



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING

**JOINT TASK FORCE
ON ACADEMIC ADVISING & MENTAL HEALTH**

FINAL REPORT

NOVEMBER 29, 2019

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Introduction

The health and wellbeing of our students is the top priority of the Faculty of Applied Science & Engineering (U of T Engineering). Student mental health, in particular, remains a topic of pressing concern for universities across the country, including the University of Toronto.

In recent years, U of T Engineering has undertaken several evaluations of its environment and ability to promote and support mental wellness. The Dean's Task Force on Academic Advising recognized the importance of student-support staff, especially academic advisors, as important resources for our students. Its [final report](#), released in 2016, outlined 10 recommendations that focused on the language around advising, resources for advisors and the further professionalization of academic advising within U of T Engineering.

Building on those findings, in 2017 U of T Engineering received a [report](#) from the Decanal Mental Health Task Force that outlined 11 recommendations to increase awareness, support and policies regarding student mental health within the Faculty.

In March 2019 following a death on campus, U of T President Meric Gertler responded to an outcry from students demanding better policies and support systems for those experiencing challenges to their mental health, [outlining four actions](#) the University would take in an effort to better support students. One of these actions was to form the Presidential & Provostial Task Force on Student Mental Health to review mental health supports and services for U of T students.

At U of T Engineering, we heard students raise fears around access to mental health and wellness services on campus and indicate that they felt that the University had no interest in their overall wellbeing. We recognized the urgent and ongoing need to examine and reinforce student supports at the Faculty level.

In April 2019, U of T Engineering's Joint Task Force on Academic Advising & Mental Health (JTF) was created to review the work of previous Faculty task forces and make further recommendations with regards to academic advising and student mental health and wellness.

Most of the recommendations from the previous task forces have been implemented; however, there was recognition from U of T Engineering's senior administration that more work was required. The recommendations the previous task forces provided were considered by the JTF in their work this past summer.

Furthermore, U of T Engineering's [2017-2022 Academic Plan](#) includes the following goals:

- Improve the quality, accessibility and delivery of academic advising services.
- Leverage and create resources and develop policies and procedures to support mental wellness, assist students in need and promote healthy lifestyles.

With these considerations in mind the JTF was tasked with the following areas of focus:

- Academic advising resources, staff complement & training.
- Mental health and wellness training for students, staff, faculty and teaching assistants.
- Reviewing Faculty policies and resources with a mental health and wellness lens.

- Consult with U of T Health & Wellness, Accessibility Services and other service providers and make recommendations for existing and/or new partnerships.
- Consider a permanent committee structure to ensure student experience, wellness and mental health issues are continuously prioritized by the Faculty.
- Additional issues as deemed critical by the JTF.

The JTF had representation from undergraduates, graduate students, faculty and staff. Members met 17 times from April 22, 2019, to November 6, 2019. In addition to making recommendations for future action, the JTF, in consultation with Dean Emerita Cristina Amon and Dean Chris Yip, took action on a number of items as outlined in this report.

JTF Membership

- **Professor Tom Coyle**, Vice-Dean, Undergraduate (Co-chair)
- **Don MacMillan**, Faculty Registrar (Co-chair)
- **Professor Julie Audet**, Vice-Dean, Graduate Studies
- **Chris Brown**, Assistant Registrar, Academic Scheduling & Senior Business Analyst
- **Samantha Cheung**, Graduate Student Representative
- **Shayni Curtis-Clarke**, Academic Advisor, Department of Civil & Mineral Engineering
- **Melissa Fernandes**, Health Education Coordinator, U of T Health & Wellness
- **Professor Jason Foster**, Associate Chair, Division of Engineering Science and Acting Vice-Dean, First-year Engineering
- **Leslie Grife**, Associate Director, First-year Programs, First Year Office
- **Cori Hanson** (she/her), Assistant Director, Student Experience & Teaching Development
- **Shawana Munir**, Undergraduate Student Representative
- **Shivani Nathoo**, President, Engineering Society 2018-2019 and Undergraduate Student Representative
- **Professor Micah Stickel**, Vice-Dean, First-year Engineering
- **Kathleen Vranesic**, Skule Mental Wellness Director, Engineering Society, and Undergraduate Student Representative
- **Dani Couture** (she/her), Communications Coordinator, Office of the Registrar (Secretary)

Summary of recommendations related to academic advising and mental health as related to the undergraduate student experience:

- 1. Continue to foster a culture of caring and support at U of T Engineering and destigmatize mental health challenges.**
- 2. Creation of a Dean's Advisory Committee on Student Mental Health and new Mental Health Officer position in the Faculty.**
- 3. Offer and promote more mental health training resources to U of T Engineering staff and faculty.**
- 4. Identify student mental health and wellness training for all student-facing staff (academic advisors, front-line student services, instructors, teaching assistants, etc.).**
- 5. Ensure new job postings and interview questions for academic advisors include language related to advising-based competencies.**
- 6. Create a full-time academic advisor position to support first-year international students in the First Year Office and make Engineering Science's new academic advisor position permanent after the one-year contract ends.**
- 7. Review academic advising caseloads, frequency of complex cases and petition volume by department/division.**
- 8. Development of a proactive advising notification system in the Academic Advising Portal.**
- 9. Standardize academic advisors' out-of-office and auto-response messages to include links to helpful resources and services. This effort could be applied to all staff who regularly interact with students.**
- 10. Increase the number of scholarships that recognize U of T Engineering students who have overcome challenges.**

Summary of actions taken related to academic advising and mental health to support the undergraduate student experience:

- 1. Created an Academic Workload Task Force.**
- 2. Implemented the Student Self-Declaration of Illness Pilot for term work.**
- 3. Eliminated student rankings from U of T Engineering's web services.**
- 4. Dean's Honours notations added to official transcripts.**
- 5. Considered the implementation of a Fall Term break.**
- 6. Edited petition response templates to better align with the Faculty's mental health initiatives.**
- 7. Identified prerequisites and co-requisites for courses in Academic Calendar and academic planning tools.**
- 8. Moved Academic Advising Handbook to Office 365 SharePoint to make the handbook more accessible for academic advisors.**

Summary of recommendations related to academic advising and mental health to support the graduate student experience:

- 1. Increase specificity and consistency of graduate student orientations across the Faculty.**
- 2. Explore options for graduate chairs to assess the levels of support available for research-stream graduate students and the climate created by their supervisors.**
- 3. Clarify supervisory expectations by setting guidelines for personal time off and by promoting best practices in graduate supervision within the Faculty.**
- 4. Reduce barriers for research-stream graduate students who need to take medical leaves of absence.**
- 5. All graduate administrators should complete Identify, Assist, Refer (IAR) Training and be encouraged to take additional health and wellness training.**
- 6. Create clear policies for missed work and late withdrawal in graduate and 500-level courses.**
- 7. Make the graduate course schedule available on a centralized website prior to course registration.**
- 8. Continue to support graduate student mental wellness groups.**

Summary of actions taken related to academic advising and mental health to support graduate students:

- 1. Hold Faculty-wide graduate student feedback sessions at least once per year.**
- 2. All teaching assistants (TAs) should complete Identify, Assist, Refer (IAR) Training and be provided with information on student crisis response and wellness resources.**
- 3. Create a graduate student resources page on the Engineering Graduate Studies website.**

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO ACADEMIC ADVISING AND MENTAL HEALTH AS RELATED TO THE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Recommendation 1: Continue to foster a culture of caring and support in U of T Engineering and destigmatize mental health challenges.

