

Meeting Summary- Academic Toolbox Reference Group (ATRG)

ATRG Kick-Off Meeting Wednesday October 29, 2014 – 2:00PM-3:30PM

Attendance:

Maureen Gottesman, **ATRG Chair**
Andrew Petersen
Avi Hyman
Corey Dales
Creso Sa
Donald Boyes
Ernie Lopez
Fareed Teja
Haley Fuller
Jan Mahrt-Smith
Janice Patterson
Jenna Jacobson
Laurie Harrison
Lisa Romkey

Melody Neumann
Michael Morrow
Monika Havelka
Pamela Harris
Paul Gries
Peter Azmi
Philip Wright
Rita Vine
Rochelle Mazar
Simone Laughton
Tino Corsetti
Zoran Piljevic
Shannon Kelly

Guests / Substitutions:

- Michael DiPaul (Alternate Peter Azmi), Ernie Lopez (Sub. Steven Bailey), Simone Laughton (Sub. Susan Senese)

Regrets:

- Dionne Aleman, James Fiege, Michael Reid, Peter Donnelly, Aneel Lubhaya (Guest), Sian Meikle, Steven Bailey, Sue Bondy, Susan Senese

Agenda:

Intros, Overview of Committee Purpose, Individual Introductions, RoFTR, Infrastructure: vs. Components vs. Tools, Review of Standards

Discussion:

The Chair explained that the Reference Group is an advisory group and the goal is to take a holistic view of Academic Toolbox and provide recommendations. It was clarified that the reporting to the Teaching, Learning and Technology Advisory Committee (TLTAC), which is chaired by the Vice-Provost Academic for the University of Toronto.

Differences between Infrastructure, Components, and Tools were discussed. The infrastructure refers to the overall ecosystem. Components refer to the major software programs and services, such as a Learning Management System. Within a component, there may be different types of tools with a range of different types of functionality.

Committee members were referred to the sample listing of components and tools that are already available at the university (<http://toolboxrenewal.act.utoronto.ca/home/>). The community is invited to provide feedback on this list.

The committee then discussed the concept of “Standards”, a concept that was intended to serve as an initial starting place for the ATRG to review.

It was unclear to some as to what ‘standards’ meant. Are standards requirements...? Are we trying to increase the use of these tools? How are we determining if anyone in the room has the ability to define standards? There was also discussion about the time frame for renewal?

Despite differing viewpoints, there was general consensus that we have to start somewhere and it's reasonable to develop standards or criteria at an institutional level. Can we define a set of principles and standards that will work for us?

In discussing actual tools, there was some discussion about trying to determine what people who use this toolbox want and need, and understanding what the best resources are for student and new teachers.

Some committee members recommended a need for a more structured conversation, while others suggested the use of existing channels, where there is a way to communicate to faculty. It was generally felt that there was no conflict between these ideas.

There was also a general feeling that if we want to transform teaching the key will be flexibility, meeting baseline institute tools, and the ability to move between tools fluidly. There was general agreement that flexibility is a very good principle for the University ("Standards are an enabler of Flexibility").

Returning to tool use, it was clear from the conversation that everybody uses different technologies to get through their work. Not one consistent tool even amongst committee members. The different discussions boards in use at UofT were raised as an example.

This led back to a discussion about how standards can help us make informed decisions about which tools to use. For example, we wouldn't want work with company that puts our intellectual property at risk. At the moment, some instructors are asking students to use technology that the University does not support and we are putting faculty and students at risk.

The Chair suggested that we should collect a "Best of Breed" from the ATRG Committee via the feedback form, where each member can interpret what they think that means.

There was additional conversation about terminology and concept issues. Some felt we should think in terms of guidelines, since standards may be too prescriptive. If it's a guideline it's something less prescriptive.

A specific proposal was made that that we adopt "business continuity" as a standard/guideline in the published list.

Some members wanted to know the problem we were trying to solve? Others felt that it's up to each person to define problems or opportunities. Broad consultation is part of this process. There was encouragement to invite colleagues to participate. Engage with groups at the university and go see them with these types of questions, and guide them through to our feedback processes and processes at the divisional level. On the other hand, there was some feeling that there can be a point at which too broad of a consultation leads to paralysis.

There was also some discussion of students complaining that not all instructors use Blackboard. Students find it difficult to gage what, when and how to communicate with instructors and what, when and how Instructors will communicate with them (in what medium or mode).

There was also some discussion that we make the software company provide training. How are people getting trained?

Action Items

Please put your views into our Feedback form

<http://toolboxrenewal.act.utoronto.ca/feedback-form/>