11 in 2022-2023) in-class or in-tutorial presentations and workshops. We held 8 (16 in 2022-2023) benchmarking sessions for specific courses.

We also redesigned the Writing Development Initiative TA Training program and held it in-person for the first time since 2020. A total of 33 TAs participated in the training, and they received seven hours of instruction on writing pedagogy.

We phased out the use of online writing office hours for WDI-funded courses, replacing these with in-person dedicated drop-ins (described above).

Finally, we are in the process of revising the way we assess the efficacy of WDI-funded projects, so we can efficiently collect meaningful data.

Other Writing sWorkshops

We designed and led 10 additional writing workshops for departments, student groups, and specific student cohorts in addition to our course-specific workshops and presentations.

Caribbean and Black Writing Collective

The Caribbean and Black Writing Collective (CBWC) began in 2022-2023. The CBWC gives students who identify as Caribbean (Black, Indo Caribbean, Chinese-Caribbean etc.) and/or Black (African, Caribbean, Canadian etc.) an opportunity to work on their assignments and engage deeply with their studies in a collaborative environment with faculty, supportive friends and peers who identify with the collective. The CBWC aims to build community, motivation, and accountability. Check-ins, networking, reflective discussions, writing/reading/numeracy support, visits by Caribbean and Black identified UTM faculty members are all available components to enhance the session experience. The CBWC is led by Janine Rose and Sheliza Ibrahim with support from Efe Eghujovbo, Jordana Garbati, Aimy Lieu, Olivia Tenn, and Sirine Messaikeh.

In 2023-2024, the CBWC team refined program logistics, developed social media and on campus promotional materials, developed the objectives of the collective, presented

in faculty meetings, and connected with student associations (e.g., African Student Association, Caribbean Student Association) and departments (e.g., English Department, New College at St. George) to develop collaboration and collegial connections.

Between September 2023 and March 2024, we offered 12 sessions of two and a half hours. Approximately 38 students (not unique) attended CBWC sessions.

Two initiatives began in 2023-2024:

1. We collaborated with the English and Drama Student Society to co-sponsor the "Words Unleashed" event in Winter 2024. The event featured Black and Caribbean speakers who are UTM alumni and professional writers. There were more than 20 attendees at this event
2. We began the Black and Caribbean Scholar Speaker Series. In this series, members of the collective had an opportunity to connect with other faculty members across UTM. Guest speakers included Khalida Ali, Assistant Professor, Historical Studies and Emil Marmol, Sessional Lecturer, Institute for the Study of University Pedagogy.

Plans for 2024-2025 include:

- Continuing the Black and Caribbean Scholar Speaker Series;
- Increasing outreach to first-year students through Orientation events;
- Increasing graduate student outreach;
- Continuing outreach with the SEE UTM program for Peel grade 12 Black students, and classes which include sizable numbers of Caribbean and/or Black students; and
- Continuing to provide Co-Curricular Accreditation (CCR).

Math and Numeracy

Math and numeracy are critical areas for academic skills development in UTM students. The RGASC offers one-on-one appointments in math and numeracy instruction, particularly for students taking first year math courses. Our Foundational Math Skills for University program gives incoming first years a refresher of high school math and introduces them university mathematics expectations and culture.

Appointments

The RGASC offered 457 hours of in-person and online synchronous Math and Numeracy appointments in 2023-2024. Despite a concerted effort to promote these appointments, as well as offering evening appointments (5pm to 7pm), they continue to be under-utilized with an average of 57%.

In Summer 2023, 9 unique students used 40% of the offered appointments (16/40 hours). In Fall 2023, 41 unique students used 65% of the offered appointments (127/196 hours). While in Winter 2024, 29 unique students used 54% of the offered hours (119/221 hours).

These appointments have attracted a dedicated group of students who access this support regularly, often making weekly appointments throughout a given semester. In 2023-2024, 45% of our booked appointments were made by just seven students. Three of those students booked more than 20 appointments over the course of the academic year.

Table 2

Math and Numeracy Appointments Yearly Comparison

	2021/22	**2022/23[1]**	**2023/24**
Unique Students	68	86	63
Total Available Appointment Hours	376	298	457
Total Utilization Rate	61%	66%	57%

[1] Excludes Summer 2022 data

Foundational Math Skills for University

Foundational Math Skills for University (FMSU) is a six-week online Math and Numeracy program for incoming first-year students offered in collaboration with the Dean's Office. The program is offered in the summer semester and gives incoming students a refresher of high school math through two-hour, online synchronous sessions, practice problems, and quizzes. The program introduces students to the university Mathematics learning environment and to communication and learning management systems commonly used in UTM Mathematics courses.

In late June 2023, all incoming students were invited to register for one of 500 spots in the FMSU program. The cap was reached quickly with 500 students added to one of 12 sections in the FMSU Quercus shell. Data from the Registrar's Office indicates that most students who joined FMSU were admitted to programs in Computer Science or Mathematics and Statistics (30%). The next most common programs of registration for FMSU were students in Life Science (14%), Commerce (13%), and Social Science (12%).

In all, 488 students participated in the program:

- 238 (48%) students participated fully in the program by attending online sessions and completing the weekly quizzes
- 206 (41%) students participated partially, completing only 1 or 2 quizzes
- 54 (11%) students joined the Quercus shell but did not participate in any aspect of the program.

In a post-program survey, most respondents indicated that after completing FMSU, they felt prepared for university math and would recommend the program to other students.

Learning Strategies

Overview

The learning strategy portfolio focuses on providing study skills support through peer-led programming. Our primary programs are the Facilitated Study Groups (FSGs), Promoting Academic Skills for Success (PASS), and Peer Mentor Learning Communities (PMLCs). In addition, we have offered study skills workshops for the RGASC's Head Start program, and for departments and academic societies upon request. Learning Strategists also provide study skills support to wider UTM initiatives and programs including Exam Jam, the Summer Academic Skills Institute (SASI), and the Support, Engage, Experience (SEE) UTM program. We also offered individual study skills appointments with a part-time Study Skills Instructor and piloted study skills drop-in sessions.

