

Excellence Through Innovation Award: Recipient Profiles

1. 1914-1918: In Memoriam

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On July 31, 2014, at Varsity Stadium, the Munk School of Global Affairs - together with the Faculty of Kinesiology & Physical Education, The Bill Graham Centre for Contemporary International History, Trinity College, the University of Toronto, the City of Toronto, and the Canadian Armed Forces – presented *1914-1918 In Memoriam* a large-scale, free, public event commemorating the centenary of the outbreak of hostilities of World War I.

The programming combined ceremonial, musical and multi-media elements, including formal reflections from Lieutenant Governor David Onley, historian Margaret MacMillan, Chief of Defense Staff General Thomas J. Lawson, and University President Meric S. Gertler; a military honour guard; performances by a massed band of the Canadian Armed Forces; and montages of period footage and images gathered from archives across the country.

The event filled Varsity stadium – drawing over 4000 members of the public and the University of Toronto community for an evening of reflection marking the historic moment for the city, the province and the country.

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The project was an initiative of community enrichment and public outreach. As a public education event, the program was designed to convey, to as wide an audience as possible, the extraordinarily complex struggle of the Great War, its staggering impact on the city (including the University), the province and the country, and to communicate a sense of how the effects of the war are in some respects still with us. As an outreach initiative, the project sought to enhance the image of the University and participating departments as providers of public service and education. The event was a tangible demonstration of the manner in which a public institution, through innovative programming and dedicated efforts can serve the community to which it belongs.

2. Arts & Science Exam Jam

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First piloted in April 2012 and now much more fully-developed in its third year, *Arts & Science Exam Jam* is a day-long event that offers students intensive course-specific study sessions given by faculty instructors, alongside opportunities to engage in activities that help manage or reduce stress and establish healthy and productive study and lifestyle habits. Co-sponsored by the Faculty of Arts & Science and the Arts & Science Students' Union, the *Arts & Science Exam Jam* draws together a number of faculties, organizations and student services.

Free and open to all students, *Arts & Science Exam Jam* happens twice a year during the run-up to the final examination periods in December and April. It draws thousands of Arts & Science students who drop into Sid Smith each year to attend course review sessions given by faculty members; develop study and exam-writing skills; engage in some de-stressing activities, like making their own stress balls, yoga, or petting or a therapy dog; learn how to take quick movement breaks to refresh while studying; use rooms booked for open study space; learn about healthy eating or just relax.

Exam Jam provides a variety of supports, locating them in one place at a critical time when they are all needed by students, and using the powerful magnet of course review sessions to draw students in. It is one of a small number of events on campus that

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addresses health and well-being, academic skills, academic reviews, fun and connection at a just-in-time moment, and in one central space familiar to all Arts & Science students.

3. Co-Curricular Record (CCR)

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Coordinated through Student Life, the *Co-Curricular Record (CCR)* is an institutional initiative which provides students a single database that they can use to find opportunities beyond the classroom, and to track, reflect on, and market transferable skills and competencies.

Students can highlight these experiences and competencies on an officially validated University of Toronto record, which they can then use to illustrate their experiences, skills and competencies to employers, graduate and professional programs, and for awards and scholarships. In the development of this initiative, the team had to overcome a number of challenges including the creation of a shared set of principles as to what would be eligible for inclusion in the CCR; how the competencies would be identified and included; what system we would use, and how to support divisions and administrative units effectively to minimize workload while maintaining high quality standards.

4. Digitizing Pre-ROSI Transcript Records

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The University of Toronto Transcript Centre (UTTC) undertook an initiative to digitize over 350,000 transcript records that were not on the student record system (ROSI). The project involved 18 University of Toronto Divisions and Enrolment Services.

The main goals of the project were to:

- Provide faster service to students thereby reducing the turnaround time in issuing the transcript from 2-9 days to same-day service;
- Centralize transcript processing at the UTTC freeing up divisional resources; and
- Ensure the preservation and security of student academic records.

With the introduction of ROSI in 1998 and the move to the consolidated UofT transcript, a decision was made to incorporate in the new electronic transcript only records since 1996. This left earlier academic records in various forms at over 18 divisions. UTTC had planned since 1999 to digitize transcript records held at other divisions but was unable to do so due the records being on different media (microfilm, microfiche or scanned documents), the volume of records, and the absence of an electronic file management system to house and search for records. With time these pressures became more acute.

The resulting electronic records repository moves the University to a modern, accessible set of truly consolidated academic records that can be used to provide an efficient, timely response to alumni transcript orders. It brought records forward into the modern age in a sustainable, greener electronic format. It improved the usability of and access to a repository of documents that represents generations of hard work and study by our alumni.