Social isolation and loneliness are endemic to university campuses. A 2019 National College Health Assessment Survey found that almost 70% of Canadian university students felt *very lonely* within the past year [1]. The JTF recommends that the Faculty continue to create and foster a culture of caring and support within U of T Engineering. Destigmatizing mental health challenges are part of this work. As part of this recommendation, the JTF recommends the continuation of existing events and the creation of new events where staff, faculty and students can interact in informal settings.

Examples of existing events include the Faculty's new positivity pop-ups, Coffee with Chris (formerly the Dean's Town Hall), Engineering Day at Varsity Stadium and Meet Your Advisor. The JTF encourages faculty and staff to drop by these types of events to interact with students in different settings. These events can be used as opportunities to speak with students about new Faculty initiatives (e.g. elimination of rankings) and further build community within U of T Engineering.

Recommendation 2: Creation of a Dean's Advisory Committee on Student Mental Health and new Mental Health Officer position in the Faculty.

The JTF recommends the creation of a permanent Advisory Committee on Student Mental Health that reports directly to the Dean.

The Dean's Advisory Committee on Student Mental Health would undertake the following tasks:

- Assess mental health resources and services within the Faculty.
- Assess staff and faculty training needs and requirements.
- Make recommendations for the improvement of current mental health resources and services.
- Coordinate and promote mental health training and resources for U of T Engineering students, staff and faculty.

The Dean would select the Committee's Chair (a faculty or staff member) and indicate how frequently he wishes to meet with the Committee. The Chair, in consultation with the Dean and the Engineering Society, would establish the composition of the Committee and the reporting relationship.

The Committee's membership would be drawn from undergraduate and graduate students, staff and faculty, with external expertise consulted as required.

The JTF acknowledges the importance of the work of such a committee and the significant time commitment it would require from all members. As such, the JTF recommends that the Faculty create a full-time position similar to the Faculty of Arts & Science's new Mental Health Officer. The new position would be central to the success of the proposed Dean's Advisory Committee on Student Mental Health. In

addition to their work on the Committee, the individual would coordinate mental health programming and training, conduct research on student mental health and be the Faculty's in-house expert on such matters.

Recommendation 3: Offer and promote basic mental health training for all U of T Engineering staff and faculty.

When facing academic or personal issues, some students approach staff and faculty for assistance and guidance. To best support students, all staff and faculty must have a strong understanding of Faculty and University services, how best to refer students to those services and how to support students in distress.

Currently, staff and faculty onboarding practices vary across the Faculty, the result of which could be that in some instances faculty and staff have little or no training in identifying and assisting students who could be in distress. The JTF recommends that all administrators, faculty and staff complete the 30-minute [Identify Assist Refer online training](#). For new hires, this training should be included in the mandatory HR onboarding process (Appendix A).

In addition to the basic IAR training, the JTF recommends that more mental health training opportunities are made available to staff and faculty within U of T Engineering. The JTF has collaborated with U of T Health & Wellness to develop a strategic plan of mental health training opportunities for the U of T Engineering community. The JTF recommends that this strategic plan is rolled out in collaboration with Health & Wellness over the next three academic years. This plan would be implemented by the Assistant Director, Student Experience & Teaching Development, with support from U of T Health & Wellness and the new Mental Health Program Officer (Recommendation 2).

A sample multi-year training schedule can be found in the Appendices. Furthermore, the JTF recommends the new Dean's Advisory Committee on Student Mental Health (Recommendation 2) assess the Faculty's training needs after three years and determine a yearly training schedule.

Recommendation 4: Identify specific student mental health and wellness training for all student-facing staff (academic advisors, front-line student services)

Academic Advisors and front-line student services staff are often presented with a wide range of student issues that require a strong and broad knowledge base of Faculty, University and community resources. Staff must also have a foundational understanding of student development theory to effectively support students.

In meetings held with advisors throughout the summer, it was noted that there is no consistent approach to onboarding, developing or maintaining this required skill set for advising and front-line student services staff.

Since 2016, new academic advisors have been paired with advising mentors (a recommendation from the Dean's Task Force on Academic Advising [2]) and encouraged to meet with their mentors regularly to discuss routine matters. New advisors are also encouraged to reach out to their mentors when they need assistance or guidance on matters.

With the creation of the Academic Advising Portal and its continued development, advisors have a common and comprehensive tool that will eventually consolidate all web-based student services. With this system, there is a clear need for ongoing training for current advisors and student-facing staff, and there should be clear, deliberate and specific onboarding/training of these systems for new and existing advisors.

The JTF recommends that the Faculty develop an onboarding and training program for all academic advising and front-line student services staff as it pertains to Faculty systems, policies, processes and support services. Additionally, a schedule of advising and student services professional development opportunities should be established. All academic advisors and front-line facing staff should be encouraged by their programs/departments to attend these sessions. Responsibility for the development of this programming should rest with the Assistant Director, Student Experience & Teaching Development with support from U of T Health & Wellness and the new Mental Health Officer (see Recommendation 2) and in collaboration with the Registrar's Office, FYO and the Faculty's advising community of practice. A sample onboarding program and training schedule has been drafted and can be found in the Appendices (Appendix B).

Recommendation 5: Ensure new job postings and interview questions for academic advisors include language related to advising-based competencies.

Before the 2016 Task Force on Academic Advising, U of T Engineering job postings for academic advisors did not always clearly articulate the competencies, aptitudes and knowledge required for effective academic advising. Increasingly, academic advisors are seen as key partners in promoting student mental health and this role must be highlighted in future position descriptions and during the hiring process.

In consultation with U of T Engineering's Human Resources Manager, it was suggested that consistent implementation of standardized language in job descriptions for academic advisors would require cooperation from all chairs, associate chairs, and department and division administrative officers involved in the hiring process. Additionally, the JTF recommends that an experienced academic advisor should have a presence on the hiring panel for a new academic advisor.

The JTF has developed a template to assist with job descriptions and position postings for new academic advisors and front-line student services staff positions (Appendix C). It is expected that when new positions are posted, the Faculty's departments, institutes and division will use elements of the template as appropriate to their needs.

Recommendation 6: Create a full-time academic advisor position to support first-year international students in the First Year Office and make Engineering Science's new academic advisor position permanent after the one-year contract ends.

Within U of T Engineering, we know that success in first-year is critical to a student's future progression to graduation. The FYO assists first-year students in making successful transitions to U of T Engineering and provides students with the tools and support needed to make informed decisions during their first year of study. The FYO currently serves 974 students, 326 of which are international students.

While most students experience challenges transitioning from high school to university, international students may encounter additional challenges related to homesickness, loneliness and social isolation; dietary and cultural adjustments; financial difficulties; language adjustment issues; housing, visa and immigration concerns; and extreme pressure to succeed and not let their families down.

While the Centre for International Experience (CIE) used to provide the Faculty with an on-location advisor for international students for a few hours per week during the academic year, they were unable to maintain the service.

In addition to their advising appointments and emails, all three of the FYO's academic advisors have significant other duties. The FYO's caseloads are higher than the norms indicated in the 2011 NACADA Survey results [3] (296 advisees to each full-time academic advisor). Individual caseloads in the FYO range from a low of 241 students to a high of 464 students.

As a result of the higher caseloads, proactive advising, though desirable, is not always possible. In an ideal state, every first-year student would have one appointment with their advisor in the Fall Term and a second appointment in the Winter Term.

