

HEQCO

Access and Retention Consortium University of Toronto Scarborough

Get Started

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Overview

The University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC) will be conducting an evaluation of *Get Started*, a postsecondary student orientation and academic transition program at UTSC, to measure its effectiveness and impact on student academic success, as defined by cumulative grade point average (CGPA), accumulated credits, and retention. The study will compare the academic success of domestic students that participate in *Get Started* with those that do not participate, with a special focus on two categories of students that have traditionally been underrepresented in post-secondary education: (a) First-generation students (students whose parents have never attended post-secondary) and (b) students who come from low-income backgrounds.

Get Started is an academic orientation program held every summer at UTSC; it incorporates theory, practice and technology with the goal of increasing student retention. Managed by the Academic Advising and Career Centre (AA&CC), in partnership with over 25 departments across the campus, the program welcomes incoming, first-year and transfer students and their caregivers/parents in the months of June and July with workshops, campus tours, and speaker sessions. While program attendance is voluntary, all first-year students are invited to participate via introductory admissions materials, as part of the steps they need to take to complete the admissions process. The consistent trend has seen *Get Started* serve approximately two-thirds of the incoming class, averaging about 64%, which represents about three-quarters of domestic incoming students. *Get Started* is fully funded through a combination of student fees and operational funds, so that incoming students and their caregiver's/family members can attend at no cost to them. Program design and its continuous improvements have been informed by best practices at peer institutions that host similar programs, feedback received from students and families as well as the latest research on student retention and academic success

Methodology and Timeline

This study will assess the impact of *Get Started* participation on student retention and academic success as compared to non-attendees. The evaluation will follow two cohorts of students for two years each: Domestic students entering UTSC for the first time in Fall 2017 and domestic students entering UTSC for the first time in Fall 2018. In particular, the evaluation aims to examine whether *Get Started* attendance

has differential impact on 1) students who self-identify as being first-generation and 2) students who come from low income backgrounds. The number of students ultimately included in the study is dependent upon the number of active registrations on November 1st of each year.

The two research questions that will be addressed are:

1. Is attendance at *Get Started* significantly associated with student retention and academic success?
2. Is *Get Started* attendance more beneficial for students who self-identify as first-generation or who are from low income backgrounds, with respect to academic success and retention?

The primary outcome variable is year-to-year persistence, with the secondary outcomes being accumulated credits and cumulative GPA.

For both research questions, the exposure variable is *Get Started* attendance (treatment group), and confounding variables are Gender, admissions category (program of study), residency status (living on- or off-campus), high school GPA, first-generation status, low income status and/or OSAP-eligibility status.

In using a regression model to examine research question #1 for the binary outcome retention (Yes/no for retention in the following year), a standard logistic regression model will be conducted.

In applying regression models to investigate research question #2, a logistic regression model will be used for the categorical outcome (academic standing) and a linear regression model will be conducted for continuous outcomes (accumulated credits and CGPA).

This is a 3 year project, which is projected to be completed in 2020.

Contact Information

For more specific information about this project or for any questions, please contact Helen Tewolde, Senior Researcher and Manager, Centre for Equitable Access at HEQCO (htewolde@heqco.ca); or Varsha Patel, Assistant Dean, Student Success, University of Toronto Scarborough (varsha.patel@utoronto.ca).