



Office of the Chair and Graduate Chair

## DPES 2011-27 Thinking about Recruitment

From: William A. Gough, Chair and Graduate Chair, DPES

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Dear DPES community

I want to thank all who have been involved in recruitment events this fall. This is an essential activity and we need to do more of it and do it effectively. At the moment the Registrar's Office is the driver behind most of our efforts and they enthusiastically encourage faculty participation. Although very supportive of this, I wanted to pause and have the department think through these issues both for shorter term recruitment (achieving 2012-13 admission targets) and for medium and longer term approaches. I am considering here undergraduate recruitment. Graduate student recruitment is another important activity that I want to consider separately.

First, let's explore why recruitment is important and perhaps if DPES has specific goals with respect to recruitment. The enrollment of undergraduate students provides the fiscal resources to run the University. Students provide tuition and attract basic income units (BIUs) from the provincial government. We do have other sources but this is the largest single source of income. These students people our programs, an essential mission of the university and we want both quantity and quality of applications. For admission into our programs we want to maximize the number of high quality students. Total numbers of students is a more complex issue. We do need sufficient number of students to generate sufficient income to pay for the university's human and physical infrastructure, but we need to limit numbers to insure high quality education. There is considerable tension on this issue and there is a wide range of what we as faculty members feel is acceptable. The fiscal reality is that DPES does not pay for itself when we consider the number of programs students we teach and even if we factor our service teaching for other non-DPES programs. This is partly the result of a very crude funding formula used by the Ontario government in assigning BIUs. This results in most Science departments requiring more resources than they generate, so we are not alone in this respect. Fortunately other fields of study are less resource intense and can be delivered in such a way that allows for subsidization of Science departments. This does not mean that we cannot consider careful growth or that we really don't need to recruit. We do have identified growth areas in the department as indicated in our departmental

plan and all disciplines would welcome more excellent students. Physics & Astrophysics is an identified area of growth stemming from a major restructuring of their programs last year that will enable all of their programs to be offered on this campus, a decided advantage in cohort building. The group is excited about the prospect of growth and has been enthusiastically promoting their programs at various recruitment events. However, the expectations of growth are realistic. I was a Physics undergrad and I know these programs are never huge, not like Psychology or one of the Social Sciences, for example. We will not be attracting them in the hundreds or thousands! I am confident we will achieve a program comparable to programs at universities of the same or similar size as UTSC, perhaps a bit larger, due to the relatively unique planetary flavour at UTSC. Thus recruitment efforts will focus on both quantity and quality. Chemistry has the largest number of program enrollments in the department. In this case, more is not necessarily better. The Chemistry programs are resource intensive, both human and dedicated space. The efforts here have been to improve the quality of the undergraduate programs by striving for accreditation. This will in turn enable us to deliver a better product and attract more top students. Thus in this instance the recruitment focus is on a greater number of quality applicants, but necessarily the growth of total numbers of students (which would require increasing our physical infrastructure). We have room to grow in Environmental Science and increases in faculty complement are not likely to occur until this has occurred. Like Chemistry accreditation is being sought for the Environmental Science programs including the Joint program with Centennial. Once again quality and quantity are the recruitment focus.

Now let us turn to existing recruitment activities. For recruitment into first year, we have a number of events that occur, especially during the fall in which we “court” prospective students, largely but not exclusively from Ontario high schools. The Registrar’s Office has a team of recruiters who visit high schools and do presentations about the University of Toronto, followed by Q&A. I went on one of these high school visits recently to better understand how this works and what works with these students. The University of Toronto brand is quite effective in bringing students to these information sessions. Much of the interest however is not UTSC but programs at the other campuses, particularly St. George. So there is a finely balanced tension here between getting students to attend sessions but at the same time emphasizing UTSC strengths. Other important events include University Fair held earlier this fall at the Convention Centre. This year the Fair set a record for the largest number of participants at any event hosted in the Convention Centre with over 60,000 participants on the Saturday of the three day event. The recruiters of course attended this event and worked with faculty members to talk to prospective students. Getting students on to campus is also a priority with the largest fall event being the Fall Campus Day that will take place Saturday November 19<sup>th</sup> this year (an email was circulated last week). In the winter, recruitment goes into a different mode. By then students have applied to universities, typically choosing three or more. The main focus then turns to landing those who have

ranked UTSC in the top three. Students are contacted by the Registrar's Office and invited to campus for another visit. In addition departments are given lists of names and phone numbers. Faculty members call these students to welcome them and to answer any questions students may have. All of these activities have proven quite effective and we of course will continue to support these institutionally organized events. However we may want to think of what more we can do to assist this short term recruitment strategy. This activity would be initiated by the department and by faculty members within the department. I am sure many such activities are going on quietly and I would like to hear about them. I know some of you visit local high schools largely due to personal connections. I cannot emphasize how important such activity is. In a recent presentation by the Vice-Provost Students she provided a list of recruitment activities that students access. Top of the list was departmental web pages with 93% of prospective students accessing relevant web pages in their decision making process. We have been working on our web page over the last year, and we should continue this work specifically from a recruitment perspective.

Medium term recruitment is another aspect we want to consider carefully. This occurs during a student's first year at UTSC. Although we do have some direct entry programs in the department (Co-op) most students choose their major(s) by the end of first year. Although there are some students who have a clear idea what they want out of university, many (probably the majority) are not clear on this and first year can be a transformative experience. We also, especially in Biochemistry, have a large cohort of students who are considering professional schools. We have two goals here, retaining students at UTSC and encouraging students to choose DPES programs by the end of their first year. In this latter activity we are in friendly competition with other departments at UTSC, particularly Biological Sciences and Social Sciences. The Registrar does organize some events (and departmental faculty present at these events) for first year students. We are starting to take some initiatives in this area including a major field trip in EESA06 (Planet Earth) and the refurbishing the observatory by the Physics and Astrophysics group. Both of these initiatives are funded by the Dean's Office.

We also need to consider longer term recruitment strategies. These are perhaps more nuanced and subtle and involve a longer sustained commitment and tend to focus on reputation/profile rather than specific student contact. The current efforts for accreditation in Chemistry and Environmental Science will be reputation building and something we can prominently advertise. The bottom line is that the better our product (our programs) the easier it will be to sell them to prospective students. It is very clear from the enrollment numbers that Co-op is a big attraction for incoming students (both quantity and quality). Both the Environmental Science and Chemistry faculty have worked over the past year to insure that our Co-op programs will work better for our students. The Chemistry plan is complete and I am seeking decanal approval to move ahead with the new options. There is still some work needed for the Environmental Science Co-op revisions but this should be completed in the next few months. I am

currently working with the Provost's Office to provide expedited access to professional Masters (locally and downtown) for students in Environmental Science and perhaps Chemistry. This access can be used to recruit high quality students into our programs. Connecting with high school teachers and guidance counselors in a consistent fashion, perhaps linked to campus visits or faculty visits to schools, will help to build our reputation allowing us to be considered an option for students from these schools. We already have some great examples of this and these can be expanded into other areas. It is time for us to continue to think creatively to find effective ways to put us on the map as the place to go in our areas of strength. Please give this some thought and share any insights with me. I would like to spend some time at our next departmental meeting discussing possible initiatives.