



REPORT

From the office of the...
Associate Vice President
(Services)

TO: Members of the Student Representative Assembly
FROM: Justin Phung, Associate Vice President: Services
Mitchell German, Vice-President (Administration)
SUBJECT: Macademics Review
DATE: **Thursday, March 23, 2023**

INTRODUCTION

To the esteemed members of the Executive Board of the McMaster Students Union,

The following report is a review of the McMaster Students Union (MSU) service known as **Macademics**.

The aim of this review is to give an overview of how successful the service is in fulfilling its purpose and mandate. Surveys were conducted of the general student body as well as volunteers and employees of the service to gain an understanding of how the service functions, how it is perceived, and what programming/services it delivers to the student body. This review contains an analysis of those results, as well as a summary of external research that has been done. The external research took a focus on other university student unions in Ontario to understand if they offer clubs or services with strategies which can be adopted by Macademics. The result of this internal and external research is summarized to give a series of recommendations made in concert by the Services Committee, VP Administration, and AVP Services.

SERVICE OVERVIEW

Service Purpose

1.1 To recognize, promote, and encourage excellence in teaching and learning at McMaster University.

Service Operating Parameters

2.1 MSU Macademics shall recognize excellence in teaching at McMaster University by awarding MSU Teaching Awards on behalf of MSU members;

2.2 MSU Macademics shall collect and disseminate information on the quality of education at McMaster University by establishing formal collaborations and communications with campus partners, including, but not limited to:

2.2.1 The MacPherson Institute for Innovation and Excellence in Teaching and Learning;

2.2.2 The McMaster University Faculty Association (MUFA);

2.2.3 and The Student Success Centre (SSC).

2.3 Holding campaigns to gather student input on quality of education at McMaster University;

2.4 MSU Macademics shall collect and promote online resources to students to aid in academic success.

Service Structure

3.1 The Macademics Coordinator, who shall:

3.1.1 Be responsible for managing all activities of MSU Macademics;

3.1.2 Perform other duties outlined in the Macademics Coordinator job description.

3.2 The Teaching Awards Coordinator, who shall:

3.2.1 Chair the Teaching Awards Committee in accordance with Operating Policy – Teaching Awards;

3.2.2 Plan the Teaching Awards Ceremonies;

3.2.3 Perform other duties as outlined in the Macademics Teaching Awards Coordinator job description

3.3 The Student Recognition Awards Coordinator, who shall:

3.3.1 Chair the following student recognition awards committees in accordance with their respective Operating Policies:

3.3.1.1 Honour M Award;

3.3.1.2 Rudy Heinzl Award of Excellence;

3.3.1.3 J. Lynn Watson Award for Community Service;

3.3.1.4 MSU Spirit Award;

3.3.1.5 MSU Merit Scholarship Award.

3.3.2 Ensure adherence to Operating Policy – Awards & Distinctions;

3.3.3 Perform other duties as outlined in the Macademics Student Recognition Awards Coordinator job description;

3.4 The Research & Resources Coordinator, who shall:

3.4.1 Be responsible for the creation and maintenance of an online library of academic resources available on and off campus;

3.4.2 Liaise with campus partners in the collection of academic resources for students.

3.4.3 Perform other duties as outlined in the Macademics Research & Resources Coordinator job description;

3.5 The Promotions Executive, who shall:

3.5.1 Be responsible for creating and sharing promotional materials for all MSU Macademics: Events; Programs; and Campaigns.

3.5.2 Perform other duties as outlined in the Macademics Promotions Executive job description;

3.6 The Volunteer & Logistics Executive, who shall:

3.6.1 Be responsible for the outreach, engagement, scheduling, and coordination of volunteers; 3.6.2 Assist in day-to-day actions and operations of the service;

3.6.3 Perform other duties as outlined in the Macademics Volunteer & Logistics Executive job description;

3.7 The Volunteers, who shall:

3.7.1 Support the service in completing its mandate;

3.7.3 Perform the duties outlined in the Macademics Volunteer job description

INTERNAL RESEARCH

Volunteer and Executive Survey

The executive and volunteer survey consisted of 34 questions to gauge how effectively Macademics' executives and volunteers view its functioning and delivery of services to the student body. This allows for reviewers to understand how the leadership and volunteers of Macademics perceives the service and will allow us to gain an understanding of where areas for improvement exist. There were 8 responses to the survey which represents approximately 47% of all executives and volunteers with Macademics.

