



MATHSOC

First-Year Cohorts Memorandum

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Purpose

The main goals of establishing a first-year cohort system are to create a stronger sense of community, help students transition from high school to university and increase student engagement.

From a student society's perspective, cohorts bring a large benefit in being able to better communicate with students. For example, in the Faculty of Engineering, each cohort (ie. SE 2019) will elect a number of EngSoc reps and a number of Academic reps, whose respective jobs are to represent the cohort to EngSoc or to communicate their cohort's concerns about courses to their professors and to their department Chair.

Overview

I've spent the last few weeks consulting various students in the Faculty as well as incoming students (i.e. students who will be enrolled in 1A in Fall 2019), and a number of them have provided their opinions and have consulted students in their programs as well.

The main advantages of first-year cohorts brought up by students were building a stronger sense of community, thus making it easier for students to form connections and friendships, and establishing a support system that helps students transition into university academically, emotionally and socially.

One of the main problems that the university faces is mental health issues. Personally, I believe that by establishing cohorts, support systems are created for first-year students and can positively contribute to those who are experiencing social difficulties, transitional challenges adapting to university life or adjusting to different cultures, and hence, reduce mental health problems that first-year students might encounter.

A couple of concerns were brought up about scheduling - namely the flexibility to take various electives, taking advanced courses, and switching from advanced sections to regular sections. Previous Vice President Academic Deon Hua has suggested that at the worst case, students who choose to take an uncommon combination of electives may be placed "across" a number of cohorts. I would like to mention that since math students typically take the same electives - namely Economics (ECON), Speech Communication (SPCOM) and Accounting and Financial Management (AFM) - some of those electives could be scheduled according to the cohort schedule.

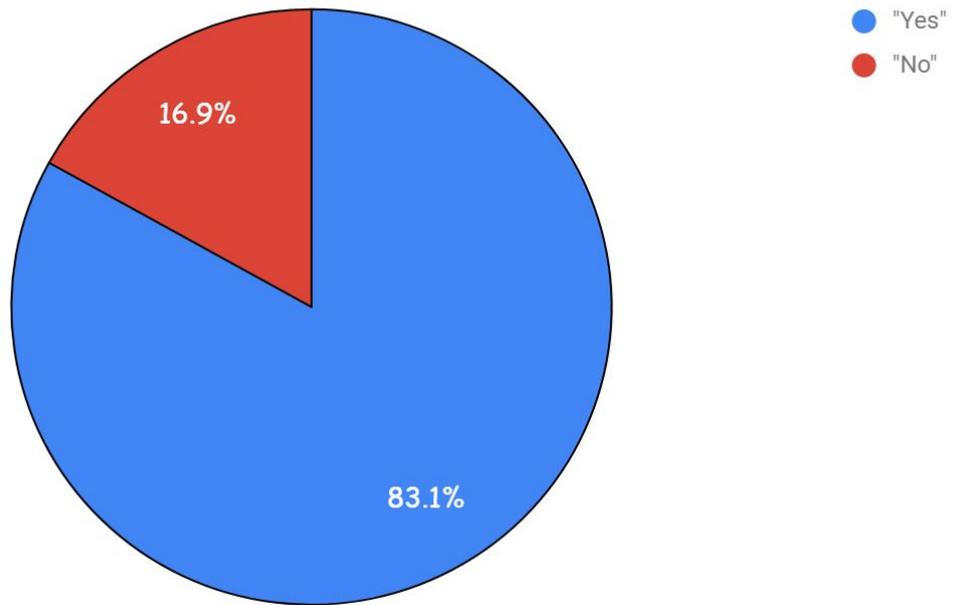
A few people suggested that the cohort system limits the amount of variety of students' social interaction, that is, students only see the same group of people every day.

The majority of students suggested splitting up students into cohorts based on their co-op sequences and level of courses - namely regular or advanced courses. A few students noted that balancing gender equality is important when splitting up cohorts.

Appendix A: Student Opinions Breakdown

I have conducted a survey on first-year cohorts targeting both current and incoming math students. Out of the 59 students who completed the survey, 49 were in favor of the idea.

Students' Opinions on First-year Cohorts



Appendix B: Student Quotes

Since I am not comfortable with sharing students' information, only a couple of quotes from the survey will be shared.

"[Cohorts make it] easier [for students] to find a support system in first year, which is extremely important when you're transitioning into a completely new environment and can decrease the stress of adapting."

"It is quite difficult to make friends within the faculty of math because of its competitive nature. If cohorts were initiated, this would hopefully create comradery among cohort members and take of the competition out of math. Students should work together and support each other rather than fuel unnecessary competition and isolate themselves. University is an extremely social experience and having someone to turn to in every aspect of your life is important, including the peers in your faculty."

"I think that the cohort system provides students with some stability and eases the transition into university life, as it makes it slightly similar to high school in the sense that they see the same people in class every day. This also gives them the opportunity to develop stronger friendships and thus a stronger support system, which is particularly important for first-year students."

"I support cohort systems because they allow for a stable group of people to interact with which makes it easier to find friends."

"It's pretty unnecessary. There are many programs that are taught the same math classes, and thus an abundance of students to go with them. The cohort system for engineering would feel in place because the grade sizes per program are significantly smaller compared to the number of MATH 135 students per se. Having no cohort system allows the flexibility available to the Math faculty to thrive. Also, there are many profs for every math course, and some profs might not cater to every student's learning style. It's important that students can attempt to find a prof suitable for them, and having a cohort system would prohibit the process."