



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING

Faculty of Applied Science & Engineering

Decanal Task Force on Mental Health

Final Report

January 2017

Table of Contents

Introduction and Summary of Recommendations	1
Task Force Mandate, Membership, and Process	3
University of Toronto's Mental Health Framework	4
Mental Health Programs and Services: A Strengths Assessment	5
Our Faculty's Recommendations	10
References	20
Appendices	
A. University of Toronto's Mental Health Framework	21

Introduction

With the release of the University of Toronto's Mental Health Framework in 2015, our Faculty responded by examining the existing mental health support systems for our students.

The Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering created a Task Force in July 2015 to:

- Create an inventory of the existing activities and resources that foster mental health amongst our students;
- Review Mental Health initiatives and strategies from across and beyond our University;
- Assess the effectiveness of these approaches; and
- To propose a comprehensive mental health strategy consistent with best practices from across the University and our fellow higher education institutions. The mandate and membership of the Task Force are provided in the following sections.

Within this task force, subcommittees were formed to review and assess our Faculty's current performance and initiatives in relation to each of the strategic priorities of the University's Mental Health Framework. As a result, the subcommittees developed recommendations that addressed each of these areas to align ourselves with the Framework's systems approach to mental health.

Since the Task Force was formed, the 2016 National College Health Assessment (NCHA) survey was conducted at the University of Toronto, with approximately 200 Engineering student participants. Of those participants, 57% indicated that their stress level was "above average" or "tremendous".¹ And although 66% of participants felt that the Faculty has a "sincere interest in (their) well-being", there is certainly still more work to do to ensure students have the support and services to flourish and succeed.

Summary of Recommendations:

Education, Training, Awareness & Anti-Stigma

1. Improve the Faculty's webpages dedicated to student health and wellness resources.
2. Develop and clarify a communication and referral protocol for students in crisis.
3. Develop a coordinated training program for staff and faculty on addressing students in distress and increase training for academic departments.
4. Develop a quick reference guide on addressing students in distress for faculty and instructors.
5. Develop a campaign to showcase Engineering students who prioritize healthy habits and lifestyle.

Inclusive Curriculum & Pedagogy

6. Develop a mental health statement to be included on all course syllabi.

7. Utilize Universal Design principles as a paradigm when proposing new academic programs or making changes to existing academic programs.
8. Review and further develop academic and personal support services for graduate students.
9. Better communicate to students their program's academic objectives and how their program's requirements are designed to support them.

Mental Health Service & Programs

10. Expand the capacity for embedded personal counselling within the Faculty.

Policies & Procedures

11. Modify the current Engineering undergraduate ranking system.
12. Facilitate a review on the Faculty's accessibility and accommodations policies.

The Decanal Task Force for Mental Health Strategies

Mandate

1. Identify and review the mental health strategies and resources that the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering currently provides or facilitates.
2. Review the current initiatives and strategies that promote mental health, and their effectiveness, within the University of Toronto and beyond
3. Recommend a mental health strategies and implementation plans for the Faculty that aligns with the University's new Mental Health Framework
4. Recommend appropriate working groups to implement the proposed strategies and plans

Membership

Prof. Thomas Coyle – Chair, Vice-Dean, Undergraduate

Prof. Markus Bussmann – Vice-Dean, Graduate Studies

Prof. Mark Kortschot

Prof. Jim Davis

Prof. Peter Weiss

Tom Nault (Faculty Registrar/Administrative Staff)

Estelle Oliva-Fisher (Administrative Staff)

Carla Baptista (Upper Year Advisor)

Jennifer Fabro (First Year Advisor)

Sean Hunt (Undergraduate Student)

Varsha Parthasarathy (Undergraduate Student)

Nazanin Orang (Graduate Student)

Sara Eskandarifar (Graduate Student)

Judy Vorderbrugge (Health and Wellness)

Process

The task force met regularly between July 2015 and October 2015. The committee was chaired by the Vice-Dean, Undergraduate, Prof. Tom Coyle.