5. Facilities & Services (F&S) Invoice Workflow Process

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The Facilities & Services Invoice Workflow program is transformative in many respects. The workflow software automates the department's invoice payment process (22,000 invoices per year) and significantly increases productivity for dozens of staff

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members. The system actively manages the invoice approval process reducing risk to the department and the institution by: eliminating the potential for duplicate payments, ensuring timely approval of the department's payables, allowing opportunities to garner early payment discounts and enabling a number of management reports for high level management oversight. Management staff budgetary controls will be enhanced with nearly real time data on their respective budget expenditures with this system.

Beyond the built-in internal controls and accounts payable function, the software enables data mining that extracts key data from invoices including consumption data and meter reading dates from utility invoices such as Toronto Hydro and Enbridge Gas, and automatically stores this data in an energy database. The system goes far beyond invoice scanning software by utilizing state-of-the-art optical scanning technology. Moreover, it will significantly reduce paper and move the department's accounting and management group from a paper and pen approval system to a completely transparent electronic solution embedded with internal controls and full accountability.

6. Flourish: A Strength-Based Approach Towards Student Well-Being

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Flourish is a strength-based collaborative project that aims to proactively help University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC) students grow intellectually, socially, and emotionally and to translate this growth into action, habit and purpose. Historically, post-secondary institutions have taken a remedial approach to improve academics and the university experience. Informed by solid lines of research, *Flourish* takes an innovative and integrative approach by helping students to identify, apply and amplify their strengths systematically.

Over the past two years, the program has assessed well-being, stress levels, academic and character strengths of more than 1500 first-year UTSC students. Students are provided comprehensive feedback and a rich repository of online and campus-wide resources to support their flourishing. The program, in collaboration with peer leaders and professional staff, offers experiential workshops to struggling students focusing on building their psychological, physical and academic well-being and resilience.

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In a departure from traditional remedial approaches, Flourish is innovative as it is concerned with the strengths rather than the weaknesses of students. It is interested in building the best and creative resources within students and with making lives of students fulfilling and meaningful. Its innovation is demonstrated by the fact that it is the only program in Canada featured in the resource list of Resilience Consortium, which includes the U of T's excellent peer institutions Harvard, Yale, Stanford, Princeton and Berkeley. Furthermore, McGill University and Ryerson University have formally requested to implement this program through their student services. Likewise, UTSC counselling services is the only one of its kind to incorporate assessment of strengths, along with symptoms, and provide continuous client feedback at the start of therapeutic practice.

7. FOCUS System Launch

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The team successfully and innovatively developed a suite of engaging and unique tools in order to launch *FOCUS* within the Department. After the development of the information system *FOCUS*, by Discovery Commons in the Faculty of Medicine, the team was challenged with how to launch the program and train a large and distributed group of faculty and staff on a new electronic platform.

The Department launch was designed to enable rapid learning and provide hands-on tools staff could easily use without the need for significant investment in training sessions or significant use of help-desk staff. The Faculty of Medicine had set a strategic initiative of deploying *FOCUS* across all of its departments and the DFCM system launch has become one that is unique, engaging, effective and replicable. The *FOCUS* online database allows individual users from a group of 40 staff and over 1400 faculty at 14 teaching sites across the Greater Toronto Area to access, query and report on aggregated information.

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2014 saw large increases of staff registering and using *FOCUS*. To encourage sustained use of the tool, the team ensured customization of the record profile to best suit the needs of the majority of staff. In addition, the creative team ensured all preparations were creative, fun and engaging when launching and implementing the complex online database to department staff -- a challenge that is continually addressed with the *FOCUS* index cards and workshops. These workshops fostered a renewed sense of engagement, positive interactions and community between staff members within the department. The *FOCUS* team is committed to supporting the staff in our department to ensure long-term and sustained use.

8. My Research Application (MRA)

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As one of the world's great research universities, the University of Toronto is now focused on the attainable goal of consistently ranking among the top 10 public universities in the world. To achieve and sustain this level of performance requires supporting business processes and online tools that enable world-class administration of research projects and funds.

Each year U of T researchers submit thousands of applications to numerous programs and funders for the purpose of supporting annual research funding needs. To facilitate this process outstanding administrative support is required. This is why the Division of the Vice-President, Research & Innovation (VPRI), in partnership with the Office of the Chief Information Officer (CIO), initiated *Project RAISE (Research Administration Improvement & Systems Enhancement)*. *RAISE's* primary goal is to develop more effective and efficient business processes and online tools associated with research administration. Just as U of T is known globally for excellence and innovation in its research, so *RAISE* will establish U of T as Canada's leading institution in research administration.