In the Winter 2024 term, a Program Strategist was hired on a short-term casual contract to support the Learning Strategists' work, by focusing on piloting a study skills drop-in and supporting the PASS program's delivery.

Facilitated Study Groups (FSGs)

FSGs are rooted in the Supplemental Instruction (SI) model developed by the University of Missouri at Kansas City. SI is a non-remedial approach to learning enrichment that uses peer-assisted study groups to integrate essential academic skills with course-related material. FSGs are only offered in support of courses in which there is active collaboration between the course instructor and the RGASC. The sessions are led by a team of facilitators, model volunteer students who have been successful in the course and who have had approval from or been hand-picked by the course instructor. Facilitators are intensively trained by the RGASC in Supplemental Instruction techniques and proactive study strategies before leading FSG sessions.

Table 3 shows a comparison of overall attendances, number of courses, and number of FSG sessions in the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 academic years.

Table 3

FSG Attendance Data

	Fall 2022	Fall 2023	Winter 2023	Winter 2024	2022-23 Total	2023-24 Total
FSG Leaders					162	200
Student Attendances	1042	2603	1208	1443	2250	4046
Number of Courses	26	29	31	28	57	57
Number of FSG Sessions	354	503	485	469	839	972

Although the number of courses remained the same, in comparison to 2022-2023, the number of FSG sessions in 2023-2024 increased by 16%, while the total number of students attending increased FSGs increased by 80%. This increase in student attendance per session reflects efforts to focus the FSG schedule on offering sessions that better align with student availability, and prioritizing courses that reflect greatest student need. The positive trend of increasing student attendance reflects the ongoing efforts to rebuild the program after the COVID-19 pandemic, and the 4000+ attendance in 2023-2024 is the highest the program has observed since the 2019-2020 academic year. The particularly strong start to the academic year may be attributed to starting training earlier in the summer term and increasing awareness of the FSGs during the 2023 HeadStart program.

FSG and SEE UTM

For the second year, the FSG program supported the Support, Engage, Experience University of Toronto Mississauga (SEE UTM). SEE UTM aims to make post-secondary education more accessible to students who come from communities historically underrepresented at UTM. Three co-facilitators led 12 FSG sessions for Black high school students from the Peel District School Board throughout the Fall Term with 20+ attendees per week.

Collaboration with EDS325 H5

The RGASC continued to collaborate with Language Studies to run EDS325 H5: Supplemental Instruction in Higher Education, a credit-bearing course that introduces students to the theory and practice of Supplemental Instruction in higher education. EDS325 incorporates the RGASC's FSG program as a mandatory internship for every

student on the course. In 2023-2024, 57 students were enrolled into EDS325, compared to 71 students enrolled in 2022-2023, with 51 of the 57 students being directly placed in the FSG sessions. The decrease in students placed reflects changes made in the vetting process, which focused on being more selective regarding the course backgrounds of the incoming students and raising the minimum CGPA requirement for placement.

FSG Process and Communication Improvement

In Winter 2024, RGASC's Program Assistant worked to increase the efficiency of the FSG program and improve communication of the program to students, staff, and faculty across campus. FSG training and marketing videos were produced, a session mapping archive was created, digital files were re-organized on Teams and SharePoint, social media templates were developed and aligned, and exemplar Program Assistant portfolios were developed.

Promoting Academic Skills for Success (PASS)

The PASS Program provides 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 (PASS Term 1) followed by supplemental support and mentoring in the subsequent term (PASS Term 2).

In 2023-24, total attendance for PASS Term 1 increased by 9% from 136 in the 2022-23 academic year to 148 students in 2023-24. Student retention stayed unchanged between the two years at 63%. Total attendance for PASS Term 2 increased by 56% from 35 students in the 2022-23 academic year to 56 students in 2023-24. Retention also increased from 47% to 50% between those years.

PASS Student Data project

In Winter 2023, the PASS team launched a collaborative project with the Office of the Registrar and Divisional Research to refine the process for collecting student data, reporting on student progress, and aligning PASS data with Office of the Registrar student records. Phase 1 of the project was completed in May 2023, while Phase 2 started in November 2023 and will be completed in May 2024. Phase 2 focused on integrating PASS data with student demographic data from the Office of the Registrar to better understand how PASS impacts the academic outcomes of different segments of our at-risk student population. All the data for PASS Term 1 and Term 2 was cleaned in preparation for the construction of a new dashboard, which will be completed in May 2024.

Peer Mentor Learning Communities (PMLC)

The Peer Mentor Learning Communities (PMLC) program is a joint initiative with Accessibility Services, which serves to offer of a series of study skills workshops rooted in the Supplemental Instruction approach in addition to group study sessions, and social gatherings to help build a sense of community amongst all UTM students who are registered with Accessibility Services.

RGASC Program Assistants provide facilitation and study skills training for Accessibility Services peer mentors, who lead study skills sessions for Accessibility students. The RGASC Program Assistants also provide logistical support to schedule and book the sessions and provide feedback on the peer mentors' facilitation during and after session delivery.

Both the Program Assistants and peer mentors supported the Summer Academic Skills Institute (SASI) in August 2023. SASI aims to equip incoming students registered with Accessibility Services with the academic skills and strategies to make a successful transition to postsecondary education. Table 4 shows the attendance data of SASI and PMLC since the 2020-2021 academic year, with PMLC attendance reflecting total attendance at workshops, group study sessions, and socials. In comparison to the 2022-2023 academic year, attendance at PMLC events increased by 103% in 2023-2024. This is largely due to the growth in the number of students attending group study sessions, which may be largely due to these sessions being moved from online to in-person this year.