To create alignment with the University's priorities and goals, four working groups were formed. Each working group met separately to discuss and report existing practices that addressed their area of focus, and provided recommendations to further develop the mental health support and services that we offer our students.

The four working groups were:

- Awareness, Education, Training & Anti-Stigma
- Inclusive Curriculum & Pedagogy
- Mental Health Services & Programs
- Supportive Policies and Procedures

University of Toronto's Mental Health Framework

Over the past five years, Students' health and well-being have become a priority in post-secondary institutions. In June 2011, the provincial government launched a comprehensive mental health and addictions strategy: [Open Minds, Healthy Minds](#)². This initiative serves as Ontario's plan to support mental health, from childhood to old age. Part of this strategy was the creation of The Mental Health Innovation Fund. This fund supports mental health projects at several colleges and universities across Ontario, including the University of Toronto³.

Although many students within the University succeed and are resilient without additional support and services, there are many students who struggle with mental health challenges that may put them at academic and personal risk. To address this increasing demand for support and services, the University adopted a systems approach as the overarching institutional strategy⁴.

This systems approach is summarized in 22 recommendations within the [Report of the Provostial Advisory Committee on Student Mental Health](#). This report offers a framework that "considers an academic environment that sustains health, and promotes the health and well-being of students as a foundation for academic and life success"⁵.

The recommendations can be themed in five areas of focus:

1. Develop a communication strategy that ensures students are informed of all programs and services available and how and when to access them;
2. Expand strength-based programming to develop positive mental health and resilience that engages students early to prevent exacerbation of the problem;
3. Develop mental health literacy of students, staff and faculty to create supportive and inclusive conditions for students to flourish and to reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues;
4. Coordinate, benchmark, and assess the effectiveness of programs and initiatives to ensure they are accessible, sustainable and cohesive;
5. Further leverage external community resources to help meet the full spectrum of health needs of our students and enhance coordination, collaboration and communication across services and systems within and beyond the University.

(-Executive Summary, mentalhealth.utoronto.ca)

The complete list of the 22 recommendations and a link to the full [Report of the Provostial Advisory Committee on Mental Health](#) can be found in the appendix.

Mental Health Programs and Services: A Strengths Assessment

The Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering is an engaged, diverse, and vibrant community composed of 8 core departments and a division, 5441 undergraduate students, 2365 graduate students, 262 faculty, and over 300 administrative staff. Below are the ways in which the Faculty currently optimizes the success and wellbeing of our community

Academic Advisors

Each academic department offers academic advisors for their respective upper-year undergraduate and graduate students. All first-year students, with the exception of Engineering Science students, are provided academic advising through the First Year Office. The Division of Engineering Science offers an academic advisor for years 1 and 2 and a second advisor for years 3 and 4.

Academic advisors provide advice and guidance around academic policies and procedures and make connections to Faculty and University services and resources. As a front-line connection with students, academic advisors are often the staff members that initially become aware of signs of distress and refer students to appropriate services at the University. In December 2016, the [final report from the Academic Advising Task Force](#)⁶ was presented to Faculty Council and included several recommendations (see appendix for the full list of recommendations) for the professionalization and ongoing training of our advisors to ensure consistent practice and enhance skill development across the departments.

Recommendation 10 in that final report is to “develop a network of specifically trained academic advisors for students encountering sexual violence, harassment or other gender related issues, as well as mental health issues” (AATF 2017). With the Academic Advising Steering Committee, the Faculty is currently in the midst of creating cross-departmental training for our academic advising staff to assure that we will provide consistent messaging and effective triaging to our students in distress.

The Community

“By fostering community, social networks and sense of belonging within learning environments, university staff and faculty may contribute to building protective factors against the development of mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.” (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009, p. 497)⁷

It is the Task Force’s experience that the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering fosters a strong community. As a cohort-based, lock step program, students move through their degree program with the majority of their courses the same as their peers. In addition, many design courses, including Engineering Strategies & Practice and Praxis, involve extensive group work. These are great strengths that we believe the Faculty can leverage to continue to build a close-knit community.