Recently, the Division of Engineering Science added a third advisor on a one-year contract subject to renewal. The addition of a third advisor has allowed them to allocate all international students to a single advisor. The domestic/international student split in Engineering Science is 215/82. The JTF views this as an excellent initiative, as it allows the advisor to specialize in the needs of international students and to focus on identified strategies such as inter-cultural communication and understanding cultural differences and expectation [4].

The JTF recommends the First Year Office hire a new full-time academic advisor. The advisor would focus on one-on-one appointments and special programming for international students. Additional administrative duties would not be associated with this role. A desirable additional benefit of this recommendation would be a reduction in the other three advisors' workload, which would allow them more time for proactive advising. The JTF also recommends Engineering Science's new advisor position be made permanent.

Recommendation 7: Review advising caseloads, the frequency of complex cases and petition volume by department/division.

Throughout June 2019, the JTF conducted meetings with each academic department's academic advising team and their supervisors when possible. The meetings focused on a set of questions that pertained to caseloads, type of work and complexity of work (Appendix D).

From these meetings, several trends were identified:

- An increase in the number of advising appointments.
- An increase in the number of term-work petitions.
- An increase in the number of complex cases requiring additional support and time.
- An increase in referrals to central or on-location resources.
- An increased expectation of professional skills and knowledge as they relate to academic advising and assisting students with complex issues.

It was also clear that there are different levels of support for academic advisors across the Faculty. While some departments have a more robust front-line student support model with one or two dedicated front-line student services staff, other departments have a less robust support model with a single front-line staff member or no front-line staff member.

Within these models, there are varying levels of effectiveness. Some departments have experienced front-line student services staff who are well-trained and able to effectively manage most transactional advising and manage high student-to-advisor ratios well. Other departments have struggled to retain front-line student services staff for the length of time that is required to build the depth and breadth of experience needed to perform these tasks well. High turnover of front-line staff creates an additional burden on the academic advisor(s).

While meeting with advising staff, the JTF learned that while divisions and departments were notionally supportive of additional training and professional development, advisors did not feel supported in the ability to leave to undertake such training because of their workload (advising and administrative).

The Joint Task Force recommends that the chairs and associate chairs of each program and department determine what their advisor-to-student ratios are, and, in larger departments, increase the capacity for timely advising so that student access to an advisor is consistent across the Faculty.

The JTF notes that some departments may need to hire additional advising staff, while for others it may be more appropriate for them to hire additional administrative support to relieve administrative duties from the existing advisor. Chairs and associate chairs are in the best position to assess these needs.

Additionally, we recommend that the Vice-Dean, Undergraduate, encourage all divisions and departments to implement annual meetings with their academic advisors and discuss professional development goals and plans for the upcoming year.

Recommendation 8: Development of a proactive advising notification system in the Academic Advising Portal.

The Faculty's current academic advising model is largely reactive. Generally, students reach out to advisors when they have concerns and not vice-versa. Students who need assistance and do not engage with the Faculty's academic advisors are more at risk for academic performance issues.

As part of the original Task Force on Academic Advising & Mental Health, the Office of the Registrar created the Academic Advising Portal. The JTF recommends the Office of the Registrar work with academic advisors to develop proactive advising functionality in the Academic Advising Portal to further expand the portal's capabilities.

Based on a variety of indicators (i.e. previous advising appointments, in-course academic performance, current registration/enrolment, etc.), the Portal could be modified so that it could identify students who would benefit from advisor-initiated contact. Literature indicates that proactive advising practices have a meaningful effect on student retention and participation in advising programs [5].

The Office of the Registrar recently received permission to integrate Quercus grade books with the Academic Advising Portal, which will make proactive advising a possibility. The Office of the Registrar

is assembling a working group of academic advisors to assist with defining the criteria for identifying students who would benefit from proactive advising.

It must be noted that while proactive advising is considered a best practice in advising, it requires additional time for advisors. The JTF is concerned that in many departments, academic advising resources are already at capacity.

Recommendation 9: Standardize academic advisors' out-of-office and auto-response messages to include links to helpful resources and services. This effort could be applied to all staff who regularly interact with students.

U of T Engineering students frequently use email as a way to connect with their academic advisors, undergraduate offices and other faculty offices. Depending on the time of day, week or academic year, response times may vary and there may be delays in responses to students' emails and/or connecting them with the appropriate resources where necessary.

The JTF recommends the creation and implementation of out-of-office and auto-response templates for the Faculty's academic advisors and all staff who receive a high volume of student emails.

The templates should include useful contacts and links to additional information that may assist students in connecting with necessary resources in advance of a Faculty response.

Draft templates have been created (Appendix E).

Recommendation 10: Increase the number of scholarships that recognize U of T Engineering students who have overcome challenges.

The Faculty's academic advisors are aware of many students who experience and overcome academic and/or personal challenges during their time with the Faculty. The efforts of these students are generally only recognized by their advisors and confidants.

As the Faculty explores new and enhanced supports for our students, it is also important to acknowledge students who have overcome challenges. One of the Faculty's mechanisms for such acknowledgment is in-course scholarships. The Faculty currently has two scholarships that explicitly recognize students who have faced challenges: The John Karl Hergovich Memorial Scholarship (ChemE) and The Glenn & Richard Hauck Memorial Scholarship (EngSci).

The JTF recommends that U of T Engineering create one new scholarship (without a financial need requirement) per department (except for the division and department that already have one) that formally acknowledges undergraduate students who have faced and overcome challenges. These scholarships should be open to students in years two, three and four of each program. Annual funding for five new scholarships valued at \$2,000 each would need to be secured.

ACTIONS TAKEN RELATED TO ACADEMIC ADVISING AND MENTAL HEALTH IN SUPPORT OF THE UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE

Action taken 1: Implemented Student Self-Declaration of Illness Pilot.

Across U of T, academic units inconsistently require the receipt of a formal Verification of Illness (VOI) form ahead of providing a student with an accommodation for an absence or term-work extension due to illness or absence. Temporary illnesses (e.g. cases of flu, colds, migraines, GI tract issues) reported by students are typically acute and require little or no medical intervention. Purely to obtain a VOI form, students seek appointments with medical professionals who are already in high demand.

Alternatives to VOI forms are used across U15 institutions and demonstrate promise in alleviating demand on medical professionals and our health-care systems [6]. Furthermore, research demonstrates students use these alternatives responsibly [7].

The Health & Wellness Centre in partnership with the Vice President and Provost are exploring ways of implementing a student self-declaration of illness or absence system at the University of Toronto.

The JTF carefully considered this matter and its effect on mental health. It concluded that the possible benefits outweighed the negatives and that a pilot period was worth exploring. Issues discussed included:

- The added stress on a student experiencing an illness or mental health issue of having to visit a medical clinic.
- The financial burden students experience when they have to pay for doctors' notes or VOI forms at off-campus clinics. Fees range from \$20 to \$80.
- How students seeking to obtain VOI forms for illnesses that require little to no medical intervention can overburden U of T's Health & Wellness Centre. Visits solely to obtain VOI forms can cause delays for students in need of medical attention.
- Students requiring little to no medical intervention visiting hospital emergency rooms for VOI forms. Our current term-work petition process allows the student's academic advisor to approve the absence while asking the professor to make alternative arrangements for the student (make-up assignment or lab, re-weighting of assignment to the final exam, etc.) As such there would be no noticeable changes for instructors.

With approval from the Examinations Committee and Dean Chris Yip, the Faculty agreed to participate in a one-year Self-Declaration of Illness Pilot program (effective September 2019). During the pilot, the Registrar's Office will monitor usage and provide a final report to the Dean, Examinations Committee and Health & Wellness.