Science represents the faculty from which the greatest number of respondents originate, with 75% from that faculty. Health Sciences is second, with the remaining 25% of respondents from that faculty. Fourth-year students represent the year with the greatest number of respondents, with 37.5% of total respondents being from that year of study. This was followed by second years at 25% of total respondents. All respondents were full-time domestic undergraduate students residing in Ontario. Half of respondents

(50%) lived in off-campus student housing, 37.5% lived at home or in other housing, while 12.5% lived in McMaster campus residence.

In order of greatest to least number of respondents, the four ethno-racial groups in which all respondents identified were South Asian (62.5%), White or European (25%), East or Southeast Asian (12.5%), and Mixed Race (12.5%). Cisgender women made up a clear majority of respondents (75%) with 12.5% identifying as cisgender men and the remaining 12.5% preferring not to disclose. 62.5% of respondents were heterosexual, 12.5% identifying as homosexual, 12.5% identifying as bi/pan/polysexual, and 12.5% preferring not to disclose their identity.

37.5% of respondents indicated their annual household income to be less than \$50,000, another 37.5% respondents reported their annual household income to be greater than \$200,000, and 25% indicated their household income to be between \$100,00 and \$199,999. Most respondents had family units composed of greater than four, oftentimes with one parent having a university certificate, diploma, degree, or above. The average age of respondents was 20.12 years old, with a large majority being second-generation students.

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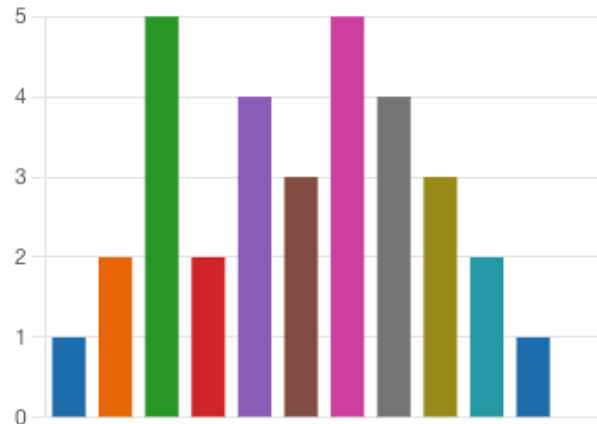
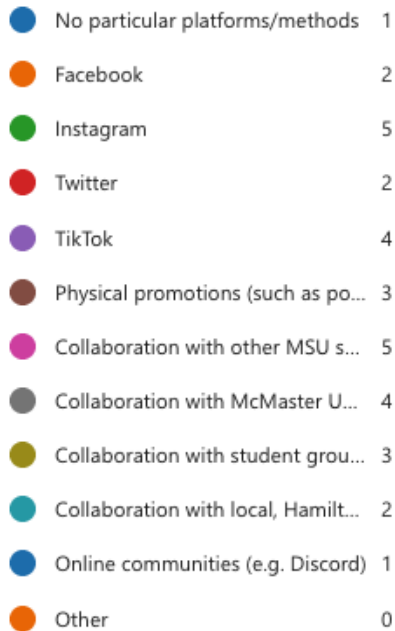
Respondents felt the role of Macademics was suitable and agreed it probably shouldn't be expanded. 62.5% of respondents strongly agreed. Further, 25% of respondents agreed that Macademics should bring back collaborations with Spark to host study nights in MUSC, which was done in the past to provide snacks and hot drinks for students, as well as quiet study rooms and social spaces.

Respondents first found out about Macademics through Instagram, friends/acquaintances, professors/TAs, and Welcome Week. Most respondents also indicated they've seen Macademics in a wide variety of areas including professors/TAs, friends/acquaintances, Instagram, on-campus promotions, and Welcome Week events being the top 5 mediums.

Figure 1. A figure to show platforms/methods which executives/volunteers believe should be used to expand awareness of the service.