Educational Technology

The Instructional Technology office assists instructors with the integration of various educational technology platforms and programs in their courses. Many of these programs such as Piazza, Blackboard, and Top Hat allow students to engage with course material and their instructors through alternative means. These platforms create greater accessibility to course content and peers in their class, thus reducing barriers to learning and community support.

Embedded Advisors

Our Faculty currently offers three embedded, cross-appointed advisors: a Personal Wellness Counsellor and Coordinator; an International Transition Advisor; and a Learning Skills Strategist. These staff provide additional front-line support and service to all undergraduate students.

The embedded personal counsellor provides one-to-one appointments to students twice per week, totaling 14 hours per week. Over the past three years, the embedded personal counsellor has maximized her caseload each term. Of the students who completed the First Year Exit survey in 2016, 22% indicated they experienced an incident that was considered an emergency or crisis. It is evident that there is a demand and need for personal counseling within the Faculty.

Our embedded advisor system allows our students to meet advisors in a familiar environment. Currently, all learning strategist appointments are coordinated centrally through the First Year Office (FYO), regardless of a student's year of study. All academic advisors refer students for personal counselling or transition advising directly to the respective embedded counsellor.

Beginning in February 2017, the Faculty will have an additional embedded, full-time Learning Skills Strategist. This person will work collaboratively with the central University of Toronto Academic Success Centre and the departmental academic advisors, and serve all undergraduate students under the Vice-Dean, Undergraduate portfolio. The Learning Skills Strategist will offer one-to-one advising, group advising, and workshops both in and outside the classroom. These workshops will teach and encourage skills for resiliency and a healthy lifestyle.

The Engagement & Development Network

Since its inception in 2014, the Engagement & Development Network offers professional development opportunities and a cross-departmental forum for administrative staff and faculty to engage. Through a series of presentations and workshops, there have been intentional offerings that have positioned mental health as a priority for this network and the Faculty.

Examples of these sessions include: an introduction to the services and resources within the central Health and Wellness division; a summative presentation on the University of Toronto's Mental Health Framework; multiple safeTALK training sessions; a workshop on navigating cultural and mental health accommodations; and interactive health and wellness activities.

Each of these opportunities resulted in administrative staff feeling more aware of mental health resources available on campus and confident to approach students in distress.

Engineering Society's Mental Health Initiative(s)

Over the past three years, the Engineering Society has offered several events and initiatives that highlight mental health as a priority for our students. In the spring of 2015, the Engineering Society ran a mental health week with initiatives focusing on awareness of mental wellness, as well as stress-management. In the summer of 2015, SafeTALK training was run for Frosh week leaders to ensure that new students felt supported during their transition to university. In November of 2015, the Engineering Society elected its first Health and Wellness Director. This director promotes mental health awareness, directs students to appropriate resources at the University, and facilitates stress-management activities throughout the year.

First Year Instructor Training Day

Since 2014, as a part of the First Year Instructors Training Day, a brief presentation on "How to Deal with Students in Distress" has been offered.

Each September, approximately 20 first year course instructors attend a day-long professional development day that provides insight into new curriculum development, new or revised processes and systems, and trends and challenges amongst first year students.

The presentation offers an overview of how to recognize signs that a student may be in distress and how to best refer the student to appropriate resources. It highlights the importance of addressing these issues and a systems approach for referrals. As a result of this presentation, instructors have a list of specific resources in the faculty and the University that they can consult with regarding students in distress.

The First Year Office and APS 100

The FYO is a service hub for all first year undergraduate students. Students are often referred to the FYO when in distress. The FYO also coordinates stress-management events such as **Exam Jam**. This event is offered each semester before exams, incorporating course review sessions, mini-massages, therapy dogs, and healthy food. The FYO also offers academic success programs such as **Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS)**. The PASS program offers academic peer and mentorship support to both Engineering Science and Core 8/TrackOne students by connecting upper year students with a group of first year students.