Table 4

SASI and PMLC Attendance

	SASI Attendance	PMLC Sessions	PMLC Attendance
2020-21	21	24	196
2021-22	22	35	178
2022-23	28	28	153
2023-24	20	27	311

Study Skills Appointments

We continued to offer half-hour online Study Skills appointments through the WCONLINE platform. In Fall 2023 and Winter 2023 we offered 71 hours of appointments. As in previous years, these appointments were not in high demand.

In Fall 2023, 26 unique students booked 41% of the available appointments (16/39 hours). While in Winter 2024, 17 unique students booked 30% of the available appointments (9.5/32 hours). These numbers are comparable to Fall 2022 and Winter 2023 when only 30% (39/132 hours) of Study Skills appointments were utilized.

Study Skills Drop-ins

In a pilot in Winter 2024, the learning strategist team offered three one-hour Study Skills drop-ins in March and April. The intent was to provide students with a flexible space that met their diverse needs for effective studying prior to exams and during a time of peak stress. The drop-in space was organized in three sections to give students the flexibility to access general study skills handouts and chat with peer facilitators, work independently, or consult one-on-one with a learning strategist. Each session attracted 4-5 students.

Additional Specialty Programs

Head Start Program

Head Start, our first-year transition program, was offered online over five days in August 2023. Sessions ran from 10am until 5pm and offered incoming first-year students workshops in foundational academic skills development, an orientation to UTM's academic support services, as well as informal sessions on the university experience with senior students, RGASC staff, and ISUP faculty.

Head Start sessions were well attended. 260 unique students attended the live sessions, with each day attracting an average of 108 unique students. Students were particularly engaged with academic skills development sessions, such as "Writing for University" with Dr. Mark Blaauw-Hara (ISUP), "Time Management" with Linda Duong (RGASC), and "Library 101" with Dr. Nathan Wolfe (UTM Library).

Asynchronous content to support each live session was hosted on the Eagle Connect Quercus site. This content reached 2275 unique students and generated 114,940 page views.

Preparations are underway for Head Start 2024 which will be offered in a hybrid format with in person sessions streamed and recorded for students who cannot come to campus. Asynchronous content will continue to be hosted on the Eagle Connect Quercus site.

Game-Enhanced Learning

Game-Enhanced Learning (GEL) uses board games to aid learning in and out of the classroom in both academic development and student wellness. Currently, ISUP's Mitchell Pedicelli and a team of student volunteers coordinate our program on a part-

time basis. The RGASC's houses the largest board game collection at UTM with 155 unique games. This collection is made up of acquisitions from the RGASC and donations from Tom Klubi, a retired RGASC Learning Strategist.

In 2023-2024, we worked with RGASC's Promoting Academic Skills for Success (PASS) program where we guided Program Assistants (PAs) on how to play and facilitate games (e.g., Pandemic, Concept) used in the PASS program. We also support CCT419: User Experience Design by providing copies of Pandemic and Settlers of Catan and soliciting volunteers for playtesting. We currently do not offer course support to new courses.

Our primary contribution in GEL is our Game Cafés. These Cafés use games to encourage students to socialize and de-stress to avoid isolation and burnout. The Game Cafés also provide peer-to-peer learning opportunities whereby volunteer facilitators teach games to student attendees. Game Cafés occur five times per semester, averaging over 100 students in attendance per session. An additional Exam Jam Game Café occurred at the end of each of the Fall and Winter semesters with attendance of 35 and 60 students respectively. Game Cafés do not run during the summer.

We have also collaborated with many student groups on campus such as Erindale Gaming Organization, UTM Chess Club, UTM E-Sports, and UTM D&D. These clubs provide volunteers and assist with advertisements for the Game Cafés. Hart House partnered with us for four Game Cafés during the Winter semester to help build awareness of that tri-campus centre to UTM students. Groups on campus have been invited to use games from our collection and get advice on how to incorporate games into their programming. Some examples include Accessibility Services, UTM IMACC, and the Department of Language Studies.

Additionally in 2023-24, the Director initiated a research project to investigate GEL initiatives across Canada. The intention is to use these results to inform future GEL programming at the RGASC.

English Language Learner (ELL) Support

Professional English Language Skills (PELS)

Overview and Highlights 2023-2024

In 2023-2024, English as an Additional Language (EAL) support was offered through the Professional English Language Skills (PELS) online program in the Fall and Winter semesters. This supplemental academic and writing support was offered to students for extra marks in CCT110, CIN101, RLG101, VCC101, and WGS102. Students who did not take PELS in a credit-bearing course could take PELS for a Co-Curricular Record (CCR) notation on their transcript. Although PELS is designed to support EAL students, all UTM first-year students are welcome to participate.

This year, in addition to the synchronous and asynchronous online modules and activities, in-person student hours were added and held once a week to address students' concerns about coursework, foster student interaction, and practice speaking and listening skills. Attendance was low at PELS student hours; however, efforts will be made to increase participation in 2024-2025 because students consistently ask for more in-person meetings in their survey responses. Scheduling convenience and UTM-wide promotion of PELS student hours will be addressed going forward.

Since Winter 2023, students have been added to PELS in Quercus and instructed to accept the invitation to participate for course marks or CCR validation. However, students can also access PELS content out of curiosity without submitting assessments. This strategy encouraged enrolment because students could try a few modules before committing to completing a minimum of 7 modules with a mark of 7.5/10 or greater in each module to pass PELS. Enrolment data since 2020 indicates both an increase in PELS enrolment and students who passed the program. It is likely that word-of-mouth student and instructor referrals, class visits to promote PELS, and the easy one-click access to PELS in Quercus has generated more interest and participation (see Table 5).