The Faculty communicated the pilot to students via email, the Current Engineering Undergrads website and Engineering Student e-News. Additional reminders will be communicated to students throughout the year.

Action taken 2: Eliminated student rankings from U of T Engineering web services (effective Fall 2019).

Through student feedback and research, the JTF determined that the practice of ranking students relative to their peers is unnecessarily stressful and potentially harmful to students' wellbeing. Many peer institutions have already ceased the practice. This issue has come up in numerous student consultations and was specifically mentioned in the "[*Nothing About Us Without Us*](#)" statement.

In discussion with Janine Robb, Executive Director of the University's Health & Wellness Service, she offered the opinion that the practice of ranking was contrary to best practices with regards to student mental health. In her professional opinion, the practice of ranking should be ended.

With regards to academic performance indicators, students have access to U of T transcripts, course averages, formal grades and their academic standing. Additionally, U of T Engineering honours high-achieving students with Dean's Honours List notations on transcripts when applicable (see Action Taken 3).

The JTF recommended that the Faculty no longer post individual class rankings in the Engineering Portal.

In consultation with Dean Emerita Cristina Amon and Dean Chris Yip, the practice of ranking in U of T Engineering ended during the 2019 Fall Term. This policy change was communicated to students by email (Appendix F).

The Registrar's Office will continue to provide ranking information directly to institutions or scholarship programs that require ranking information. Individual rankings will not be provided directly to students.

Action taken 3: Dean's Honours notation included on official transcripts.

The Dean's Honours List recognizes exceptional academic performance during a term. Traditionally, the Office of the Registrar provided printed Dean's Honours List certificates to students, however, over 50% of the certificates were not collected.

Consultation with student representatives confirmed that noting the achievement on a transcript would be a more appropriate indicator. The JTF felt that this improvement was a better way to recognize student achievement than publishing student rankings.

The JTF recommended the cessation of the Dean's Honours List certificates in favour of Dean's Honours List notations on students' academic transcripts. Noting the achievement on a student's transcript makes the achievement visible to future employers and graduate schools.

The Office of the Registrar added Dean's Honours notations to all transcripts for current students (as of the 2019 Fall Term). The notations were backdated where applicable to students' first year of study.

Action taken 4: Created an Academic Workload Task Force.

Student workload in a standard engineering curriculum is regularly cited as a contributing factor to increased stress levels that can often result in mental health and wellness challenges. The "unnecessarily demanding pace and load" of STEM-related programs has been identified as one of the major reasons

why students of all abilities leave such programs [8]. As well, the *culture of stress* that normalizes a high volume of work can result in undergraduate students being reluctant to seek mental health support [9], [10].

Specific to U of T Engineering, we regularly observe that over 40% of our first-year students report the academic commitments in first year were unmanageable or overwhelmingly unmanageable.

The JTF created a Decanal Task Force on Academic Workload that will focus on the relationship between academic workload, stress and mental wellness. The Task Force will run from November 2019 to August 2020. A report will be delivered to Faculty Council during its 2020 Fall Term meeting.

Specifically, the Task Force will:

- Assess the perceptions of student, staff and faculty regarding academic workload and expectations.
- Review the extent to which a *culture of stress* and excellence and *meritocracy of difficulty* exist at U of T Engineering and identify how this impacts student mental wellness.
- Understand the elements that impact academic workload, which may include course timetables, pace, the rate new material is introduced, assessments and assignments, etc.
- Develop a set of recommendations on how to improve student mental wellness through changes to academic workload, which might include:
 - Alternative assessment and assignment strategies.
 - Careful consideration of the necessity and effectiveness of current assessment strategies and workload elements on a course-by-course basis.
 - Suggestions for how to improve alignment between professor and student expectations around course workload and opportunities for programmatic coordination of workload where appropriate.
 - Changes to course scheduling and meeting times.
 - Consideration of high pass/pass/fail and letter-grade systems for certain terms and/or courses.

Action taken 5: Considered the implementation of a Fall Term break.

Currently, U of T Engineering does not offer a Fall Term break for students. Between the start of term in early September to the end of exams in mid-December, students only have one day off – Thanksgiving.

The Fall Term is intense for students. The Faculty has had frequent discussions regarding the creation of a Fall Term break. Students in other U of T faculties and other institutions have Fall Term breaks around the first week of November. The JTF discussed the pros and cons of either a full week break or a few days. One concern raised was whether or not the break would be beneficial or if it might increase pressure on students as assignments would be compressed into the weeks surrounding the break.

U of T Engineering curriculum is currently built around 12.8 weeks of instruction per term, primarily due to the nature of accreditation: 12.8 hours was adopted by the Faculty as the result of a previous CEAB audit. If a Fall Term break is implemented, the impact on accreditation units and accreditation would need to be considered.

Several options were presented to the JTF:

- Shortening the Fall Term exam period and removing the Fall Exam Study Day to provide a full week break.
- Shortening the Fall Term exam period to provide a short break.
- Removing the Fall Exam Study Day to provide a short break.

The JTF recommends that the Faculty's Decanal Task Force on Academic Workload (Action Taken 4) discuss the potential of a break during the Fall Term.

Action taken 6: Edited Faculty's petition response templates to better align with mental health initiatives in the Faculty.

The Faculty has approximately 50 template petition responses in the online petition system. When the Committee on Examinations renders a decision on a petition, the appropriate template response is selected and the text is what the student sees in the student portal. On review of the current templates, it was determined that they could be re-written to better align with the Faculty's goals with regards to mental health.

The JTF recommended that the Faculty's petition templates be edited to include "softer" language, so that no message seems like a closed door, especially as students receive the decisions online and not from staff. Lines were introduced to encourage students to connect with their academic advisors for additional information. Appeals information was also included directly in the template.

The JTF hopes that the careful and thoughtful rewording of the templated petition responses will be, in relation to other initiatives, another way to improve student mental health by addressing some of the systems we currently use.

The edited templated responses were drafted and reviewed by the Committee on Examinations. Implementation occurred during the 2019 Fall Term.

Action taken 7: Identified prerequisites and co-requisites for courses in the Academic Calendar and academic planning tools.

Students engage with degree planning in their first year of studies; however, without any tool to explore the prerequisites and co-requisites required to complete a degree, students do not have a simple way to plan their academic careers. This adds uncertainty and additional stress for students, especially those who fall out of step with their cohort due to health or other reasons.

The Joint Task Force recommended the Office of the Registrar ensure all prerequisites and co-requisites are listed in Degree Explorer, the tool used by all students to plan their academic careers (except those in the Department of Electrical & Computer Engineering). The JTF also recommended that the Office of the Registrar collaborate with the Department of Electrical & Computer Engineering to ensure that prerequisite and co-requisite information is available for their students as well.

Identifying prerequisites and co-requisites will allow students to plan for future terms, reducing uncertainty in the academic career planning process, which in turn alleviates student stress. This will also provide another platform for students to explore completion of minors, certificates and other streams that interest them.

This recommendation has been fully implemented by the Office of the Registrar and will be maintained on an ongoing basis.

Action taken 8: Move Academic Advising Handbook to Office 365 SharePoint to make it more accessible for academic advisors.

As part of the original Task Force on Academic Advising, an academic advising handbook was written by academic advisors and other stakeholders. This handbook was initially stored in the Faculty's SharePoint site; however, the handbook was difficult to access and maintain in that location.

After the handbook was written and developed, the Faculty adopted Microsoft Teams. It was decided that a "team" should be created for academic advisors to have a digital space to collaborate, share resources, talk, etc. Microsoft Teams was a natural place for the Academic Advising Handbook to exist as it is easier to access and retains the functionality of the Faculty SharePoint site.