APS 100: Orientation to Engineering is a new course that provides six learning modules designed to provide first year students with a greater understanding of their academic learning environment and introduce them to the field of engineering. Throughout the six learning modules, the themes of mental wellness and resiliency are integrated. Specific examples include tutorials that offer meditative breathing exercises, time management skills, and exam preparation skills; all of which contribute to anxiety- and stress-reduction. In the Dean's Town Hall on January 25, 2017, a first year student noted that she felt that this course and its content "communicated that the Faculty does care about students' emotional well-being".

Health-and-Wellness-Based Student Clubs

In addition to initiatives offered by the Engineering Society, there are recognized student clubs with a mandate to advance mental health and well-being in our Faculty. In 2014 and 2015, the Peer Wellness Group, a student-driven initiative and recognized group worked collaboratively with staff, our embedded counsellor, and other support services on campus to offer programming for students. In 2014 – 2015, the Peer Wellness Group nominated three representatives to become trained Peers Are Here facilitators. Peers Are Here was a central University of Toronto initiative in which students were trained to facilitate open group discussions pertaining to the common stresses that university students may experience. In 2015, the division of Health and Wellness decided to discontinue the Peers Are Here program due to low participation rates across the University. Between March 2015 and February 2016, students created and coordinated a club called Skule Stress Release. This club offered de-stressing activities for members of the University of Toronto Engineering community.

Mindful Moments: A Mindfulness Group in Engineering

In 2015, the Faculty invested in the central initiative, Mindful Moments. This program provided regular opportunities across the University for students to learn and practice mindful meditation. The Engineering group has developed into a regularly practicing, small community of students. The Engineering mindfulness meditation group has the most participants of all the optional groups that are part of this initiative, approximately 20-25 students since September 2016. The embedded personal counsellor has referred several students to this group as a method of stress management and resiliency.

All participants have reported positive feedback for the group and their experience. Many students have requested that this initiative continue to be offered in the coming years.

Probation Policy: Revised

In February 2016, Faculty Council approved a change to the Faculty's Academic Regulation 8.1. This change amended the requirements for students to lift probation and thereby reduces anxiety and stress as students progress through their program. "The revised policy will allow a full-time student who has a non-repeated session with a weighted session average of 60% or greater while maintaining a minimum 1.50 cumulative GPA to have his or her academic standing improved by one step. A part-time student will have his or her academic standing improved by one step after having completed the minimum number of sessions required to have grades registered in four or more non-repeated courses with a weighted average of 60% or greater and a CGPA of 1.50" (Faculty Council Minutes, February 29, 2016).

safeTALK Training

Each year, staff, faculty, and select students are invited to participate in safeTALK, a suicide-alertness training session created and licensed through Livingworks. The program encourages participants to engage in open-dialogue around the topics of suicide to destigmatize the reality of suicide within our community. It trains participants to recognize the invitations that a person with thoughts of suicide may be offering. Finally, it provides them with a list of community

supports and resources to which they can refer students with thoughts of suicide, and the skills for effective referrals and connections.

In 2014 and 2015, over 20 administrative staff and 40 student leaders were trained in suicide alertness. This program is optional and has been facilitated by a certified and trained facilitator. According to the feedback survey, 90% of participants that completed the program felt more confident to approach and engage with a community member in distress. This program has been offered to staff and faculty, once or twice per year, over the past four years.

Recommendations

Education, Training, Awareness & Anti-Stigma

As a large Faculty, awareness, education, and training are critical in order for our staff and faculty to feel prepared to respond effectively when students are in distress. In addition to our size, the large percentage of international students is a factor that must be considered when implementing mental health initiatives. International students may have differing cultural and religious beliefs related to mental health treatment seeking or diagnosis and face a range of other transition issues. To foster more awareness of mental health issues, trends, and challenges within our Faculty, increased communication around support services, as well as integrated and inclusive training and resources must be a priority.

Recommendation #1: Improve the Faculty’s webpages dedicated to student health and wellness resources.

The Task Force recommends that the Faculty create a dedicated webpage, which is directly accessible from the main Faculty, Undergraduate, and departmental webpages, for all support services and resources available to Engineering students.