Table 5

PELS Student Enrolment and Completion Yearly Comparison

	2021-2022	**2022-2023**	**2023/24**
Student Enrolment	756	999	1909
Student Completion	240	316	577
Completion Rate	32%	32%	30%

Strengths and Challenges in 2023-2024

PELS continues to offer academic English language learning and writing development to first-year students – both EAL and non-EAL students – and assist them in the transition to university expectations. The strengths of the program include:

- a model of delivery that offers asynchronous self-study
- formative and corrective assessment feedback,
- encouragement to use supports at the RGASC,

- course marks that reward students' participation through successful completion of at least seven PELS modules – many students complete all eight modules.

Meetings with faculty to debrief course offerings of PELS indicate that the online design of PELS supports students without skewing course grades or creating additional labour for faculty and teaching assistants. Students are motivated to participate in PELS, and survey responses consistently indicate that assessments are fair and allow students to demonstrate their learning.

In-person class visits by PELS instructors improved student participation by responding to questions and clarifying expectations. WGS102 faculty indicated that PELS worked well as a course requirement (not for extra marks), and the instructor noted that increasing the mark from 3% to 5% is a fair and well-reasoned weight for the work that students do in PELS. Last but not least, consistency between RLG101 and other courses benefited students by increasing their exposure to PELS content, assessments, feedback, and RGASC writing support.

Challenges in the delivery of PELS include keeping track of students who completed PELS in a previous semester and making sure they complete 2.0 PELS assessments for course credit in the Winter semester. This went smoothly; however, accurate tracking will continue to be important as more students participate in PELS during the Fall semester.

While the increase in participation shows the popularity of this program with faculty and students alike, responding to discussion threads, marking quizzes, and grading written assignments posed a significant challenge in Winter 2024. This issue was addressed by reducing PELS instructor participation in online discussions and by communicating PELS statistics and global feedback on quiz responses (i.e., percentage of correct answers and common mistakes) instead of individual corrective feedback. For longer written assessments, students were graded using a labour-based approach. That is, correct citation in APA, accurate source integration, and meeting the assignment criteria received full marks while attempting the assessment with errors received a passing mark of 7.5.

Assessing student work was made more challenging due to the frequent use of AI to respond to short answer quiz questions. However, this also afforded instructor cautions and reflecting global errors to students. For the next academic year, PELS assessments will be redesigned to accommodate the significant increase in enrolment and AI use in quiz responses. This will likely require omitting several writing tasks that are manually graded and revising assessments with greater complexity for students to demonstrate critical thinking and writing metacognition. Assessments that are auto graded, yet pedagogically sound for meeting the learning outcomes of PELS, will replace manual

grading; however, this will afford the instructor more time to offer corrective feedback and engage students in discussions and student hours.

Program for Accessing Research Training (PART)

Overview

The Program for Accessing Research Training (PART) is an online research training program designed to prepare UTM undergraduate students for possible participation in research opportunities on campus and an opportunity to acquire foundational skills needed for graduate studies.

In 2023-2024, the RGASC launched a redesigned version of the PART program. The revamped PART aimed to increase accessibility for undergraduate students to participate in PART modules and more efficiently obtain CCR, involve UTM graduate students by offering TA-ships for facilitating certain modules, and respond to the current needs of the UTM community by adding, removing, and revising modules. A draft of the redesigned PART was shared with the PART Advisory Committee, and their input was invaluable.

PART now includes 18 modules. Each module is included in one of five categories: (1) Core (e.g., conducting literature searches), (2) Special Topic (e.g., in STEM, Humanities, Social Sciences), (3) Method (e.g., conducting interviews), (4) Data Analysis (e.g., descriptive statistics), and (5) Communication (e.g., communicating your research). Each module comprises of up to four hours of instruction with a module facilitator and a homework exercise or assessment. Modules include both conceptual discussion and hands-on practice. Each module is offered in the Fall and Winter semesters and again in a compressed format in the summer as the "PART Summer Institute."

In 2023-2024, we adjusted the CCR requirements for PART participation. Previously, students were eligible to receive a CCR annotation on their transcript as either a Qualitative or Quantitative Methods PART participant after completing a specific combination of modules and a reflective writing exercise. As of 2023-2024, students are eligible to receive up to three CCR annotations designated as Core, Intermediate, and Advanced. Students must complete the CCR requirements within one academic year (i.e., Fall, Winter, and condensed PART Summer Institute).

Attendance Data

In Fall 2023 and Winter 2024, a total of 299 undergraduate students enrolled in the PART Quercus shell, and 80 (27%) unique students participated in PART modules. There was a slight increase in the number of unique participants who participated in PART compared to previous years. In 2022-2023, 467 undergraduate students enrolled, and 93 (20%) unique students participated. In 2021-2022, 530 undergraduate students enrolled, and 130 (25%) unique students participated.

PART Summer Institute has shown higher unique student participation as compared to the Fall and Winter semesters. In Summer 2023, 93 enrolled and 50 completed (81%); in Summer 2022, 257, 124 (48%); and in Summer 2021 81, 50 (62%).

A total of 25 students completed all the program requirements to obtain a level of CCR in 2023-2024.

Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities

The redesigned PART brought more opportunities for students to participate in introductory level research training, additional CCR opportunities for students to showcase their engagement with the program, professional development opportunities for graduate students as Teaching Assistants, and a more efficient administrative structure.

A few challenges should be addressed in the year ahead. For instance, there was a lack of engagement in some modules. While an online PART program may be more accessible to students and facilitators, we should consider developing an in-person (partial or full) program to increase engagement. Additionally, considering the high participation rate in the PART Summer Institute (compared to the Fall and Winter semesters), we should think about how this model could be adapted and/or implemented in the Fall and Winter semesters. Lastly, we should improve awareness of the PART program for faculty and in collaboration with the Experiential Education Unit to increase familiarity with the program and assist with our promotional efforts to students.

Graduate Student Support

Overview

The RGASC supports the graduate community at UTM by offering programming in the form of conferences, workshops, writing retreats, and one-on-one writing, numeracy, and study skills consultations. The RGASC also fulfills workshop requests from programs and departments.