The Joint Task Force recommended that the Academic Advising Handbook should be moved to a place where the information is easily accessible and available for advisors and easier for the Office of the Registrar to maintain. The Office of the Registrar migrated the Handbook to Microsoft Teams in July 2019.

Recommendations Related Academic Advising and Mental Health in Support of the Graduate Student Experience

At the University of Toronto, the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) shares the responsibility of graduate students with the Faculty. SGS defines university-wide regulations for graduate education, which are administered and implemented in concert with graduate units within the Faculty. Consequently, these recommendations are also relevant to SGS and they will be shared with its Dean, Professor Joshua Barker, as there are consultations on graduate student wellness currently underway within the University.

Recommendation 1: Increase specificity and consistency of graduate student orientations across the Faculty.

When students start a new graduate program in U of T Engineering, they become part of a multi-faculty administrative structure that is far less centralized than they may have experienced during their undergraduate studies. Consequently, it is potentially quite challenging for graduate students to identify resources. For research-stream students, the transition is even more abrupt as they have to familiarize themselves with their research supervisors, course instructors, lab mates, TAs, scholarship applications and the paperwork related to their funding packages.

Orientation sessions would be an ideal time to provide guidance on all of these aspects and introduce graduate students to the resources available to them on campus. However, it has been identified that there are inconsistencies between graduate units in the way orientation sessions are conducted. Consequently, students can be inadequately prepared when facing difficulties in their programs and/or challenges related to their health. The main issues identified with orientation are graduate units that have either no orientation session or an orientation session that is not program-specific. Also, in some graduate units, orientation does not cover mental health and wellness resources.

The JTF recommends increasing the consistency of graduate student orientation across the Faculty with separate orientations for MEng and research-stream students. It is further recommended that all orientations include wellness-related content and representation from the respective departmental graduate student association.

By increasing specificity of orientations for graduate students, students will be better prepared for their programs, which will decrease confusion, stress and the feeling of being overwhelmed at the start of the year. Specific orientations are expected to especially help MEng students who do not have as much time or support as research-stream students. Including graduate student representatives in orientation will ensure that the orientation is best suited to students' needs. Adding a wellness component to orientation will decrease the stigma around mental health issues, support students in setting realistic expectations and enable graduate students to access resources when they need them.

This recommendation is currently in progress. Graduate administrators have been provided with information on wellness for orientations and graduate association representatives have been involved in the preparation and delivery of the sessions. The Faculty Graduate Coordinator now organizes monthly meetings with all graduate administrators in U of T Engineering to discuss best practices. Guidelines for graduate student orientations was the topic of a meeting held during the 2019 Summer Term.

Recommendation 2: Explore options for graduate chairs to assess the level of support available for research-stream graduate students and the climate created by their supervisors.

Some students in research-stream programs reported that conflicts with their supervisors have had an extremely negative impact on their wellbeing. A main source of dissatisfaction was the amount and quality of guidance received. Some graduate students feel that their supervisors have unrealistic work expectations, do not provide enough support, are unavailable or do not respond or return thesis drafts within a reasonable amount of time. Currently, there are no direct or systematic means for graduate students to share how they experience their supervisory relationships or to report on the climate that exists within each research group to graduate chairs.

The JTF recommends that potential options be explored to measure and report supervisory quality with the lens of student wellbeing. Currently, U of T's Faculty of Medicine is piloting a system to survey graduate student satisfaction levels in the various research groups. If this pilot is successful, the JTF recommends the Faculty implement a similar system where the information from this annual survey is used by graduate units to provide constructive feedback to supervisors. If the pilot is unsuccessful, alternative means of measuring and reporting supervisory quality should be explored.

As supervisors can inadvertently undermine the ability of their graduate students to function productively, a process to receive feedback can be useful for them to develop greater self-awareness. This, in turn, can create incentives for supervisors to implement some changes and create a more positive dynamic between them and their group members. A systematic feedback system can also lower the barriers for graduate students to raise concerns about their supervisory relationships and draw the attention of their graduate chairs on factors that can significantly increase the time it takes to complete their programs. This information can be proactively used to avoid further deterioration of the supervisory relationship and wellbeing of all group members.

Currently, the Faculty, in collaboration with its graduate student association, is preparing a pilot survey. This anonymous survey will obtain aggregate data on various issues. The Faculty will continue to provide department chairs and directors detailed information twice per year about time-in-program for PhD students, so that they may be in a position to better evaluate new initiatives focussed on facilitating student progress and wellbeing.

Recommendation 3: Clarify supervisory expectations by setting guidelines for personal time off and by promoting best practices in graduate supervision within the Faculty.

It was reported in the graduate student feedback sessions that some students in research-stream programs have difficulty finding a healthy work-life balance due to lack of clarity in terms of their supervisors' expectations. Some of the most sensitive aspects for these students are related to expectations related to productivity and work schedules.

It was identified that graduate students are uncomfortable discussing topics such as the number of vacation days, working hours and other expectations with their supervisors. For safety reasons or in case of an emergency, students and supervisors should always know when someone will be absent from the lab or out of the office; clearer policies would make it easier for students to openly share their plans. To our knowledge, SGS does not provide any guidelines for personal time off. Some graduate units provide some

guidance; however, the guidelines are rarely articulated in terms of the actual number of days allocated for personal time off. While the nature of experimental research makes it challenging to establish a clear number of maximum hours per day or week, it is clear that it is unhealthy for someone to consistently work long hours with no time off for extended periods.

The JTF recommends that consensus be made within or across departments for the number of days a graduate student is expected to take as vacation every year. This number could be in the form of a range, minimum, maximum or average and must be presented to graduate students upon the start of their programs and on department websites.

The JTF recommends continuing the promotion of the SGS Guidelines for Graduate Supervision and the Grad Conflict Resolution Centre to students and supervisors. It is further recommended that the guidelines be provided to incoming students during orientation while supervisors should be encouraged to read and follow the SGS guidelines with their students. Supervisors are encouraged to discuss expectations with their graduate students regarding vacation, working hours, breaks, and other expectations at the beginning of their program.

Setting the number of vacation days for graduate students will help students avoid having to negotiate the matter with their supervisors. Ideally, the discussion would be more productive by having a greater focus on determining, for instance, the best possible time for interrupting research activities. It also promotes a more positive work-life balance, which will help prevent students from working too much and burning out. Providing supervisors with supervisory guidelines and resources can help create consistency in the supervisory expectations throughout the Faculty. Clearer communication of supervisory expectations can benefit new and current graduate students by decreasing uncertainty around the supervisor-student relationship which will generate more positive and fruitful relationships.

The SGS Guidelines for Graduate Supervision document (Faculty edition), as well as the Graduate Conflict Resolution Centre, were introduced during the orientation session for new Faculty in September 2019. The student edition of the SGS guidelines document was distributed to the prospective graduate students who attended Graduate Research Days. Moreover, the Faculty graduate studies website has a webpage that lists those resources, as well as other wellness resources. Since January 2019, the Faculty has had a group of peer guides (GradPACs) who have been trained to provide career and academic support to graduate students within group events or one-on-one discussions; due to the extensive training the peer guides receive, they are familiar with the guidelines, as well as various wellness resources on campus

Recommendation 4: Reduce barriers for research-stream graduate students who need to take medical leaves of absence.