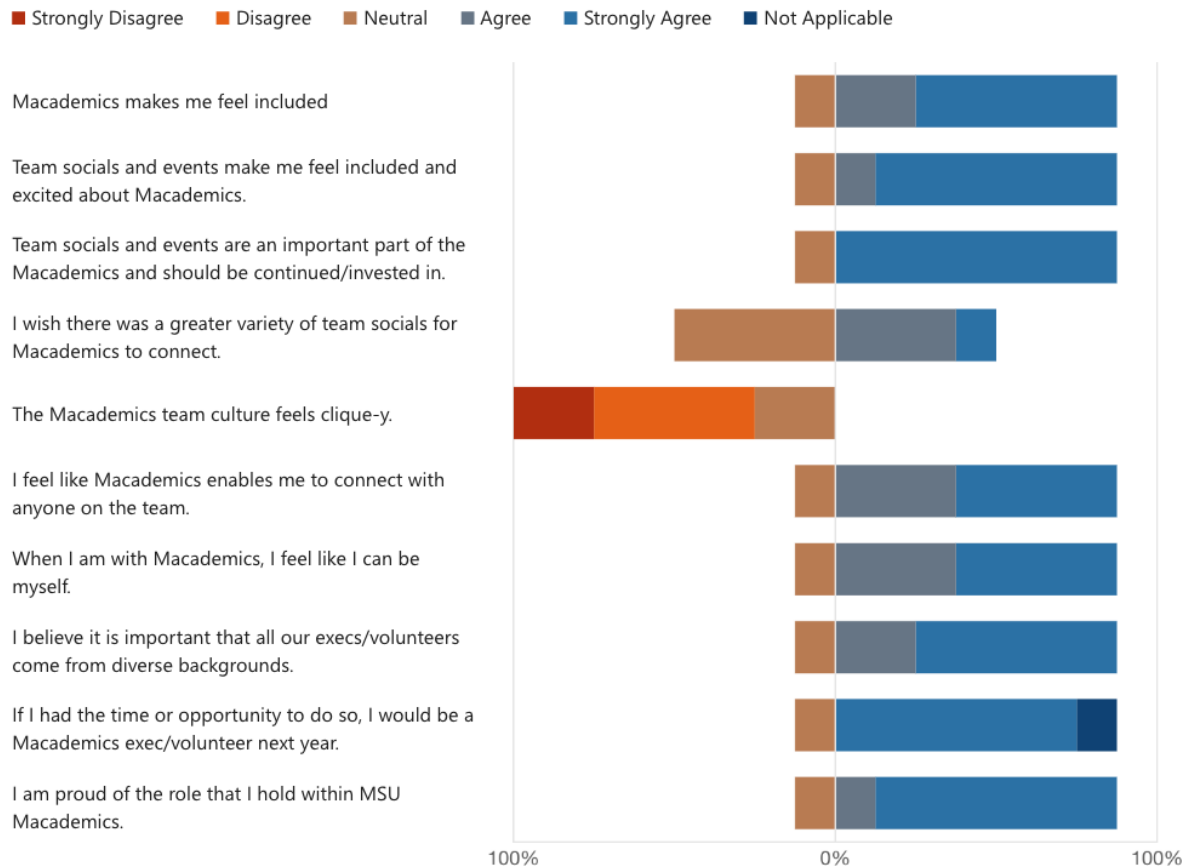
23. I think Macademics should use the following platforms/methods to increase awareness of its services:

[More Details](#)



Half of the respondents were executives, and half of the respondents were volunteers with Macademics. Half of people serve on Teaching Awards Committee, with the rest of respondents being in Promotions, Research & Resources, and Student Recognition Awards. Most people felt their job description was accurate and felt there was adequate support. The hiring process and training was also appropriate, with a majority indicating the MSU-wide training was sufficient and appropriate too. Frequency of collaboration and meetings was also mostly appropriate according to the responses. A large majority of people also strongly agreed in investing more in team socials and events for Macademics, with half the respondents indicating they wanted a greater variety of team socials for Macademics to connect. Many people also felt Macademics was a diverse, comfortable, and safe(r) space to be themselves, with many strongly agreeing they were proud to be a Macademics exec/volunteer. No verbal feedback or responses were provided.

Figure 2. Likert scale statements assessing inclusivity and team dynamic.



General Student Body Survey

The general student body survey consisted of 37 questions to gauge how effectively Macademics delivers its services to the student body. This allows for reviewers to understand how the student body perceives the service and will allow us to gain an understanding of where there exist areas to make service delivery or communication with the student body more efficient. There were 230 responses to the survey, with the plurality from first-year students (34%) followed by second-year students (27%).

The greatest number of responses came from Science students (38%) followed by Social Science students (15%). Approximately 90% of respondents were domestic students from Ontario, with out of province and international students making up the remainder. Most responses were also from full-time undergraduate students.