The RGASC's support for graduate students is informed by ongoing feedback from the UTM graduate community and an understanding of graduate student needs. The Graduate Student Support Strategist conducts outreach to the UTM graduate community through various methods, including informal one on one and group meetings with graduate supervisors, staff, librarians and students, as well as formal data collection through focus groups, and the Graduate Needs Assessment Survey.

The Graduate Needs Assessment Survey was distributed in October 2023. Survey completion was incentivized with the chance to win one of two $50 gift cards. Sixty graduate students participated from various degrees, years, and departments/programs. The results of the survey indicated that graduate students are currently most interested in workshops, conferences, casual gatherings, online resources, and mentorship

opportunities. While a variety of programming topics were submitted, most were related to writing and career exploration.

Graduate Professional Development Conference

During the Fall 2023 and Winter 2024 UTM Reading Weeks, the RGASC hosted the Graduate Professional Development Conference (GPDC), an event focused on enhancing graduate students' transferable skills to better prepare them for their studies and beyond. The Fall 2023 GPDC was offered online and the Winter 2024 GPDC was a hybrid event. In response to the results of the Graduate Needs Assessment Survey, the Winter GPDC invited graduate students to give lightning talks on topics related to navigating their graduate journey. Each graduate student was given a $100 honorarium to give a 10-minute lightning talk and partake in a Q&A period. This new format to GPDC gave graduate student attendees an opportunity to hear about other graduate students' lived experiences and provided graduate student speakers a professional development opportunity to speak with their peers to build community. GPDC session topics included the academic workflow, transferable skills in teaching, tackling writer's block, data management, and time management in graduate school.

A total of 30 unique participants participated in the Fall 2023 GPDC, and a total of 39 unique participants participated in the Winter 2024 GPDC.

Graduate Workshops

The RGASC hosts workshops for graduate students independently and in collaboration with other units on campus. We also provide programming support for departments upon request. Below is a list of workshops hosted by the RGASC in 2023-2024:

- *Demystifying the Research Writing Process* in collaboration with the Collaborative Digital Research Space (27 attendees)
- *Developing your Research Writing Plan: Balancing Work, Research, and Life* in collaboration with the Collaborative Digital Research Space (6 attendees)
- *Introduction to Python* in collaboration with U of T Coders (23 attendees)
- *Doctoral Seminar: Teaching in a Canadian Context* for UTM's International PhD Scholars (6 attendees)
- *Introduction to R* in collaboration with U of T Coders (7 attendees)
- *Introduction to Zotero* in collaboration with the UTM Library (7 attendees)
- *Introduction to Mendeley* in collaboration with the UTM Library (6 attendees)
- *Revision and Editing in Geographic Writing* for UTM Geography Graduate Students (4 attendees)
- *Effective and Equitable Teaching and Communications* in collaboration with the Teaching Assistants Training Program and UTM's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Office (8 attendees)
- *Doctoral Seminar: Reflective Practice in Teaching & Learning* for UTM's International PhD Scholars (7 attendees)
- *Tips and Processes for Revision and Editing* (3 attendees)

Graduate Writing Group/Retreat

In prior years, the RGASC hosted informal weekly group writing sessions called Graduate Writing Groups. The groups were designed to help graduate students connect to a writing community, stay focused, and make progress in their writing project. Due to the diminishing weekly attendance witnessed over the semesters, the RGASC piloted a monthly Graduate Writing Retreat in the Winter 2024 semester. Unfortunately, there was poor attendance which may be due to other writing retreats open to graduate students at UTM (e.g., Writing Retreats and Co-Writing times with the Collaborative Digital Research Space) as well as writing retreats hosted by other faculties and support units at the St. George campus.

Graduate Resources

In 2023-2024, The RGASC began developing asynchronous resources for graduate students. We hope to launch these resources by Fall 2024 on the RGASC website. The resources include:

- Writing a Conference Proposal
- Goal Setting and Time Management
- Preparing a Conference Talk
- Brainstorming and Outlining
- Writing a Literature Review
- Designing a Poster
- Conference Attendance 101

Graduate Appointments

Graduate students can book appointments for one-on-one appointments related to writing, numeracy, and study skills. Only 5 graduate students booked a writing appointment in the Fall 2023 semester, and no students booked in Winter 2024. These students were looking for support as they prepared research and grant proposals.

Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities

In continuously building and maintaining our connections with the UTM graduate community, this academic year saw numerous opportunities for graduate students, staff, librarians, and faculty to collaborate and learn from one another when developing and facilitating graduate programming.

For 2024-2025, we hope to expand our engagement with the UTM graduate community. We will continue to connect with individual graduate students, graduate student groups, staff and librarians supporting graduate students, and graduate supervisors. Additionally, we will work closely with tri-campus partners to expand our programming and find new opportunities to best support our graduate students.

Instructor Support – Educational Development

The RGASC Educational Development team provides pedagogical support to UTM Instructors of all ranks through individual consultations and programming. The overarching goal of the Educational Developers is to help UTM function effectively as a teaching and learning community.

Individual Consultations

The Educational Development team supported instructors in over 250 individual consultations; 92 unique UTM instructors and 13 staff members were supported. Course design (12% of all consultations) and scholarship of teaching and learning (12%) were the most common consultation topics, followed by teaching dossiers (10%), teaching and learning grants (9%) and assessment design (7%). Most consultations were with Assistant Professors, Teaching Stream (26%), Assistant Professors (16%), Associate Professors, Teaching Stream (13%), and sessional instructors (13%). The RGASC supported instructors across departments at UTM. Instructors from ISUP: Institute for the Study of University Pedagogy, Historical Studies, MCS: Mathematics and Computational Sciences, GGE: Geography, Geomatics and Environment, Biology and Language Studies most often sought one-on-one consultations. Most of our consultations (69%) continue to occur online despite offering both on campus and online options.