The only option for research-stream graduate students who need to take extended time off for medical reasons is a leave of absence, which normally results in the partial or complete interruption of their graduate student stipend. This is a major disincentive for students considering taking medical leave and can potentially result in graduate students working through illness if they have no other source of income. Currently, SGS does not offer specific bursaries for students on medical leaves but other options may be available under very specific conditions (OSAP/OSOG).

The JTF recommends that each department clarify its medical leave options for graduate students and post the information on their respective websites.

The JTF recommends that the Faculty create a fund and adjudication process to provide temporary financial support to research-stream graduate students who wish to take medical leaves of absence.

Recommendation 5: Continue to support graduate student mental wellness groups.

It has been identified by the JTF and the Task Force on Mental Health in 2015 that there is a need for more mental health and wellness support for graduate students. To address graduate student mental health and wellness issues, graduate student mental wellness groups need to be supported by the Faculty in terms of their funding, communications and for getting access to university venues for their activities.

This will make it possible for graduate students to pilot a variety of mental wellness initiatives, host wellness-related events, discuss mental wellness issues with the Faculty and receive advice from other students who have overcome difficult situations.

Supporting graduate student wellness groups will create a formal link between the Faculty and graduate students on the subject of mental wellness issues. This will make it easier for graduate students to collaborate with the Faculty and to incorporate graduate student input in Faculty mental health initiatives.

A Faculty-wide graduate student mental wellness group, the GECoS Mental Wellness Commission, was created in January 2019 with the support of the Vice-Dean, Graduate Studies. The Commission is formally part of GECoS who receives funding from the Dean's Office. This committee hosted the Mental Wellness Carousel feedback session in June 2019 and will continue into the 2019-2020 academic year. A Faculty-wide graduate wellness event is currently being planned for April 2020 which will include hosting an internationally renowned advocate for health and wellness for academic researchers.

Recommendation 6: All teaching assistants (TAs) must complete Identify, Assist, Refer (IAR) online training and be provided with information on student crisis response and wellness resources.

TAs are significant resource people for undergraduate students given their regular and direct interactions. For these reasons, teaching assistant training should include guidelines that enable TAs to detect and respond to students in crisis.

The JTF recommends that TAs be required to complete the IAR online training. They should also receive information about student crisis response and wellness resources during the Faculty's training for first-time TAs. The training should also aim to clarify TA responsibilities in terms of protecting student privacy in normal circumstances as opposed to when a student is experiencing a crisis.

Training TAs will enable them to appropriately respond to student mental health concerns, which, in turn, can help prevent the escalation of mental health issues of not only undergraduate students but their peers.

Invitations to complete IAR training were distributed to all graduate students. As part of their training, first-time TAs were encouraged to complete IAR training for the 2019-2020 academic year. However, making IAR training mandatory and part of the payment structure for all TAs must be explored by a future committee. Additionally, as part of their Faculty training, first-time TAs were provided with information on student wellness and University resources.

Recommendation 7: Create clear department policies for missed work and late withdrawal in graduate and 500-level courses.

Feedback from graduate students suggested that there is a lack of clarity in terms of the University's policies regarding accommodations for missed coursework and late withdrawal due to illnesses in graduate and 500-level courses. This is exacerbated by the fact that the way some policies are interpreted can vary depending on the graduate unit hosting the course or the student home graduate unit. The development and communication of these policies are especially important with the increasing number of international MEng students who may be unfamiliar with the accommodations provided in Canadian education and teaching institutions.

The JTF recommends departments develop and communicate clear policies regarding late withdrawals and absences (both self-declared and documented) for graduate and 500-level courses. The policies should be posted on graduate unit websites. It is further recommended that the Faculty assist graduate course instructors with the preparation of their course syllabi by providing them with templates that reference department policies.

Clarifying the policies will help ensure that the various graduate student communities have equal access to accommodations related to missed work and late withdrawals. This will also provide better guidance to course instructors on the matter. Making graduate students aware of these policies will provide them with options to take time off to address medical concerns as opposed to working through illness and continuing coursework.

The Faculty has distributed a document to all instructors of the Faculty-wide (APS) graduate courses with guidelines about course syllabi, which includes information about wellness resources, the SGS deadline to drop courses without penalty, SGS grading, coursework extensions, academic appeals and leaves of absence policies. Consultations have begun with the graduate unit coordinators to compare how SGS policies are implemented in each graduate unit and how this process can be made more uniform within the Faculty. Contents for the Faculty graduate studies website about policies related to academic accommodations, appeals and leave of absence is currently being prepared and will be shared with graduate administrators in each unit.

Recommendation 8: Make the graduate course schedule available on a centralized website prior to course registration.

In preliminary feedback sessions, graduate students — especially MEng students — noted they were experiencing unnecessary difficulties during course registration because some of course schedule information was not available. For instance, full-time MEng students take three to five courses per term — often across multiple departments. Currently, graduate course schedule information is not always entered in ACORN, the main university system in which students register for courses. Instead, it is posted on department websites and sometimes only after course registration has opened. Course registration can be a very challenging process for students when course scheduling information is not easily accessible since they have to navigate through multiple department websites to find courses that do not conflict.

The JTF recommends that the Faculty encourage departments to finalize course schedule information before course registration, and, in the future, the information should be put on ACORN.

Finalizing courses before registration would make the process of selecting courses more efficient for students and would make it possible to better design their curricular pathway to meet their research or

career goals and maintain a positive outlook throughout their programs. Posting course schedule information on ACORN will enable students to generate timetables directly on a single site that will minimize the inconvenience of having to navigate multiple webpages and inadvertently register in courses that conflict. Consolidation of all the links to each department's course information on one Faculty webpage will greatly facilitate this process.

A webpage that contains links to the course webpages for the seven graduate units was created on the Faculty website; the page can be found under both "Research Programs" and "Professional Programs." The Faculty Graduate Coordinator now holds monthly meetings with the graduate administrators in each unit to discuss best practices, such as providing course schedule information prior to course registration.

Actions Taken Related Academic Advising and Mental Health to Support the Graduate Student Experience

Action Taken 1: Hold Faculty-wide graduate student feedback sessions at least once per year.

It has been identified that there is a need for academic, personal and mental wellness support within the Faculty for graduate students. Preliminary feedback sessions revealed that graduate students experience a variety of mental wellness-related issues and they feel that there is a lack of mental wellness support within the Faculty. Additionally, the 2015 Task Force on Mental Health highlighted that graduate student academic and personal support should be further developed. Feedback sessions and student involvement are necessary to identify and address the areas for development.

The JTF recommends that feedback sessions should be held at least once per year to obtain input from graduate students on their student experiences with an emphasis on mental health and wellness. It is further recommended that graduate students and the Faculty organize these sessions together to best meet the needs of the students. The recommendations made from these sessions should also be reviewed for implementation shortly after the event when possible. Graduate student organizers and staff and faculty should regularly meet to ensure continuity year after year.

Holding annual feedback sessions will create a platform for the Faculty to identify the mental health and wellness needs of graduate students and provide them with the opportunity to make recommendations. These sessions will also provide the Faculty with the opportunity to discuss with students various challenges facing other groups within Faculty (undergraduate students, postdocs, staff, supervisors), which can directly or indirectly affect them. Open communication between graduate students and the Faculty will help identify the best ways to address key wellness issues affecting all members of the U of T Engineering community.

This recommendation is currently in progress and the most recent Faculty-wide graduate-specific feedback session was held in June 2019. The feedback session, the Graduate Engineering Council of Students (GECoS) Mental Wellness Carousel, consisted of discussions on research/coursework challenges, interpersonal relationships, self-image and imposter phenomenon, diagnosable mental illness, and recommendations to improve wellness in the Faculty. The GECoS Mental Wellness Commission is planning the next feedback session, which will be held during the 2019 Fall Term. Other informal events with specific graduate student groups have also taken place during the fall.

