

February 11th, 2025

Spaces & Experiences

GRADUATE HOUSE RESIDENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE (RAC)

11:00am - 12:00 PM

Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

Meeting Minutes

IN ATTENDANCE

Name	Role
Steve Massee	Dean of Residence and Director of Student Life
Aisalyn Templin	Administration and Communications Assistant
Alicia Whitfield	Manager, Residence Admissions
Amika Shah	Assistant Dean, Residence Life & Communication
Michael Fernandes	Residence Life Coordinator
Oluwaseun Adesanya	Resident, Graduate House
Ryan Hopkin	Facilities Coordinator
Sangeeta Jeyakumar	Manager of Residence Administration, Finance & Operations
Tao Wang	Residence Advisor
Victoria Chui	Resident, Graduate House
Yara Corky	Co-President of Graduate House Council

REGRETS

Name	Role
Kevin Dancy	Director of Residence Operations

AGENDA

- Welcome and Introductions
- 24/25 Residence Experience Survey Results
- Admissions Update
- Grad House Council Updates
- Discussion
- Next meeting
 - March (last meeting for the 24-25 contract period)

Note: this meeting was chaired by Michael Fernandes, Residence Life Coordinator

WELCOME

All participants introduced themselves and participated in the icebreaker discussion topic.

Land Acknowledgement

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

24/25 RESIDENCE EXPERIENCE SURVEY RESULTS

Amika Shah presented the most recent survey overview. Notable elements of the process this year included:

1. A narrowed survey timeline, which allowed for more time for analysis and development of action items.
2. The timing of the survey was more strategic (before Winter Break).
3. We employed the use of incentives, including a pizza party, \$75 gift cards. Incentives were both individual and community focused.
4. Emails, newsletter, and a print campaign were used.

Highlights from the survey include:

- Increased participation (6%)
- 91% knew how to contact their RA, most connect on a semesterly basis (1:1 meetings)
- 88% found the frequency acceptable.
- The sizeable population (76%) attends at least one event per semester. For those not participating, the number one reason is that they didn't have time (81%). Second, most common is not wanting to attend an event alone (25%).
- 60% of respondents have made friends and feel somewhat connected. Some have not made friends but still do not feel isolated. For some students, building connections in their residence is not a goal.
- Grad House has done a strong job with maintenance follow-up and notice to residents.
- 15–30-minute drop-in events was the most desirable option.
- 50% of students use the Courtyard Common Room – Lounge at least once a month.
- 90% agreed that living in residence supported their academic success.
- Non-newsletter emails are the preferred method for residents to receive information.

ADMISSIONS UPDATE

Alicia Whitfield presented a few key updates to the Committee:

- Summer applications opened January 15th
- 2025-26 applications opened on January 22nd
- Current students will be able to apply for GCPS status beginning March 17th
- Returner offers will be sent in early June.

RESIDENCE COUNCIL UPDATES

A student representative indicated that they are happy with the level of engagement this year and they are looking forward to more collaborations with the RAs. Programming Highlights include a visit to the Aquarium. There is a Snow-ball event coming up, and the Council is hoping for a high level of participation. It was noted that the sense of community the Council encourages can help improve the experience for students, especially newcomers.

DISCUSSION

A student asked how we can increase participation in events. Staff replied that students tend to get quite busy as the term progresses, and academic demands increase. Staff are happy to offer support on ways to increase engagement with Council events and activities.

Staff congratulated the Council for successfully running programs and events and asked for suggestions for staff moving forward. The Council representative said that students love giveaways, things that are easy to participate in. Students enjoy community and culture-based events. This can be an avenue to promote community building and friendships in the building. Affinity-based programming is something that students have highlighted through the survey as well.

Staff would like to bring groups together with shared experience. This can be a way to help residents make a connection, someone they can attend events with moving forward. The fear of small talk can be powerful. When students know there is a point of connection, this can be really valuable.

Staff suggested providing more opportunity to engage digitally. This could include pre-orientation communities, or an informal marketplace.

Staff announced that soon there will be filtered, refrigerated water available. There will be a filtered water bottle location, in the CCR (wall facing the pool table). This will be an accessible area for everyone.

A student suggested that Grad House could host a recurring, low-key, coffee, or games event. This would be a casual way to meet and chat with people that you see regularly around the building. Staff mentioned that in the past there was a frequent, weekend coffee meetup, and this is remembered fondly. Recurring events create familiarity, an opportunity to build rapport. This could be an option, if the budget permits, for the Council to consider

A student suggested a buddy system, and consistency with events and opportunities to meet.

A student commented that people want to attend events with their suitemates, but that it would be good to normalize meetings with students from other suites. This could be done by using a variety of common spaces, to introduce new spots in the building. This would achieve the goals of using the common spaces more frequently and building community.



Graduate House

Spaces & Experiences

A peer mentorship program is an opportunity brought forward by a staff member.

NEXT MEETING

We aim to have another meeting in March, taking members' availability into account. Michael will be in touch to confirm.