Enhancing the impact and presence of Supplemental Instruction through volunteer leaders

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Personal Profile

• Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre (RGASC), University of Toronto Mississauga
• Program Strategist for PASS, Facilitated Study Group program
• Academic coaching and transition programming
• Experience in education from high school to university level
• Originally from the U.K.
Presentation Outline

Past
1. History of S.I. at University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM)
2. Rationale for the move to a volunteer model

Present
3. The role of Program Assistants (PAs)
4. S.I. at UTM in 2017-18

Future
5. Next steps: experiential learning course
University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM)

- Built on the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit River
- Established in 1967
- Second largest division of the University of Toronto
- Currently 14,000 undergraduate students and 682 graduate students
- 17 academic departments and 156 programs
History of S.I. at University of Toronto Mississauga
Supplemental Instruction at UTM
Facilitated Study Groups (FSGs)

2003:
• S.I. launched at UTM
• S.I. sessions at UTM are called Facilitated Study Groups (FSGs)

2005 to 2009:
• FSGs funded by a grant provided by GE Canada
• Approximately 30 paid facilitators per year

2009 onwards:
• Paid facilitators replaced by volunteers
• Small number of senior facilitators were hired as Program Assistants

2012:
• Formalization of the program’s dual mandate:
  • Integration of academic skills with course-related material
  • Providing an experiential learning opportunity to students to develop them professionally.
Timeline


- Total FSG Sessions
- Total Attendances
- Total Unique Students
- Total Unique Students 2+ Sessions
- Total of FSG courses
- Facilitator Cache (Paid/Volunteer)
Rationale for the Move to a Volunteer Model
Volunteer Model Rationale

**Sustainability**
- End of the GE grant in 2009
- Volunteer model allowed for growth independent of funding

**Student Professional Development**
- Previous model limited professional development to only 30 facilitators per year
- FSGs became training ground for future teaching assistants

**Program Agility**
- More facilitators increased awareness of S.I. around campus

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<th>2009-10</th>
<th>2017-18</th>
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<td>FSG Sessions</td>
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The Role of Program Assistants (PAs)
The Role of Program Assistants

Rationale

The move from a paid to volunteer model led to an increase in the total number of facilitators (leaders). The larger leader cadre subsequently led to increases in:

• The number of training hours
• Hours of student portfolio support required
• The number of facilitators in need of one-on-one coaching
• The volume of sessions requiring monitoring
• Day-to-day administrative tasks (e.g. emails, scheduling)
The Role of Program Assistants

Responsibilities

Each Program Assistant works for 6 hours a week, and their responsibilities include:

• Coaching and supervising the facilitators within their cadre
• Organizing the FSG and Program Assistant schedules
• Mapping sessions and providing feedback to facilitators
• Working with RGASC staff to train new and current facilitators
The Role of Program Assistants
Responsibilities: Coaching & Supervision

Collaborative Facilitation:
• Mock Sessions
• Mega FSGs

Joint Announcements:
• In-class announcements
• Blackboard announcements

Written and Verbal Feedback:
• Post-session verbal feedback
• Written and graded session plan/reflection feedback

Hello CHM120 Facilitators,

You have created a very thorough session plan. I appreciate how well you organized your activities using time stamps. The level of organization will help you adapt your sessions in practice when things do not necessarily go as planned. As well, you will be able to adapt your FSG based on the questions you planned.

As a next step for improvement, use more specific terms in the key skills you want students to develop. Words like “understand” are vague verbs. What words can you use to visualize learning? Consider using words like “apply” and “identify”. Once you target the section on your learning goals, you will be able to improve the specificity of your checks for understanding. How will this impact the activities you design and their effectiveness?

Send me an email to continue discussing this feedback or if you have any questions. Additionally, feel free to drop by the Academic Skills Centre if you would like other resources for future session plans.