Action Taken 2: All graduate administrators should complete Identify, Assist, Refer (IAR) Online Training and be encouraged to take additional health and wellness training.

Preliminary feedback sessions revealed that graduate students experience a variety of mental wellness-related issues and are not aware of all the mental health resources available to graduate students. Graduate administrators are often the first point of contact for graduate students; therefore, they are in a unique position to help students in need.

The JTF recommends that all graduate administrators complete IAR online training. They should also be encouraged to take additional optional health and wellness training throughout the year.

Being aware that departments have staff trained in mental health will lower the barriers for graduate students to reach out and ask for help. Completing IAR training will enable staff to confidently refer graduate students to the appropriate mental health resources. Having more graduate student-facing staff with IAR online training will contribute to overall mental health awareness in the Faculty and aid in early help-seeking and interventions for graduate students managing mental health challenges.

All graduate administrators in each unit have been sent a request to complete the IAR training before the start of the 2019-2020 academic year. This will be repeated at the beginning of each term.

Action Taken 3: Create a graduate student resources page on the Engineering Graduate Studies website.

The Faculty shares the responsibility of graduate students with another faculty (SGS) and the graduate units. The administrative roles of the three entities are distinct but there is also notable overlap in some areas such as professional development, graduate courses, academic communication skills, awards and academic advising. As a result, graduate student-specific information can be found on multiple websites.

During the feedback session, graduate students noted that there was no single webpage that provided all relevant policies, guidelines and wellness resources. It was also highlighted that Faculty and department websites are difficult to navigate. This has been a source of stress, frustration and confusion amongst graduate students.

The JTF recommended the Faculty create a dedicated Current Graduate Student Homepage with information and links to graduate student policies, courses, guidelines and wellness resources. The homepage should also describe the difference between the information that can be found on department, SGS and Faculty websites; accompanying links should be provided. This homepage should be separate from the Future Graduate Student Homepage.

The JTF recommended that the “Courses” section of department and Faculty websites have the links to the “Courses” section of the other U of T Engineering departments and a link to the Arts & Science Graduate course website or a list of links to non-engineering departments that graduate students often take courses in.

The Faculty website content related to graduate student resources is now listed under “Current Students.” Under “Current Graduate Students,” one can find “Research Degrees” and “Professional Degrees”; under each, a page was created “Departmental Engineering Courses,” which lists all the departmental course webpages. Under “Current Graduate Students,” one can find under “Student Life and Services” a page that lists wellness resources for graduate students. Further reorganization and redesign of the pages are planned over the coming months.

The JTF recommends that further optimization of the graduate sections of the Faculty and department websites be undertaken with graduate student input.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Year 1 (2019-2020)

- Assess what training(s) student-facing staff and faculty have already completed.
- Continue to promote the online Identify, Assist, Refer to all staff and faculty (www.iar.utoronto.ca).
- 2-3 SafeTALK: Suicide Alertness for Everyone training sessions (one session has already been offered in August 2019).
- Promote ASIST: Training delivered at New College, U of T to student facing-staff & faculty.
- Include Health & Wellness Overview session at Faculty Council & first-time TA Training — In progress.

Year 2 (2020-2021)

- Continue to promote the online Identify, Assist, Refer to all staff and faculty.
- SafeTALK training — 1 per term.
- Promote ASIST: Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training delivered at New College, U of T to student facing-staff & faculty.
- Include Health & Wellness Overview session at Faculty Council & first-time TA Training.
- IAR+ Training once per term.
- Accessibility Overview Session once per academic year.
- Responding to a student in Crisis Session for Academic Advisors once per academic year.

Year 3 (2021-2022)

- Continue to promote the online Identify, Assist, Refer to all staff and faculty.
- SafeTALK training — once per term.
- Promote ASIST training to student-facing staff & faculty.
- Include Health & Wellness Overview session at Faculty Council and first-time TA Training.
- IAR+ training once per term.
- Accessibility Overview Session once per academic year.
- Responding to a Student in Crisis Session for Academic Advisors once per academic year.
- Mental Health Roadmap Session — once per year through the Engineering Engagement & Development Network (uoft.me/EngDev).

Appendix B: On-boarding training topics

Sample Training Topics: Times and duration of training TBD and assessed based on new hires previous experiences. Training opportunities already offered by U of T such as Identify, Assist, Refer (IAR) can be facilitated separately.

On hire: Paperwork for systems completed: ROSI eToken, Email/TCard, determine colleague mentor & e-introductions, IAR

RO1: ROSI & Key Policies

RO2: Advising Portal

RO3: Petitions & Re-enrolment

RO4: Degree Explorer & Graduation Assessment

AD1: Introduction to Advising: NACADA's 7 Core Advising Competencies

AD2: Having Difficult Conversations

AD3: Using the Advising Portal: Effective Appointments & Notes

AD4: Financial Aid Basics

AD5: Effective Communication and Communication Guidelines

C1: Minors & Certificates, Arts & Science Self-directed Minors

Appendix C: Template job description for academic advising positions

Position Title:

Academic Advisor

Purpose:

Under the general direction of the Chair/Associate Chair/Director of the Department, the Academic Advisor is responsible for the efficient and accurate delivery of student advising to all undergraduate students in the Department. Identifies high-risk students and makes timely and appropriate referrals to campus and community services. Advises students in academic program planning based on the student's academic and career goals, the Faculty and Department's curricular requirements and policies, performs proactive retention outreach and programming and participates in student success initiatives; advises students on how to submit a petition or appeal, coordinates and facilitates required accommodations for students registered with Accessibility Services, advises transfer students, makes appropriate referrals of students to a faculty member or Associate Chair for specialized advising and mentoring such as career and graduate school advice, tracks student academic progress and performs degree audit prior to graduation; maintains student records; Coordinates evaluation of transfer credit for domestic and international course work; represents the Department at campus meetings and recruiting functions and assists with recruitment programs and initiatives; assists in developing written materials and in coordinating events for undergraduate students. Make recommendations to the Department concerning student issues, including scheduling, curricular, or other obstacles students encounter that could interfere with timely graduation.

Qualifications

Education:

Undergraduate degree required.

Experience:

- A minimum of 3 years of progressively more senior work experience in student advising, Student Services or Registrar's Office.
- Demonstrated skills, training and experience in advising on academic and programmatic matters, student development programming and group facilitation in a university environment.
- Knowledge and experience in academic policy and procedure-preferably at the University of Toronto.
- Experience working with a diverse student population in a culturally diverse and demanding environment effectively.

Other:

Demonstrated student service experience and commitment to the welfare of the student; flexibility, resourcefulness, ability to thrive in an environment with changing priorities and deadline pressure; initiative and resourcefulness in planning work assignments and in implementing program improvements; strong conflict management skills; knowledge of University and Faculty policies, administrative procedures and student support services. Excellent writing, verbal, and interpersonal skills; ability to deliver effective presentations to large and small groups of students, demonstrated ability to exercise initiative, independent judgment and diplomacy; accuracy and attention to detail while working in a fast-paced environment with frequent interruptions; ability to work well under pressure, prioritizing and handling various tasks simultaneously; extensive computer experience including e-mail, spreadsheets, word processing; well-organized; able to work both independently and as part of a team. Familiarity with university-based applications such as ROSI, and degree audit systems, online courses such as Blackboard and experience using social media are highly preferred.

