

Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?

Foundational Academic Skills for Undergraduate Students

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1 THE CHALLENGE

The University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC) is a primarily undergraduate, suburban campus of the University of Toronto. Students at UTSC come from a wide range of educational backgrounds and therefore the skills that they enter lower level courses with can vary widely. Frequently, the content and skills being taught in these courses presume a basic level of competency in a range of foundational skills including: writing and other communications skills, research skills – including finding, evaluating, and using a

variety of information sources – critical thinking skills and, where appropriate, numerical literacy and statistics skills. Currently, there are no required foundational skills courses either offered independently or embedded into a specific department at UTSC. Instead, these skills are built into courses, most frequently at the request of the individual instructor.

2 THE METHODS

Faculty Surveys sent to Department Chairs and members of their Curriculum Committees
Hour long focus groups divided roughly by Humanities, Social Sciences, and Sciences

Foundational Skills List

- › Academic writing
- › Academic integrity (plagiarism & citations)
- › Critical reading
- › Critical thinking
- › Digital & technical skills (computer skills)
- › Evaluating sources
- › Note taking
- › Numeracy (data & statistics)
- › Presentation skills
- › Professionalism
- › Project planning
- › Research skills
- › Teamwork
- › Time management
- › Understanding different types of sources (scholarly/popular, primary/secondary, etc.)

Students Surveys were conducted in Winter 2017 and Winter 2018
One survey for first year students and a second for last year students

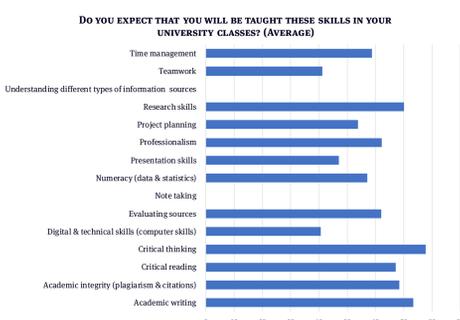
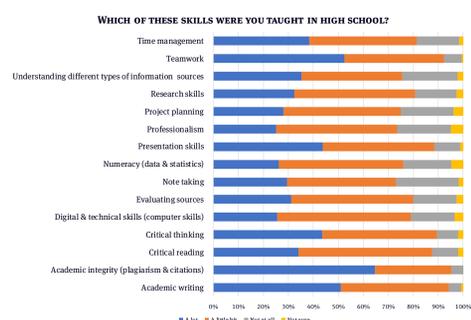
3 THE RESULTS



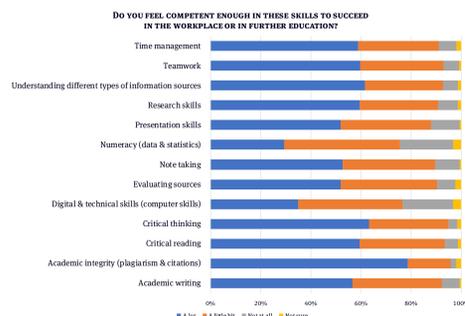
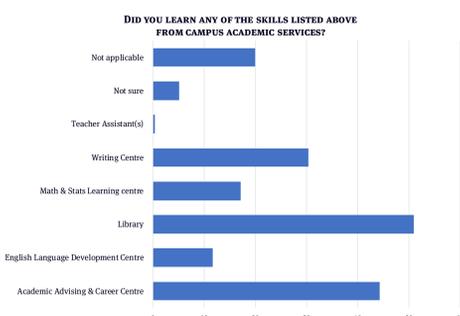
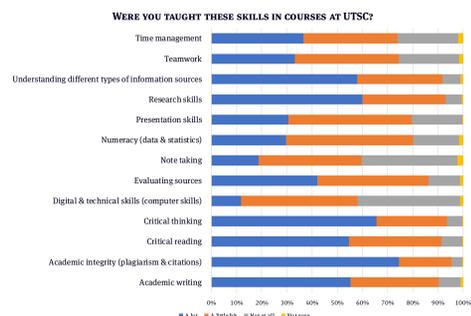
“Absolutely!! It can be very difficult to teach course content when I'm trying to balance that with teaching core skills. Collaborating with the Writing Centre and the ELDC has helped, but my time to devote to this is not unlimited. Many students are arriving at university lacking the ability to read academic content, take notes, think critically, use a library (online or hard copy), write, and cite. Teamwork and presentation skills are important life skills.”

“Yes. It is very difficult to spend any time on these skills/concepts during class time... A foundational course that was offered across the board that hit on some general skills... would put all students on a more even keel and save much time and headache trying to fix the myriad problems that arise from their lack.”

First Year Students



Final Year Students



4 DISCUSSION

- › The faculty survey and focus group confirmed our initial hypothesis that they felt there was a gap in the foundational academic skills of both incoming and graduating students
- › The student survey that participated in the survey had an overall positive experience in high school, for the first years, and at UTSC, for the final years.
- › Final year students were generally optimistic and rated their own abilities high.
- › Students do not see a need for major changes to the way academic skills are fostered at UTSC.
- › Potential for a response/non-response bias.
- › Marked difference between the Faculty's perception of students and the student's perception of their own abilities was noteworthy.

5 CONCLUSION

- › Non-course based series of workshops resulting in a Library Skills certificate in various Library-related foundational academic skills.
- › Partner with high school groups to build relationships with potential future students.
- › Collaborate with other academic support services such as the Centre for Teaching and Learning on exploring University-wide options

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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