The 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 pedagogy. This feedback averaged two to four pages in length.

Educational Development Programming

Workshops for UTM Instructors

Anti-Racist Pedagogies Learning Series

The Anti-Racist Pedagogical Learning Series was the first four-part series designed to support instructors in their journey towards becoming anti-racist educators at UTM. The learning series targeted instructors committed to promoting social justice and equity in their classroom. Twelve faculty members participated in four sessions scheduled monthly throughout Fall 2023. The session titles were as follows:

- Session 1: Understanding Anti-Racist Pedagogies
- Session 2: Roundtable Talk: Applying Anti-Racist Practices in the Classroom
- Session 3: Recognizing and Challenging Bias

- Session 4: Reflecting on Your Positionality with an Anti-Racist Lens

Integrating Generative AI in Assessment Design Sessions

During Fall 2023, the Educational Development team facilitated five sessions focused on integrating generative AI in assessment design. 36 instructors participated in these sessions.

These sessions offered instructors a chance to rethink the design of their course assignments with consideration of the possibilities and constraints of generative artificial intelligence. Sharing ideas with colleagues was an important goal of this session. There was significant interest in this support model from other teaching and learning centres across the tri-campus.

Pedagogical Reading Groups

The Educational Developers facilitated eight pedagogical reading groups: three in Summer 2023 (13 participants), three in Fall 2023 (18 participants), and two in Winter 2024 (12 participants). The groups of faculty and staff met biweekly with assigned chapters to discuss. Participants were encouraged to share how the readings intersected with their pedagogical practice or how they could implement the suggested strategies from the readings in their courses.

25 unique instructors from 10 UTM departments participated in the pedagogical reading groups. This year's reading groups focused on the following books:

- *Design for How People Learn* by Julie Dirksen
- *Inclusive Teaching: Strategies for Promoting Equity in the College Classroom* by Kelly A. Hogan and Viji Sathy
- *The Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning* by Peter C. Brown, Henry L. Roediger III, and Mark A. McDaniel
- *The Academic Well-Being of Racialized Students* edited by Benita Bunjun
- *The Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need* by Sasha Costanza-Chock
- *AI for Educators: Learning Strategies, Teacher Efficiencies, and a Vision for an Artificial Intelligence Future* by Matt Miller
- *Picture a Professor: Interrupting Biases about Faculty and Increasing Student Learning* edited by Jessamyn Neuhaus
- *Distracted* by James Lang

Communities of Practice

Online Teaching Community of Practice

Several instructors voiced their interest in having a space to share ideas and discuss challenges with other instructors who are teaching online. As such, the Educational Developer, Universal Design for Learning & Accessible Pedagogies initiated a community of practice focused on online teaching. The first meeting of the community of practice was held at the end of April 2024 and was met with much enthusiasm by those who participated. The goal of the Online Learning Community of Practice will be to create a space for any UTM instructor with an interest in online teaching and learning to share effective strategies, practices, and ideas, and to discuss and problem solve challenges with trusted colleagues.

Celebration of Teaching Excellence

In collaboration with the UTM Dean's Office, the Educational Developers coordinated the second annual celebration of UTM's recent teaching award recipients, Ken Derry, Lindsay Schoenbohm, and Fiona Rawle. We had an excellent turnout for this event with over 60 people joining to celebrate the teaching and scholarly achievements of the award winners.

Resource Development

The Educational Developers launched the [Teaching and Learning Resource Hub](#) which now includes an accompanying Quercus site. The resource hub includes resources related to assessment, inclusive pedagogy, course design, syllabus design, and an [active learning activity database](#).

A [new section of resources related to online teaching and learning](#) was added during the Winter 2024 semester in response to the large number of courses being taught online during the summer 2024 semester. Most of these resources are framed as just-in-time support, given that half of the online courses offered this summer will be taught by sessional instructors who often have less time to prepare their courses. Resource titles include Time Cues, Creating Inclusive and Equitable Online Classrooms, and Assessment Design for Online Courses. There are also sample pages that instructors can use when building their Quercus sites. The sample pages also highlight pedagogical strategies they can incorporate in their Quercus site to support student learning.

Collaborations and Outreach

The Educational Development team engaged in several collaborations and outreach activities in 2023-2024. Some examples of the collaborations and outreach work of our educational developers include:

- Co-led the launch of the first Anti-Black Racism pedagogical collection at UTM. The LibGuide is a comprehensive research tool developed in collaboration with the UTM Library and ISUP faculty. It is a valuable resource that will benefit students, faculty, and researchers at U of T, and the public.
- Collaborated with the EDIO to deliver an online 90-minute workshop to the Department of Geography Geomatics and Environment (GGE), titled: Introduction to Anti-Racism.
- Collaborated with the UTM Library and the EDIO to deliver an online 50-minute workshop titled: Creating Inclusive and Equitable Online Classrooms.
- Sat on the Black Leadership Table at UTM facilitated through the Office of the Vice President and Principal. This year the leadership group organized the Black on the Shelf event in collaboration with the UTM library, adjudicated and offered six initiatives at UTM under the Black Opportunities Fund providing up to $10,000 per project. The team also coordinated and organized the first Black staff PD Day, scheduled to be hosted in June of 2024.
- Sat on the Anti-Black Racism Operational Group as assembled in 2021 as a local response to the University of Toronto's Anti-Black Racism Task Force Recommendations. The group accomplished several initiatives this year to support Black students at UTM. The group fully launched the Black@UTM website, secured a temporary space for Black student groups on campus, and updated the Black@UTM Dashboard with updates from each unit at UTM for this academic year. The Dashboard now includes the systemic recommendations each group committed to after the ABR Taskforce Recommendations were published.
- Designed and facilitated a learning outcomes workshop for the UTM Department of Anthropology.
- Co-designed and co-facilitated two workshops for the UTM International Graduate Student Cohort focused on teaching philosophies and reflective practice.
- Contributed to the UTM teaching grant adjudication committee.
- Chaired and coordinated the Active Learning Classroom Operation Committee (ALCOG). ALCOG discusses issues and implements solutions that can improve the experience of active learning classrooms from pedagogical, accessible, and technological perspectives.