Outcome/Consequences of Error:

- In the course of performing their regular duties, the incumbent in this position requires tact, diplomacy and discretion when dealing with students who are at times dealing with emotional and stressful situations in their lives. Able to identify high-risk students to provide appropriate support and make immediate referrals to University services.
- Errors in judgment or interpretation and application of policy, procedures or regulations could result in incorrect decisions and could jeopardize a student's academic career and time to degree completion.
- Incorrect, inappropriate or incomplete oral or written communication could result in poor public relations and invite criticism and the possibility of legal action. Failure to establish work schedules could result in failure to meet deadlines and delay workflow. Incorrect information to staff or faculty could cause confusion and delay. Failure to work as a member of a team, share information, expertise and ideas would diminish front line services and impact negatively on the Department and the Faculty.

Duties:

- Advise undergraduate students regarding program and degree requirements, Departmental, Faculty and University policies and procedures, petitions, research opportunities, and post-graduation options and on opportunities that can enhance students' success and career goals.
- Assess and make appropriate and timely referrals for students in distress and refers students to appropriate campus resources, such as Health and Wellness Centre, Sexual Violence Prevention

& Support Centre, Accessibility Services, academic support services, PEY office, study abroad opportunities, Centre for International Experience, and Career Services.

- Maintain effective working relationships with students/parents/general public and resolve problems and concerns about educational issues, exercising excellent judgement and knowing when to escalate to a higher level.
- Advise and monitor student progress regarding degree requirements and where appropriate assists students with the development of an academic plan. Maintain records of student advising sessions and manage student confidentiality.
- Review and approve degree requirement exceptions.
- Participate on the Examinations Committee, researching and presenting appeal cases to the Committee.
- Sit on Department committees or represent unit on campus committees, task forces, and initiatives.
- Administer scholarship and funded research opportunities. Presents scholarship candidates at the Scholarship and Awards Committee.
- Develop and maintain advising materials.
- Recommend updates to Departmental website in response to student feedback.
- Meet individually with prospective students as needed.
- Participate in Faculty, University and external professional development opportunities as they relate to student services. Assist in training and professional development activities for new and current staff and participates in training with other Departmental academic advisors.
- Design and implement retention communication and programming for students in the Department.
- Consult and collaborate with other members of the academic advising team, the learning strategists and international student advisor, concerning students who are not making progress toward graduation, and refer students to other student services as appropriate for discussions of policy and possible exceptions to Faculty and University rules.
- Advise students who are considering changing programs or dropping out.
- Provide check of graduation requirements to ensure student records are accurate.
- Advise students about elective credits and on courses and requirements for minors and certificates.
- Advise students about study abroad courses and research opportunities and other academic programs.
- Develop internal and external advising tools and resources in collaboration with other advising staff, faculty and the Departments.
- Coordinate and facilitate exceptions to Department policies and procedures concerning transfer courses, study abroad courses or major requirements.
- Develop advising materials, and tools and strategies to meet advising, Department and Faculty goals and learning outcomes with respect to student growth, development, and success.
- Facilitate surveys of undergraduate students for advising or Department assessment.
- Monitor course enrollment and provide feedback and make recommendations to faculty, Department and the Faculty Registrar regarding course offerings, scheduling and course availability.

Appendix D: Academic Advisor Workload

Throughout June, meetings were held with each academic department's academic advisors (or advising team) and supporting supervisory staff where appropriate. The key questions asked were:

1. The number of students in year 2-4?
2. How many academic advisors and advising percentage of workload?
3. How many front-line student-facing staff and advising percentage of workload?
4. Has there been an increase in the demand for academic advising?
5. Are there more “complex” cases than in the past?
6. When does the Associate Chair become involved?
7. Do students book appointments or drop-in?
8. Are you using the Academic Advising Portal for appointment bookings and or/notes?
9. What is the average wait time to see an academic advisor?
10. How many petitions do you review per term and the breakdown by kind of petition (i.e. term-work, final exam, special consideration, appeals)?
11. How often do you make referrals to U of T services (i.e. Health & Wellness, Crisis/Progress, Learning Strategist, Accessibility Advisor, International Transition Advisor)?
12. What kinds of training or professional development have you undertaken in the past?
13. Is there any PD or training that you think would be helpful in your role?
14. Have you attended a conference related to advising (e.g. OURA, CACUSS, NACADA, or OAAP) in the past? Would you like to?
15. Other Comments?

Appendix E: Example of Out-of-office Message Template

Thank you for your message. I will be out of the office from [XXXX to XXXX]. During that time, I will not have access to email or voicemail; however, I will respond to your message when I return.

If you have an urgent inquiry or issue, please visit [your undergraduate office information]. Contact information and undergraduate office hours are posted online [include your department or divisions' undergraduate office URL].

If this is an emergency, depending on the nature of your emergency, please call U of T Campus Police (416-978-2222), dial 9-1-1 (for emergency services – fire, ambulance, police), or visit your nearest hospital emergency room.

Additional resources:

- Resources for U of T Engineering Students (academic, financial, health and mental health, personal safety, and campus programming, resources and events) <https://undergrad.engineering.utoronto.ca/undergrad-resources/resources-for-u-of-t-engineering-students/>
- U of T Safety and Support (emergency assistance, mental health, personal safety, sexual violence and sexual harassment) <http://safety.utoronto.ca/>
- Petitions and appeals <https://undergrad.engineering.utoronto.ca/petitions/about-petitions/>
- Scholarships <https://undergrad.engineering.utoronto.ca/fees-financial-aid/scholarships/>

Example of an auto-response template:

Thank you for your message. Please allow [XX] days for a response. The time may be longer during busier periods.

If you have an urgent inquiry or issue, please visit [insert your undergraduate office information]. Contact information and undergraduate office hours are posted online [include your department or divisions' undergraduate office URL].

If this is an emergency, depending on the nature of your emergency, please call U of T Campus Police (416-978-2222), dial 9-1-1 (for emergency services – fire, ambulance, police), or visit your nearest hospital emergency room.

Additional resources:

- Resources for U of T Engineering Students (academic, financial, health and mental health, personal safety, and campus programming, resources and events) <https://undergrad.engineering.utoronto.ca/undergrad-resources/resources-for-u-of-t-engineering-students/>
- U of T Safety and Support (emergency assistance, mental health, personal safety, sexual violence and sexual harassment) <http://safety.utoronto.ca/>
- Petitions and appeals <https://undergrad.engineering.utoronto.ca/petitions/about-petitions/>
- Scholarships <https://undergrad.engineering.utoronto.ca/fees-financial-aid/scholarships/>

Appendix F: Dean's communication to students regarding the elimination of rankings

Dear Engineering students,

I write to share that the Faculty of Applied Science & Engineering will no longer be calculating and distributing personal academic rankings for each program as we have done in the past. This change was informed by extensive student consultation across departments and divisions over several years and is also supported by the senior leadership team of the Engineering Society.

This means that starting with the Winter 2019 term you will no longer see this information in your Engineering Portal. However, if students have a demonstrated need for this information — for example, as part of a program or job application — the ranking could be determined and provided to a third party directly.

As we phase the academic ranking process out, we are asking for your feedback and input. Please complete this form if you'd like to provide any comments about the current practice or change.

As always, we will continue to recognize undergraduate student excellence in our Faculty through the Dean's Honours List, the awarding of in-course scholarships, and the various awards and medals that are given to our students at the departmental and Faculty levels.

Sincerely,
Dean Chris Yip