Best,

Martin
# The Role of Program Assistants

## Responsibilities: Training

| **Initial Training** | • 15 hours of training either over a 2 day duration or in individual modules.  
• PAs are equipped to deliver each module of training independently with staff support. |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **In-Service Training** | • Twice per term 1 hour training.  
• PAs organize and deliver all training with a focus on sharing good practice and modelling effective S.I. techniques. |
| **One-on-One Top-Up Training** | • PAs schedule one-on-one training sessions with facilitators who may need to further develop their facilitation skills.  
• These sessions can be at the request of the facilitator, the PA or faculty. |
The Role of Program Assistants

Administration

Ongoing administrative tasks include:

- Collecting student attendance
- Booking rooms
- Creating facilitator teams
- Coordinating PA mapping responsibilities
- Liaising with faculty by email and in-person
- Posting Blackboard announcements
- Uploading student attendance into the Repository of Student Information (ROSI)
The Role of Program Assistants

Responsibilities: Mapping

- Visual record of each session
- The application allows the PA to take photos, make written annotations and make graphical representations
- The ‘map’ is referred to when providing verbal feedback
- A PDF copy is emailed and integrated into facilitator portfolios.
The Role of Program Assistants

Characteristics & Requirements

• Former S.I. leader with 2 years experience (1 year in exceptional cases)

• Excellence in S.I. facilitation

• Leadership and management skills

• Dedication and commitment to the program

• Familiarity with multiple courses
“Not only did being a program assistant allow me to practice leadership, professionalism, responsibility and effective communication, but I also gained insight into ways to promote effective learning strategies.”


Sometimes I had to lead training or advise facilitators, which also helped me develop into more of a leader.

A.P., 4th year Molecular Biology student
The Role of Program Assistants

Comments

“I believe I can be a much more effective facilitator as a result of being a Program Assistant for the past year, as I have thoroughly seen firsthand what methods consistently work in academic settings.”

N.L. 3rd year, Forensic Sciences student

This position has sharpened my ability to send professional emails, and has improved my confidence in interacting with other Professors.

One thing that I truly loved as a PA, was seeing students who attended my FSGs go on to become facilitators or PAs themselves.

S.I. at UTM in 2017-18
Learning Management System

Reflection and Session Plan Feedback

FSGs: Student FAQs
1. What are FSGs?
   FSGs are a cornerstone of the Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre at UTSC. FSGs are study sessions run by volunteer senior students who have previously done well in the course. These study sessions focus upon the skills required to be successful in the course. The sessions are taught by_PH_ and aim to help students develop their study skills, improve their understanding of the content of the course, and prepare for exams.

2. In FSG attendance mandatory?
   Yes, FSG attendance is mandatory. There are free resources available for students to voluntarily attend throughout the year if a variety of courses.

3. Am I being marked on what I do in the FSG?
   No, you will not be marked on the work you do in an FSG. The FSG is a place where students work together with their FSG Leader on study skills that are required to be successful in the course.

4. Why should I attend FSGs?
   FSGs are an excellent place to meet other people and study together. Students will have the opportunity to form learning communities while developing a variety of study skills. In addition, the FSG Leaders will assist in constructing the session so that the learning that takes place is meaningful and as task. There is also research on FSGs that shows that students who regularly attend these sessions earn higher grades than those who do not attend FSGs (Bromme, 2015). Students who attend FSGs also develop important thinking, organizational, and problem-solving skills which leads to greater success in their academic careers (Bromme, 2015).

5. Do I have to regularly attend these sessions or should I just go when I need help?
   It is your choice how regularly you attend the FSG sessions. However, it would be beneficial to attend regularly so you will have a better understanding of how FSG works and have more opportunities to practice your skills in a collaborative setting.

6. How often should I be attending FSGs to help with my grade in the course?
   FSG attendance is voluntary and your attendance depends on your schedule and learning needs. However, our analysis of FSGs and student grades from the past have shown that students who attend more frequently tend to score higher marks than those who do not attend.