- Coordinated a three-hour, synchronous online workshop facilitated by Kathy Absolon from the [Centre for Indigegogy](). This workshop was supported by PEFAL funding.
- Collaborated with faculty on a project supported by a LEAF Impact Grant that is working on building truth and reconciliation into the UTM Biology curriculum. This project aims to build Truth and Reconciliation into the Biology curriculum in a three-pronged approach: the development of a new course "BIO294: Truth and Reconciliation for Biologists"; a learning circle for the Biology Department; and the development of learning modules focused on understanding the impact of settler colonialism that can be added to existing biology courses.
- Collaborated with the Chair of Chemistry and Physical Science to design and facilitate a departmental workshop focused on exploring the intersections between academic rigour and compassion.
- Collaborated with the Associate Dean, Pedagogical Development and Scholarship to design and facilitate a workshop on course design for UTM's New Faculty Orientation.
- Co-Chaired the UTM Interdisciplinary Teaching Workshop Group, which aims to contribute to the next UTM academic plan and includes instructors from all UTM departments.
- Planned and facilitated a day-long curriculum retreat for the UTM Biology department. The retreat was the first step of their program review process.
- Hosted the first two-day planning retreat for the National Community of Care for Education Developers of Canada (NCCEDC). This is a CoP for Canadian Education Developers that primarily focuses on anti-oppressive pedagogies.
- Served as a Co-Chair of the NCCEDC. Each Co-Chair shares equal responsibility for planning, facilitating, and taking notes during the monthly workshops. Additionally, the Co-Chairs meet monthly to organize the details of the upcoming workshop. They also work asynchronously to handle other matters related to the membership.

Other Key Projects

In addition to the programming and resource development described above, the Educational Developers worked on a number of key projects. These projects included the:

- Further development to the [Anti-Black Racism Pedagogical Collection (LibGuide)]() to include a broader social justice framework. This LibGuide has been developed in collaboration with the UTM library and with support from Nathan Wolfe.
- The creation of document called "Equity Considerations and Gen AI." The purpose of this document is to prompt instructors to consider equity-related

issues before reporting student academic offences. This document aims to function as a personal equity considerations checklist for educators.

- Expansion of the active learning activities database and inclusion of videos of activities in action as an additional modality for text-based descriptions of activities in the database.
- Curation of resources that support pedagogical applications of generative artificial intelligence.

Research Contributions

McKay, G., Goldman, A., **Bent-Womack. C**. (2024). Dismantling barriers for equity-deserving students in WIL. International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning, Special Issue, 2024, 25(1), 23-36.

Ma, J., Maradiaga Rivas, V., Huang, X., Khan, M., Rukh E Qamar, H., Salih, A., Esemu-Ezewu, J., Satia, A., Joseph, A., Gabel, C., Saravanamuttu, K., & **Bent-Womack, C**. (2023). Dismantling white supremacy through anti-racist and decolonial pedagogies: Mapping postsecondary education's capacity for shifting dynamics of privilege and marginalization. Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Knowledge Synthesis Grant.

Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities

This year we had some ebbs and flows in the size of the Educational Development team, as we lost and gained members. The Educational Developer, Indigenous Knowledges role has faced recruitment and hiring challenges and is in the process of being reimagined.

Rebuilding a strong teaching and learning community on campus continues to be a challenge, but we have seen some promising trends that offer us a direction for 2024-2025. We found that cohort offerings that allowed for sustained community building have been well-received by UTM instructors. Programming related to equity-focused teaching and generative artificial intelligence is consistently well attended. We will continue to offer opportunities for UTM instructors to connect with colleagues across departments as this also seems to motivate participation.

In 2022-2023, we found that workshops were often poorly attended, so we shifted more of our focus to individual consultations. Individual consultations often allow instructors to meet their pedagogical goals in a more time-efficient way than attending a workshop. The focus on individual consultations has been helpful for outreach and relationship building but is significantly more resource intensive.

We noticed an increase in the number of consultations requests we received from instructors in Chemical and Physical Sciences, English and Drama, and Visual Studies.

These were departments we rarely interacted with in 2022-2023, but that we made an extra effort to reach out to this year and were encouraged by the response from instructors. In the upcoming year, we plan to prioritize outreach to the Economics, Psychology, and Philosophy departments by working with Chairs and Associate Chairs to identify unmet pedagogical support needs. We also hope to expand the number of UTM instructors that we support. We will continue to connect with new instructors through participation in new faculty orientations and by reaching out personally to share an overview of the support we offer.

We will continue to expand programming, resources and consultation opportunities related to anti-oppressive pedagogies, anti-racist pedagogies, Indigenous pedagogies, and accessible pedagogies, creating space for the UTM teaching and learning community to identify and discuss systemic barriers.

We will continue to develop research-based resources and support related to pedagogical possibilities and challenges presented by generative artificial intelligence tools.

Promotion and Outreach

Print Materials and Digital Screens

In 2023-2024, the RGASC continued to expand its communications and marketing initiatives with a new, cohesive look and feel designed with the external marketing company STC. This new look and feel features multiple arrangements of brightly coloured shapes that represent the RGASC as building blocks for academic success; this is meant to be fun, approachable, accessible, and sophisticated.