RAISE focuses on the development of state-of-the-art tools and processes that ensure the effective, efficient, complete, accurate and transparent management of research activities, harmonized across central service units and partner offices in the academic divisions. As a result, the responsible management of research funds will be easier for everyone involved at U of T.

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In spring 2013, VPRI and CIO launched a key component of *RAISE: My Research Applications (MRA)* – a web-enabled solution that has replaced the previous paper-based process for internal review and approval of research applications. MRA is now available to all faculty members at U of T who are eligible to undertake independent research, resulting in significant productivity savings across the institution. MRA leverages the existing HRIS and RIS systems to minimize data entry, automate workflow and control access. Rethinking the business process has created more consistency in assessment of research applications; enabled better clarity around eligibility and roles for researchers, academic administrators and academic units; and contributed to the University’s Strategic Research Plan.

9. Occupancy Sensor Driven HVAC Control System

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The purpose of this project was to provide a more comfortable learning environment while simultaneously reducing building energy costs. In order to accomplish this objective, the building operation was converted from an antiquated fixed schedule approach to a state-of-the-art operation based on the real-time occupancy levels on all floors of the building. With the new technology, building operations are able to adjust ventilation levels on all floors automatically to accommodate the real-time occupancy of the building.

This project employed the unique use of technology (occupancy sensors) which provides real-time occupancy levels on each floor of the buildings. The mechanical equipment on each floor can now independently adjust heating, cooling and ventilation levels to match the real time occupancy level on the floor. The application of the thermal sensor technology combined with Variable Speed Drive (VSD) fans and modern building control systems elevated this 1970’s building to run as efficiently and effectively as any brand new building today. The building went from no controls to a precise “real time” occupancy-based heating ventilation and air conditioning controls approach. The net result was a much better climate for internal staff while drastically saving energy costs.

Annual savings as a result of this project will reach almost half a million dollars per year - a 40% reduction in cost while eliminating a significant amount of emissions. This project garnered extensive attention from numerous prestigious institutions including MIT, UCLA, Columbia, Queens, etc. and was singled out at the 2012 Honeywell User’s Group Conference as a noteworthy project.

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10. Off-Cycle Workbench

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This initiative was aimed at automating the off-cycle payment process and maximizing operational effectiveness, reducing costs and while better serving our employees by allowing for direct deposit (with pay statement) for payroll processed outside of regular pay deadlines. Off-cycle payments are required when for some reason all or none of an employees pay has not been processed in the standard monthly or biweekly pay runs. Multiple people are involved in this process from Employees, to Business Officers, Divisional HR Offices, Finance and Central Payroll Services. The implementation of this project has allowed us to be able to free up more time to proactively work on reducing the number of off-cycle payments as well as eliminate the wait time for employees to get their money by providing the direct deposit of funds on set schedules.

The entire initiative provided significant operational efficiencies including the removal of manual off-cycle procedures; creation of an online request / approval process that ensures all appropriate documentation is received and approved; significant automation of payroll data entry, improving speed and efficiency and strengthening internal audit practices; encouragement of more Divisional Payroll consistency, discipline, accountability and transparency, as well as accuracy of HRIS data; clarified expectations for Business Officers and employees; and eliminated paper checks and work volume in Payroll and Finance; and increased legislative compliance. This project created significant operational efficiencies, improved customer service for employees, and strengthened overall accountability and adherence to deadlines broadly.

11. PRE U of T

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PRE U of T was a collaborative project which brought together student Orientation Coordinators, faculty, and administrative staff from across the Faculty of Arts and Science to provide first year students with an orientation to their area of academic study. On September 4th, 2014 first year students had the opportunity to attend one of five hubs based on their admission stream (i.e. Humanities, Social Sciences, Life Sciences, Commerce, Physical Sciences, Math & Computer Science). Hubs were located around the St. George Campus in areas where first year students were likely to have class. At each hub, students had the opportunity to hear from faculty in their area of study, engage in small group activities with students from other divisions, and explore opportunities for co-curricular engagement through involvement with Course Unions.

In its inaugural year *PRE U of T* had approximately 3000 first year student participants. *PRE U of T* marks the first time in recent memory that there has been a collaborative Orientation event that brings together students from across the Faculty of Arts and Science to explore their area of academic study, meet students outside their College, and familiarize themselves with areas of the campus where they are likely to have classes. In addition – rather than attempting to develop an “alternative” orientation event outside of the traditional Orientation schedule, *PRE U of T* was developed in collaboration with student Orientation Coordinators and embedded in the Orientation schedules of six of the seven Colleges in the Faculty of Arts & Science.

While the need for academic orientation planning was relatively clear, there were significant challenges associated with organizing such an event. A Steering Committee & a Student Advisory Committee was formed, and budget, space and volunteer needs and associated parameters were negotiated and established. University College student Orientation Coordinators demonstrated leadership in bringing this event, further; they were able to secure the participation of six of seven Colleges.