In order of greatest to least number of respondents, the three largest ethno-racial groups were White/European (33%), South Asian (30%), and East or Southeast Asian (20%). Cisgender women made up the supermajority of respondents (75%) with most of the remainder made up of cisgender men. About 8% of respondents were individuals of various non-cisgender identities. About 79% of respondents were heterosexual, with the

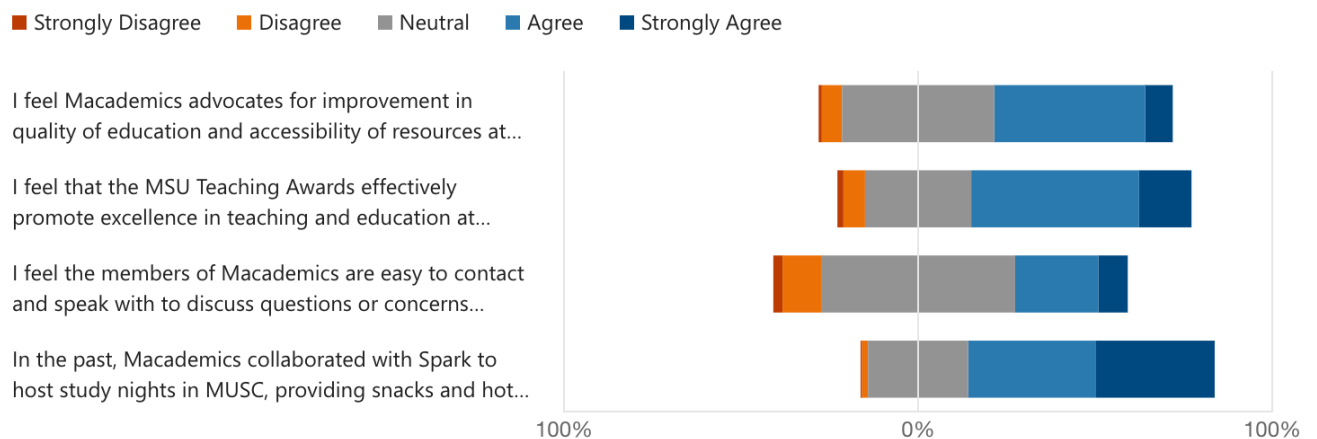
remaining 17% comprising various homosexual, asexual, questioning, Queer, and bi/poly/pansexual identities.

Average annual family income appeared to be within the range of \$50,000 to \$99,999 though likely at the lower end. Most respondents originated from family units composed of four to five individuals. Most respondents were also aged 18 or 19 years old, followed by 20, 21, and 22 years old. 13% of respondents self-identified as a person with a disability, with over half of respondents being second-generation students as well.

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Most respondents were not too familiar with Macademics, with an average familiarity score of 3/10. Nevertheless, a majority of respondents (67%) felt that Macademics' role was suitable. 46% of respondents also felt the role should be expanded. Overall, responses were positive for Macademics' role, with over half of respondents believing that Macademics advocates for improvement in quality of education and accessibility of resources. People also felt the MSU Teaching Awards were effective. Many also agreed that Macademics should collaborate with Spark to host study nights in MUSC. 32% of respondents felt Macademics members were easy to contact, with 13% indicating otherwise. See Figure 3 below for a breakdown of the statements.

Figure 3. Likert scale statements assessing the role Macademics plays in the school community and public perception of Macademics



Most respondents first learned of Macademics through informational emails (13%), MSU Instagram (11%), professors/teaching assistants (10%), Macademics Instagram (9%), and friends/acquaintances (7%). 30% of respondents indicated they have not heard of Macademics. 33% of respondents felt Macademics social media and promotions were of excellent or good quality, with 47% indicating they haven't seen Macademics promotions. Respondents have mostly heard of Macademics via the MSU Instagram (27%), followed by professors/teaching assistants (24%), informational

