SCARBOROUGH CAMPUS STUDENTS' UNION

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Official 2020-2021 Academic & Equity Survey Findings

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Introduction

The purpose of this survey was to provide students with a space to voice their experiences on their academic journey in the midst of the pandemic, as well as identify any gaps that may exist in terms of access to academic and equity-based resources. Since May 2021, we have collected over 120 responses and have held two academic working group sessions discussing topics of academic accessibility and the need for CR/NCR.

The report will first discuss the major findings of each prompt and highlight significant gaps identified by the students who took the survey and/or participated in the working group. Lastly, the report will discuss the recommendations put forward by students.

Findings

1) Noteable Survey Findings

Response Demographics
- In total we received 120 responses. We had representation from all program departments, though unequally distributed, with some programs (Human Geography) having only one response and others (Management) having responses from 36 students.
- In terms of years of study, all years (first to fifth, as well as graduate students) were represented, with an equal distribution of first to fifth year students.
- Over 70% of responses were from students who identified as female and over 50% were from students of South Asian Descent.

Transition to Online Learning
- A majority of students indicated a noticeably difficult transition over the course of the year to online learning (i.e., on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being Extremely Easy and 10 being Extremely difficult) 68.7% of respondents reported a 7 or higher on the difficulty scale.

"So many universities allow courses to be retaken especially if a student was struggling throughout a semester. Personally, COVID wasn't the only thing adding a burden on me. I had some personal issues that I also was dealing with that made it very hard to keep up with school in an online environment. Simply allowing students to have a chance to do better would make a night and day difference in how the online environment is (this could also be extended to in person and regular times). No one knew what to expect coming into this year and many of us I am confident to say we're caught off guard. We just want the chance to learn from this experience. Everyone made mistakes because we had no idea what to expect. All I'm asking for is the opportunity to learn from those mistakes." - Participant

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- In terms of support for the transition to only learning, students were relatively dispersed across their experiences, with most falling within the moderately supported to slightly supported range.

"Cr/ncr when we first transitioned was great, but we need that again when we transition back in person in winter 2022" - Participant

- 54.2% of students said there were significant external factors that had a direct or indirect negative effect on their learning capacity
- 37% of students said they were unable to ask for accommodations and 30.7% said they weren't sure.

"This entire period of Covid and being away from UTSC has made me realize how toxic our university culture is in general. I don't want to make sweeping generalizations but I've witnessed so many of my classmates double down on neglecting other areas of their lives and only focus on school. I think many people feel extra obligated to overexert themselves for schooling because they literally cannot do other things. The state of mental health is atrocious and I think our school promotes a very old mentality to higher education… My mental health matters more." - Participant

2) Academic Working Group Findings

Context: Participants discussed the CR/NCR issue on campus and provided feedback in regards to their own experience using CR/NCR, usage during the pandemic, myths they've heard and suggestions for policy change.

- One student expressed they were confused about the CR/NCR process and didn't access it out of fear of impacts on their graduate school application.
- Students expressed the CR/NCR would help level the playing field as courses are diverse and different professors have different approaches with assignment grading.
- Key findings included: lack of education/knowledge about CR/NCR and how to use it, discrepancy amongst campuses who facilitate CR/NCR and overall usage of CR/NCR is much lower than what administrators often say.

Recommendations

1) Implement SCSU's recommendations towards the CR/NCR Policy.
2) More educational material towards CR/NCR, how to use it and potential impacts to graduate school applications so that students are able to make well-informed decisions.
3) Ensure accommodations and supports are readily available with the transition back to in-person learning to support students who have been struggling to learn virtually this past year.
4) Encourage faculties to coordinate and host more facilitated study groups to help bridge the education gap experienced by students during virtual learning as well as support students moving forward who are enrolled in online classes.