Currently, undergraduate students can source some resources and support services through the Undergraduate Engineering website. Only two departmental websites contain links to the Health and Wellness Centre.

In all three cases, students need to navigate the websites and submenus in order to find a limited list of resources or a direct link to the Health and Wellness Centre. According to student feedback through the Dean’s Town Hall meetings, students often felt frustrated and overwhelmed when trying to find “who to contact” and “what to do”. Through the 2015-2016 First Year Exit Survey, 31% of survey participants indicated that they had no idea embedded advisors existed within the Faculty. In addition, through the 2016 NCHA survey 34% of survey respondents indicated that they are “not at all” familiar with University of Toronto, St. George Health and Wellness services. By creating a visible, easily-navigable, online resource page, there would be less additional stress in finding appropriate resources.

According to the 2016 NCHA survey, 59% of Engineering respondents indicated that they wanted more information about helping others in distress in contrast to the 24% that said they received this information. As well, 68% of Engineering respondents indicated that they wanted information on sleep difficulties in contrast to the 19% that said that they received this information. These gaps in responses demonstrate that in addition to focusing on how we communicate important resources and services to students, we need to consider what content we provide.

By dedicating online space to health and wellness resources, the Faculty's commitment to mental health is reinforced, and raises the profile of support services offered to Engineering students.

Suggested elements of online presence and infrastructure for health and wellness resources:

- 1.1 A clear and visible button or icon on the Faculty's and the Engineering undergraduate website's landing/parent pages. The resource webpage should be "one click" away from any landing page.
- 1.2 All departmental websites to have direct links to the webpage.
- 1.3 The webpage should outline all the support services and resources offered to Engineering students (with hours when applicable).
- 1.4 The resource web-page should contain a comprehensive list of on- and off-campus crisis response support services. This would ensure students in distress have access to support 24-hours a day, 7-days a week.
- 1.5 The web-address to this resource webpage should be short and easily remembered. When marketed, a short address will help students remember it when seeking additional support.
- 1.6 The webpage should have a direct link to the University's new healthyuoft.ca site containing campus programming, resources, and events.
- 1.7 The webpage should contain articulated privacy statements and confidentiality policies.
- 1.8 The webpage should include information or resources on specific mental health issues (i.e. depression, anxiety, sleep difficulties).

Recommendation #2: Develop and clarify a communication and referral protocol for students in crisis.

The Task Force recommends the clarification of communication and referral protocol and processes for students in distress, providing consistency and clarity for students seeking support.

With the exception of the first year program, each department has slightly differing processes for managing students in distress. Most academic advisors refer students to the embedded personal counsellor, however, beyond this option, many manage students in distress on a case-by-case basis. Unfortunately, this creates inconsistency across the Faculty and, most importantly, documentation and vital information is often missed due to the lack of a defined process.

While the embedded personal counsellor provides valuable service, maximum capacity is often reached by November in the fall term and March in the winter term. By creating and implementing a consistent process, academic advisors, front-line administrative staff, instructors, and teaching assistants will be able to appropriately refer students based on their needs and level of distress.

To formalize this process, we recommend the following:

2.1 Define the Faculty's policy regarding communication around students in crisis and critical incidents

2.2 Clarify the chain of communication and define key people to be informed in the case of a student in crisis or critical incident

2.3 Each department designate a liaison for support services. This liaison is not to be mistaken for a personal counsellor. The departmental liaison would be trained to: recognize signs of distress or mental illness; be familiar with all of the support services at the University; be familiar and understand the University's privacy and confidentiality policies; and serve as a local resource for colleagues and students⁸.

2.4 Clarify the chain of communication (if applicable) or next steps after students are appropriately referred.

2.5 Clarify policies around accommodations and withdrawals due to non-academic reasons.

Recommendation #3: Develop a coordinated training program for staff and faculty on addressing students in distress and increase training for academic departments.

The Task Force recommends the coordination and integration of an annual, tiered training program composed of sessions and/or courses to better prepare faculty and staff to address students in distress.