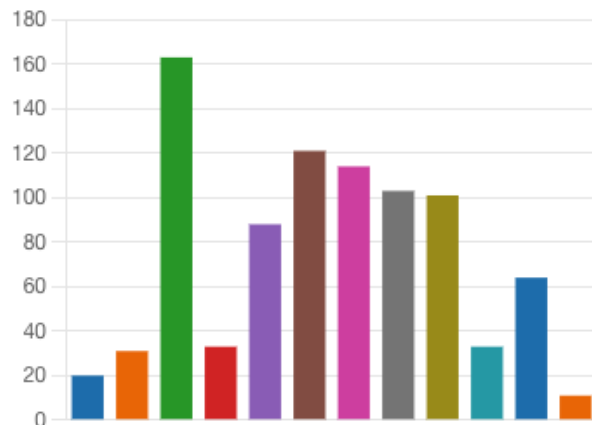
emails (24%), Macademics Instagram (20%), friends/acquaintances (19%), on-campus promotions (15%), and Welcome Week events (13%). Most respondents believed Instagram to be the best platform to increase awareness of Macademics' services. Physical promotions, collaborations with other MSU and McMaster University services, collaborations with student groups or societies, and TikTok followed.

Figure 4. A figure to show platforms/methods which students believe should be used to expand awareness of the service.

23. I think Macademics should use the following platforms/methods to increase awareness of its services:

[More Details](#)

● No particular platforms/methods	20
● Facebook	31
● Instagram	163
● Twitter	33
● TikTok	88
● Physical promotions (such as po...	121
● Collaboration with other MSU s...	114
● Collaboration with McMaster U...	103
● Collaboration with student grou...	101
● Collaboration with local, Hamilt...	33
● Online communities (e.g. Discord)	64
● Other	11

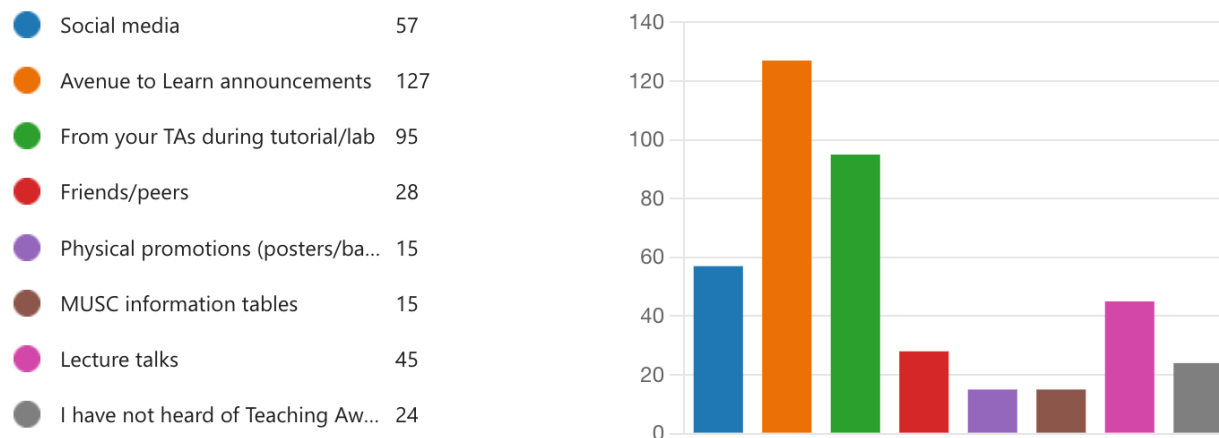


Of the Macademics initiatives, respondents were most familiar with the MSU Teaching Awards, followed by Student Recognition/MSU Awards, the used textbook Facebook page, the Resource Hub, and the blog posts. Respondents mostly felt the used textbook Facebook page to be most helpful to their education. The MSU Teaching Awards, Student Recognition Awards, and Resource Hub were all fairly even in terms of their helpfulness to students' educations, followed by the blog posts. It is important to note that across all initiatives, the majority of respondents were neutral (about 30% or more).

Most people heard of the MSU Teaching Award Nominations via Avenue to Learn announcements (55%), followed by TAs during tutorials/labs (41%), social media (25%), lecture talks (20%), and friends/peers (12%). This is shown in Figure 5 below. 29% of respondents submitted teaching award nominations for the Winter 2023 and/or Fall 2022 terms. Of these responses, a large majority of them felt the process of

submitting nominations was simple, easy, and accessible, believing it to be valuable to the McMaster community. Over 70% of respondents also felt the selection process for the Teaching Awards was transparent and fair, with 9% disagreeing.