We enhanced STC's initial concept by designing new print and digital material including: student brochures, PowerPoint presentation template, vinyl stickering for our front office glass wall, vinyl stickering for our front door, program postcards, and digital screen content posted across campus. Print and digital material was targeted for specific programming or groups such as graduate programming, facilitated study groups, Caribbean Black Writing Collective, Game Café, and instructor support. We designed and invested in large banners and tabletop banners to be used at outreach events.
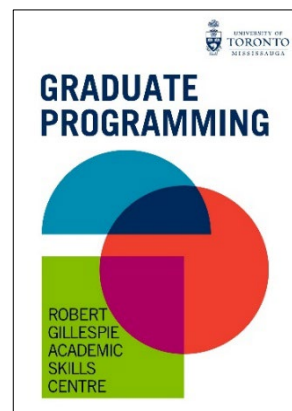
Expanding our print materials and digital screen content increases our presence in the UTM community and makes it easy to connect with students, faculty, and parents during multiple events including Fall & March Open Houses, as well as Fall and Winter Exam Jams. We spoke to and handed out promotional materials to over one hundred families during the March Open House alone. We strengthened our connection to our campus service partners by leaving print materials for distribution at the new Student Services

Hub and connecting to various departments via social media. To continue expanding awareness of the RGASC, we distributed posters, and brochures throughout campus and consistently post promotional materials on the UTM campus digital screens.

In 2024-2025, we plan to expand our print materials to include additional postcards for programs like PART, update sandwich boards to place near the Student Services Hub, and develop designs for our promotional materials that fall within our new look and feel.

Website

The RGASC website has undergone extensive changes to enhance accessibility, navigation, and visual cohesion. We updated most of the main landing pages to include our new graphics in the header images.

We archived multiple outdated pages to correspond with our current programming. The home page now serves as a point of access for every page, including pages previously hidden within the menu. Our website now includes four rotating "hero" images on the top half of the home page that correspond with available programming, including a new events calendar which compiles all RGASC events programming into one place.

The home page now includes two simple call-to-action rows: Support for Students, and Support for Instructors, that are straightforward and easy to navigate. Our About Us and Graduate Programming pages feature mini staff biographies to help personalize our programming and encourage a culture of support and familiarity. To increase consistency in our name use, we updated the RGASC website URL from utm.utoronto.ca/asc to utm.utoronto.ca/rgasc with the help of the Office of Communications.

We integrated our online resources into two resource hubs: the Teaching and Learning Resource Hub and the Student Resource Hub. We converted the Teaching and Learning Resource Hub Microsoft Word documents to web pages so that they are accessible to individuals using screen readers. In 2024-2025, we will complete the process of converting Student Resource Hub PDFs to webpages in the same manner. To convert PDFs with math equations to accessible web pages, we collaborated with

the AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act) Office, the Office of Communications, and I&ITS to develop a math module in LaTeX. This math module was implemented into UTM's content management system Drupal, in March 2024. Because of this collaborative effort, we can now directly input math equations into our webpages so that they are readable by a screen reader.

Web Analytics

Our website has seen an increase in engagement with our top viewed pages including the home page (12,175 views), the appointments page (8,722 views) as well as the Facilitated Study Groups page (5,425 views) compared to 2022-2023.[1]

The device breakdown demographic data shows us that 23.6% of our users access the website via their mobile device, 75.3% access via desktop, and 1.2% access via tablet. This means that as we continue to update our website and audit for accessibility, we must consider the mobile user experience. Furthermore, the top of the week demographic information conveys that users are the most active during weekdays. Therefore, weekly website updates should be scheduled accordingly.

Overall, the data suggests that we need a targeted strategy when scheduling website updates. In 2024-2025, our primary focus is to increase our engagement with the Teaching and Learning Resource Hub and to complete the Student Resource Hub while ensuring the website remains accessible.

Social Media

In 2023-2024, the RGASC increased its output of video content and developed a cohesive social media strategy using our new look and feel.

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[1] In June 2023, the Office of Communications changed the UTM web analytics service from Universal Analytics to Google Analytics 4, meaning that our data does not capture the period of May to July 2023; however, it still represents the majority of the year and the current data trends on the RGASC website. Similarly, while Google Analytics 4 does not convey the same information as Universal Analytics, we can still glean general user engagement with the RGASC website.
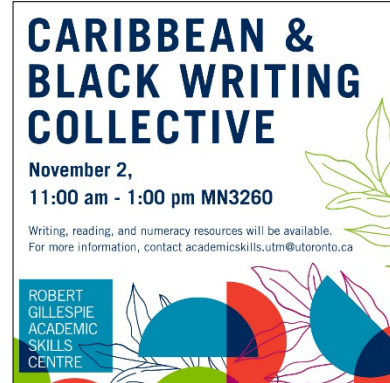
We also implemented a content scheduler using Microsoft SharePoint Lists to schedule and organize social media content and created multiple Instagram Reels series. This series includes content like 10 Questions with an RGASC Staff Member, and Study Tip Investigations, which help us to connect with the UTM community. We streamlined the communications work-study program and gave students individualized portfolios for their content creation. This division of workload helped us to increase our reach and grow our audience.

From May 1, 2023, to April 30, 2024, our cumulative reach increased by 147.5% by connecting with 15.4k accounts throughout the year. Our cumulative content interactions including likes, saves, and comments increased by 100%, totaling 3.8k. We expanded RGASC's awareness within the UTM community and grew in every metric including our lifetime followers of 1.5k. While we have continued to post on X (formally known as Twitter), changes to the structure of the social media platform have made it a less inviting space for higher education institutions, and it is no longer a core focus in our social media strategy. In the future, we plan to produce additional video content to help promote the RGASC and create novel resources for academic skills by implementing a comprehensive video strategy including our YouTube channel.

Other Projects and Partnerships

Mississauga Academy of Medicine

The partnership between the RGASC, the Office of Learner Affairs (OLA) and the Mississauga Academy Medicine (MAM) has continued into this third year. From 2021-2022, an RGASC academic success faculty member provided academic support to Undergraduate, MD Program Students, at UTM. In 2023, appointments were offered by an RGASC learning strategist. Appointments were offered online in 30-minute and 60-minute time slots.

In 2023-2024, a total of 34 students attended a MAM-focused learning strategies appointment.