12. Science Without Borders - Ciencia Sem Fronteiras

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The Government of Brazil established a visiting student program that seeks to provide 100,000 Brazilian students with an international study opportunity. In response to this opportunity, the Centre for International Experience developed and administers the *Science Without Borders* program bringing more than 1200 Brazilian university students to U of T and immersing them in an intensive one-year program of study and co-curricular activity. The three modules of the program consist of customized English Language instruction, two semesters of academic study and a research or industry placement. The Centre for International Experience (CIE) worked to build an exceptional program, involving the School of Continuing Studies, University of Toronto Mississauga, University of Toronto Scarborough, and numerous faculties to make U of T the institution a leader both in reach and quality experience. This program has received more than four times the number of Brazilian students than any Canadian university. In addition to providing an outstanding educational experience, available revenue from this program for visiting scholars will fund bursaries for students at U of T to participate in global experiences.

Implementation of this program required comprehensive, responsive and innovative thinking. The CIE had to act as admissions, registration, billing and placement offices, all with strict timelines. The CIE coordinated every aspect, from registration processes to preparing for the arrival of students, their housing needs, social integration, cultural and experiential learning, partnering with the School of Continuing Studies (SCS) on English language programs and re-imagining student account processes.

The CIE was responsive to timelines established by the Canadian Bureau of International Education, as well as Brazilian partners, and students, using a collaborative approach. Due to a very high number of responses, the challenge of responding to the volume and providing space to as many qualified scholars as possible was key. From this the team derived the greatest intangible benefit: the strong relationships forged through working rapidly with colleagues from SCS, collaborative partnerships with faculty registrars for academic placements and the growth of the number of researchers and from industry who were pleased to accept the scholars for a term. Long term relationships were formed that will continue beyond the program and be leveraged for future visiting student programs.

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13. Tri-Campus Career Learning Network

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The *Career Learning Network (CLN)* is a tri-campus initiative involving all three Career Centres, which provides efficient and prompt access to over 45,000 job postings annually, career related events and services for 67,000 students across the University.

The system is also relevant in supporting students with their career exploration and further education pursuits, and in providing access to components of academic and learning skills support. The *CLN* was developed with an external provider and integrated with the Student Web Service (SWS), with customizations to accommodate and enhance the U of T students, staff, faculty and employer experience. The team worked on this project from conception to installation and continues to work to ensure the maximum efficiency and service provision for all users. The *CLN* promotes the culture of positive tri-campus collaboration, while strengthening the student and employer experience with goal to present “one U of T”.

The development of the *CLN* system incorporated features of previous systems and new features that ensure students can access career related information, services and resources much more easily and seamlessly in accessing the full breadth of resources available to them across the campuses, including the ability to engage in an increased number of experiential opportunities with alumni, employers and partners. The employer experience is streamlined, and faculty and staff have more timely access to information and functionality that was previously not available.

14. UTM, HEQCO and OSCA: The ‘What’s Next?’ Guide

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A copy of the guide can be downloaded at <https://osca.ca/images/stories/pdfs/WhatsNext.pdf>

The *What's Next? Your Guide to Education / Career Life Planning in Ontario* is a 46-page workbook targeted at parents/guardians of high school students and was created in collaboration with the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), the Ontario School Counsellor's Association (OSCA) and the University of Toronto Mississauga. The guide was inspired by UTM's University Preparation for Parents (StepUPP) program, an aid for parents/guardians of first-generation students to better understand pathways to Ontario's post-secondary system. *What's Next* has become the next step in the evolution of the idea that students and their parents/guardians should be well-informed about all of the pathways and resources in higher education.

The creation of the guide, as inspired by the StepUPP program, consolidated information about all sectors of post-secondary options in Ontario into one easy-to-navigate and interactive document. This guide was also developed on the new curriculum being implemented by the Ministry of Education, namely four Education and Career/Life Planning inquiry questions: 1) Who am I? 2) What are My Opportunities? 3) What Do I Want to Become? 4) What is My Plan for Achieving My Goals?

The partnership between HEQCO, OSCA and UTM epitomizes the benefits that can be gained by collaborations across organizations within the community. One of the challenges both secondary and post-secondary schools have is getting information to parents/guardians. Even if students share the information they have with their parents, many are new immigrants, first-generation Canadians or may not have attended post-secondary education and are not familiar with the pathways in Ontario. The post-secondary system can be confusing for families who do not understand the unique benefits of the variety of options that students have along their career path. This guide aids in opening up a dialogue between the parents and students about needs, options and personal goals.