Figure 5. Figure depicting how respondents heard of the MSU Teaching Award Nominations for professors and TAs



Of the 230 respondents, only 5% of respondents have used the Macademics Resource Hub. Over 60% of these responses indicated the Resource Hub was accessible and easy to locate, with half also believing it to be organized and easy to navigate. 42% of respondents also felt it was useful and valuable. A minority of respondents (17%) disagreed, finding the Resource Hub to be inaccessible and not valuable for them.

4% of all respondents used the Macademics blog posts. Over two-thirds of responses were consistently positive, believing the blog posts to be accessible, valuable, and organized. A consistent minority of 11% disagreed with the others.

For the used textbook Facebook page, 27% of respondents have used it. As a whole, 70% or more of respondents believed the page to be accessible, valuable, as well as easy to navigate. A minority (less than 10%) disagreed with others.

Written feedback on the MSU Teaching Award nomination forms focused on a wide range of ideas. Some respondents indicated the accessibility through professors, teaching assistants, and Avenue to Learn was sufficient. However, other responses placed more emphasis on circulation of news for the teaching awards, such as emailing it directly to students via newsletters, posting on all courses on Avenue, or even providing non-digital forms for nominations. Incentives to complete the form were also suggested, given that it was usually teaching assistants who brought up filling in the form and larger classes or tutorials would often have greater number of responses. One respondent mentioned they could not nominate TAs unless they had their full name, while another mentioned that TAs would often tell their students to vote for them even though they may not necessarily be the best TAs. Other responses focused on

transparency of how professors and TAs were assessed to be important in boosting engagement and explaining why the form is important in education.

In terms of possible initiatives from Macademics, there were a large variety of ideas. One prevalent one was having more organized study sessions or nights, connecting students into study groups for the same courses and also providing snacks for the occasion. More student involvement was highlighted, particularly through collaborations with other services or clubs. General academic advice/help was a concern too, with possible coverage of information about minors, SAS accommodations, external scholarships, student support, financially accessible tutoring, co-op or part-time jobs, and research positions. Not all ideas would fall within Macademics' purview, but could certainly be considerations for future areas of exploration. Others suggested focusing on existing initiatives too, such as improving promotions and accessibility of the used textbook Facebook page.

Overall, many emphasized more advertising of these resources to students via social media and outreach. Improving promotions on all the services Macademics offers — not just the Teaching Awards — would be impactful. Further awareness of Macademics' missions and goals would be important so a greater portion of the general student body population will use and be involved with the service.

EXTERNAL RESEARCH

As a part of the external research strategy, the Services Committee aimed to review all undergraduate student unions of universities in Ontario. The following aims to compare Macademics to its equivalent at other universities and assist in providing any recommendations.

Algoma University has an equivalent service called Academic Supports. This program assists students with any questions regarding academics. Their Academic Support Strategist also offers various services meant to support students when they encounter problems and concerns at the university. OCAD University has 2 equivalent services called advocacy and writing and learning service. The advocacy service helps students with academic and non-academic issues, while the learning service assists with issues relating to the learning capabilities and potential concerns student may have. Queen's University has a service called Academic Grievance Centre which is a service that offers a place to ask questions or find support about academic grievances, discipline, or regulations. They have trained volunteers at the office to help students, providing resources or listening to students' concerns. The University of Ottawa has an equivalent service called Peer Help, which provides academic, personal and social support to their student community based on peer consultation. Peer Help provides in person active listening session, peer support phone line, and online chat with a trained volunteer for anyone on campus that feel overwhelmed, stressed, or just want to talk.

The University of Waterloo offers peer success coaching appointments — study sessions offered by a peer success coach to share strategies for academic success,

productivity, and focus. Workshops are also offered alongside academic policy support. The University of Western Ontario offers the Writing Support Centre and academic support and engagement programs. The Writing Support Centre provides appointments with advisors to review assignments across a variety of disciplines. The Academic support and engagement program also promotes academic, personal, and professional growth by encouraging development of strengths, confidence, academic integrity and leadership.

The University of Windsor offers the Nimbus tutoring service. The service is offered as an online platform where students can access tutors, receive assistance with textbooks, and schedule courses. In addition, reserve student space is offered in collaboration with Leddy Library and Alumni Auditorium to assist with reservation of study rooms. Wilfred Laurier University offers the student success program, academic advising and accessible learning initiatives. The student success program provides assistance with mathematics, study, and writing skills through small groups or individual appointments. Academic advising offers student access to central academic advisors, program faculty advisors, professional staff advisors, and associated deans. York University offers the Peer-Assisted Student Sessions Program to provide students with the opportunity to work alongside other students to develop learning strategies in preparation for exams. Other programs offered include English as a second language, Learning Skills Service, Student Accessibility Services, Student Counselling and Development, and the Student Paper & Academic Research Kit.

