



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO
MISSISSAUGA

Foundational Skills Working Groups

Reports & Recommendations



Andrew Petersen, Acting Vice-Dean, Teaching & Learning
Office of the Dean, UTM
Academic Affairs Committee – March 28, 2019

Working Groups

- Struck in accordance with Goal 1 of UTM Academic Plan 2017
 - “Developing communication skills from foundational to advanced levels (**written, numerical, analytical, oral and visual**)”



Committee Membership

Foundational Writing Skills Working Group

(Chair) **Heather M.-L. Miller**, Office of the Dean

(Acting Chair) **Andrew Petersen**, Office of the Dean

(Secretary) **Adriano Pasquali**, Office of the Dean

Brett Beston, Department of Psychology

Feng Chen, Department of Management

Tyler Evans-Tokaryk, Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre

Adam Giles, Office of the Registrar

Shelley Hawrychuk, U of T Mississauga Library

Michael Kaler, Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre

Jayson Parker, Department of Biology

Lavan Puvaneswaran, Department of Management

Anjeza Rexha, Department of Biology

Jessica Silver, Centre for Student Engagement

Holger Syme, Department of English & Drama

Alan Walks, Department of Geography

Foundational Numeracy Skills Working Group

(Chair) **Heather M.-L. Miller**, Office of the Dean

(Acting Chair) **Andrew Petersen**, Office of the Dean

(Secretary) **Adriano Pasquali**, Office of the Dean

Andie Burazin, Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre

Tyler Evans-Tokaryk, Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre

Shay Fuchs, Department of Mathematical & Computational Sciences

Alexandra Gillespie, Department of English & Drama

Yuhong He, Department of Geography

Kent Moore, Department of Chemical & Physical Sciences

Judith C. Poë, Department of Chemical & Physical Sciences

Fiona Rawle, Department of Biology

Christopher Richter, Department of Biology

Bruce Schneider, Department of Psychology

Truc Tran, Office of the Registrar

Cosmin Munteanu, Institute for Communication, Culture, Information & Technology

Working Groups



Timeline

- Monthly meetings held Dec. 2017 – July 2018
- Initial reports presented at Chairs' and Directors' Meetings on September 12 and October 2 and in town halls
- Working Groups reconvened in late October 2018 to revise proposals according to feedback received
- Revised **numeracy** proposal to be brought to Chairs for consultation throughout February-March 2019
- More detailed **writing** proposal, including implementation recommendations, in progress for review in April-May 2019

WORKING GROUPS

COURSE APPROACH

UPPER-YEAR SUPPORT

INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

BENEFITS TO UTM

Foundational First-Year Course



Course Approach

- Both Working Groups expressed strong interest in introducing a foundational first-year course taught by specialists in the pedagogy of writing/numeracy
 - The numeracy group also suggests a support option for units that do not wish to opt in to requiring a course.
- Course and curriculum overseen by a standing committee of specialists and disciplinary representatives
- Flexibility for different courses sections to engage different content, such as disciplinary applications
- Foundational courses will have integrated assessment to track student progress and tailor instructor feedback to their needs

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Foundational Writing Course



Writing for University and Beyond

- Required course for **all students** at UTM to be taken in their first year of study
- Course will also serve a **cohort-building function** and provide support for students transitioning into university
- 100-level half-course fulfilling a **new writing (0.5 FCE) degree requirement**
- Small classes taught by instructors with a **specialized background** in teaching writing

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Foundational Writing Course



Mechanics of Instruction

- Portfolio-based seminars
- Small class-sizes (maximum of 30 students)
- Offered across Fall/Winter/Summer semesters
 - Approximately 140-160 sections per year
- Reflective assessment in week 1 to help students choose whether to take a preparatory course
- Curriculum overseen by a multi-disciplinary committee to maintain consistency in learning outcomes

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Foundational Numeracy Course



Foundational Numeracy

- Develop a set of courses in foundational numeracy with shared learning objectives, content, and structure, but with applications appropriate to particular disciplines
- First-year course that teaches foundational numeracy skills in contexts specific to disciplinary areas
- Interested science departments opt-in by including the course in their program requirements
- Offered to humanities and social sciences students as an elective that fulfills 0.5 FCE of the science distribution credit

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Upper-Year Support

- Students are coming to university from diverse backgrounds with differing levels of ability that require a more individualized approach
- A single course will not be sufficient to improve writing and numeracy skills



Disciplinary Pathways

- Skills obtained in the foundational course must be reinforced in upper-years and applied to discipline-specific contexts
- Expand program-specific service courses, such as those offered by Mathematics and Statistics
- Introduce modules into upper-year courses as part of curricular pathways that hone advanced disciplinary skills

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Upper-Year Support



Writing Development Initiative

- Continue existing WDI services while encouraging and assisting departments with teaching discipline-specific writing skills in core courses across the curriculum



Numeracy Development Initiative

- Expand RGASC's current support for numeracy instruction into a full NDI following the model and successes of the WDI
- Numeracy specialists to offer support for discipline-specific module development and integration into existing courses

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Integrated Assessment

- Both working groups stress the importance of assessment to evaluate program effectiveness and to improve delivery
- Student outcomes will be tracked both within the proposed courses and in upper years to evaluate long-term impact and effectiveness of upper-year support



Numeracy

- The numeracy group places particular emphasis on the importance of assessment, given that numeracy support has less history on this campus
- The committee calls for a new working group to be convened after five years to evaluate the data and to revisit the recommended course and upper-year supports

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Resource Implications



Staffing

- Both groups call for permanent teaching-stream faculty to teach the foundational courses and conduct research on pedagogy in their area
- WDI and NDI responsibilities would be built into their workloads
- Allows for continuity in the programs to support continuous improvement



Extra-Departmental Unit

- Both groups call for hires to be placed into a single unit (an EDU, to be created) to support a shared purpose and to ensure consistent promotion and support processes

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Benefits to UTM



Faculty

- Providing all students with foundational writing and numeracy instruction in first year should result in improved performance with disciplinary applications in upper-year courses
- First-year, cohort-building courses that cross program boundaries will distinguish UTM among Canadian universities



Students & Parents

- Increased support for students transitioning into university, especially international students
- Improving qualitative and quantitative skills will provide UTM students with a distinct advantage and help to build resilience in their future careers

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THANK YOU



FEEDBACK



We invite you to consult broadly with your departments and the wider UTM community about this initiative. Please submit any comments and feedback to academicplan.utm@utoronto.ca.