7. Do I get course credit for attending FSGs?
   Please refer to your course syllabus for details on how attendance will be evaluated.
Leaders, Courses & Attendance
2017-18

| Sessions: | 645 |
| Courses Supported: | 47 |
| Attendance: | 4600+ |
| Facilitators (Leaders): | 176 |
| Program Assistants: | 10 |

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S.I. Beyond the RGASC

Academic Societies

- UTM Anthropology Society
- English and Drama Students Society
- Sociology & Criminology Society
- J. Tuzo Wilson Geology Club

Exam Jam

- Mega FSGs
- Hybrid FSG/Review Sessions
Next Steps: Experiential Learning Course
EDS 325

Why Launch a Course?

✓ Better measurement of facilitator progress
✓ Academic value to student participation
✓ Facilitators get academic credit for their work
✓ More intensive focus on S.I. theory at UTM
✓ Enhanced ability to maintain program
✓ Institutional validation of the program
✓ Alignment with UofT’s emphasis on growing experience-based learning opportunities
"If the FSG program became a credit-bearing course how likely is it that you would join this course?"

- Very likely: 36%
- Likely: 23%
- Not sure: 14%
- Unlikely: 21%
- Very unlikely: 6%
Which of the following benefits of taking this course would be most important to you?

- **Learning more about S.I.** 19%
- **Experience in a course structure** 23%
- **More skill development** 14%
- **Internship designation** 11%
- **More opportunities to collaborate** 3%
- **Academic credit** 26%
- **Other** 4%
Overview of EDS 325

Course Content
- History of S.I.
- Research on S.I. in Higher Education
- Facilitation in the workplace
- Constructivist theory
- Group dynamics
- Interpersonal communication

EDS325H5 Supplemental Instruction in Higher Education: The Impact of Peer-Facilitated Study Groups (HUM, EXP)

This course will introduce students to the theory and practice of Supplemental Instruction (SI) in higher education. Particular focus will be on the history and evolution of SI, the rationale for its use in different university contexts, and it will introduce the relevant tools and resources that facilitators use when running study groups. Current research investigating the impact of Supplemental Instruction on student success will be explored. This course includes a mandatory internship component in which students apply the knowledge acquired in class to their role as a Facilitated Study Group leader in the Peer Facilitated Study Group (FSG) Program run by the Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre. Only those students who have successfully secured a volunteer facilitator position in the FSG Program are eligible to enroll in this course. In addition to the lecture and tutorials hours, there will be 100 hours for internship. [24L, 12T]

Assessment
- Session mapping
- Reflection activities
- Poster presentations
- Session plan assignments

Activities
- Session planning
- S.I. specific training
- Role play/mock sessions
- 8 hours of facilitation experience per term
- Program Assistant coaching
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1. Idea pitched to RGASC Director

2. Website additions
   • To demonstrate legitimacy and ownership

3. Discussion with a “champion” in the Education Minor program

4. Discussion between RGASC Director and Language Studies Chair

5. Idea is proposed to the Vice Dean
   • Vice Dean recommends surveying current facilitators

6. Facilitators are surveyed and support is demonstrated

7. Vice Dean approves. Director presents course description to Curriculum Committee

8. Curriculum Committee meets and approves in principle

9. Further approval steps at Curriculum Committee level

10. EDS325 is added to the course calendar for the 18/19 academic year
Planning for Launch

Factors to consider:

• Placement of students
• Curriculum design
• Changes to the training model
• Messaging
Next Steps for the Volunteer Model

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<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Proposed Strategies</th>
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| Limited opportunities for ongoing professional development      | Increase in-service training sessions  
Develop online training materials (including video clips) |
| Mapping every facilitator                                       | Adding the tracking of mapping to the new LMS so we can better target PA mapping activities |
| Limited opportunities to share good practice                    | Utilize the chat functions on the LMS and develop a repository for facilitator materials |