Pertaining to any applicable recommendations for Macademics, there is huge overlap in its purview with other equivalent services provided at other universities. Although it may be nice to physically have an individual or small group of people to assist in answering academic related problems, this may fall under the scope of other services offered by the university. Currently, Macademics offers resources and directions to go to other faculty-specific recourses, but more coordination with other university services may be helpful. Having a reserve student space may also be helpful for students to collaborate and study, perhaps via sessions or workshops to connect students with each other.

CONCLUSION

From the information gathered through surveying of the student body, volunteers, and executives of Macademics, it is evident that Macademics plays an important role for the McMaster community. Nevertheless, this review has unveiled a few areas in which the Macademics service delivery can be improved.

1. Hold more team socials and events across various committees

A large majority of respondents strongly agreed in investing more in team socials and events for Macademics. Since various parts of the team like Teaching Awards or Research and Resources have separate responsibilities and may not interact much, it is important that team socials are established and held more frequently so the team is

more cohesive. It may also be nice to facilitate some internal events too given that team meetings only occur monthly.

2. Host organized study nights/sessions in collaboration with Spark

This was an initiative conducted in the past in collaboration with Spark, and aligns nicely with feedback from the general student body survey. Most likely, drop-in study groups with snacks and drinks would be popular for students. Organized study sessions where students can connect into study groups for the same courses is also a possibility should demand be met for each course. Nevertheless, this would be an excellent idea and would also involve cross-service collaboration. Further collaborations with other services are also highly encouraged!

3. Improve promotions and accessibility of used textbook Facebook page

The used textbook Facebook page, aside from the Teaching Award Nominations, was one of the most used services that Macademics offers, with 27% of respondents indicating they've used it. Thus, focusing on promoting such a valuable service especially among first-year students is essential; this could perhaps be done via other social media platforms. Ensuring the Facebook page continues to be updated and moderated is also crucial should this recommendation be adhered to.

4. Adjust the selection process for professors and TAs so it is more transparent and accessible

Many students expressed concerns regarding the transparency of the selection process for professors and TAs. Thus, the assessment criteria and process should be clear and published on the Macademics website or nomination form, clarifying the importance of a student's answers or the number of submissions a professor or TA would receive. Incentives to complete the form were also suggested, and in doing so, it would also encourage more people to complete the form and reduce the risk of bias from professors or TAs who promote their survey within their section and have a larger cohort.

5. Investigate other topics under Macademics' resources and research

Covering more topics in Macademics' resources and guides was identified as valuable to several respondents. This could encompass information such as minors, SAS accommodations, external scholarships, student support, financially accessible tutoring, co-op or part-time jobs, and research positions. Although this may be a separate concern and fall under the purview of other McMaster University services, the following topics could be considered for future topics of exploration, possibly in the Resource Hub.

6. Further promote all of Macademics' operations

More promotions of Macademics' services are crucial, particularly for other resources such as the used textbook Facebook page. By promoting the service on Instagram,

TikTok, or via physical posters, more people will be aware of the wide range of resources Macademics has to offer. Holding collaborations is also an excellent way to expand awareness of the service's operations. Furthermore, given the limited usage of Macademics blog posts, it may be more effective for the information in the blog posts to be posted on other platforms like Instagram or consolidated into one place or source like the Resource Hub. In publicizing it more on one platform, it may be easier to promote said resource and the overall Macademics service as a whole.

With these steps in place, Macademics will be able to successfully improve its service delivery and continue its role as a vital part of the McMaster Community. I would like to thank the Services Committee, the VP Administration, Administrative Services Coordinator, Director of Marketing and Communications, the Macademics Coordinator, the volunteers and executives on the Macademics team, and those in the student body who responded to the surveys for their help in the creation of this report.

Recommendations

1. Hold more team socials and events across various committees
2. Host organized study nights/sessions (in collab w Spark) with snacks
3. Improve promotions and accessibility of used Facebook page
4. Adjust the selection process for professors and TAs so it is more transparent and accessible
5. Investigate other topics under Macademics' resources and research
6. More promotions of all of Macademics' operations

Best regards,

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