Optional professional development workshops on dealing with students in crisis are already offered through the [Organizational Development and Learning Centre](#), The [Engagement & Development Network](#), and the [Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation](#). However, there is a lack of awareness of these opportunities.

Coordinating a package or menu of workshops, seminars, or courses, staff and faculty would be able to choose appropriate training dependent on their experience. By participating in these sessions, staff and faculty become valuable members of the community that foster mental health and student support.

For this coordinated training program, we recommend:

3.1 Invite Health and Wellness and the aforementioned departments to the Faculty to present pre-existing workshops on topics such as recognizing and referring students in distress, having difficult conversations with students, and boundaries.

3.2 Staff and faculty be offered yearly training sessions on how to recognize students in distress, how to respond, and what support services are available on campus.

3.3 Create “packages” of sessions already offered through the Faculty and University tailored to individual departments.

3.4 Offer “refresher” sessions to staff and faculty that have already attended training sessions within the past three years.

Recommendation #4: Develop a quick reference guide on addressing students in distress for faculty and instructors.

The Task Force recommends the development of a quick reference guide on addressing students in distress for faculty and instructors, clarifying their role within students’ circle of care, and ensuring a consistent approach and process for students across the Faculty.

Modeled after the “[Green Folder Initiative](#)” at the University of British Columbia and Queen’s University, a quick reference guide would provide instructors and faculty with warning signs, how to respond, what to do when assisting students in distress, on- and off-campus resources, and what to do if a student rejects a referral.

The quick reference guide would be available in hard copy and online. The printed copies would be distributed to all instructors and recommended to be posted where they can be easily referenced. This guide would provide clear direction for instructors, but would also demonstrate to students that they are entering a safe space with someone who is willing and able to help.

In addition to this, the Task Force recommends promoting the Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation’s [Supporting Students in Distress: Guidelines for Teaching Assistants at the University of Toronto](#).

Recommendation #5: Develop a campaign to showcase Engineering students who prioritize healthy habits and lifestyle.

The Task Force recommends the creation of an on-going marketing campaign that acknowledges Engineering students and student initiatives within the Faculty that prioritize a healthy lifestyle.

[*The Human Face of Mental Health and Mental Illness in Canada*](#) (2006) defines mental health as: “The capacities of each and all of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections, and personal dignity”⁹. By fostering mental health awareness among our students, we increase awareness of triggers, nature, impact, and prevention of mental health issues. This knowledge and understanding builds resiliency for academic, personal, and professional success.

As a part of this campaign, we recommend:

5.1 Using established and credible marketing techniques (digital displays, website banners, website news stories, newsletters, brochures, social media, etc.) to create awareness across the Faculty.

5.2 Integrating social norming as a tone for the campaign to help counteract the belief that students do not seek help or gain benefit from seeking help.

5.3 Increasing awareness that students who live healthy lifestyles may still face mental health challenges.

5.4 Increasing the profile of the campaign during key events (i.e. Orientation, midterm and exam season, Exam Jam etc.).

5.5 Highlighting Engineering students and student initiatives within the Faculty that emphasize a healthy lifestyle.

The goals of this campaign are to: encourage students to practice regular habits and skills that contribute to their wellbeing and resiliency; emphasize the correlation between healthy living and academic and professional success; and help students see the potential for themselves through images and videos of their peers.

Inclusive Curriculum & Pedagogy

The Faculty is committed to the quality of education and research that it offers. Although we offer programs and initiatives that create conditions inside and outside of the classroom that support students’ wellbeing, the Task Force recognizes there is still work that can be done.

As a cohort-based, lock step program, accommodations for student mental health needs can be challenging due to the requirements of the program. However, the Task Force has identified four recommendations to further acknowledge mental illness as an invisible disability and foster an inclusive and supportive academic program.

Recommendation #6: Develop a mental health statement to be included on all course syllabi.

The Task Force recommends the development of a standard mental health statement to be included on all course syllabi that normalizes the student experience and links to an online webpage of support services and acknowledges mental illness as a valid reason for academic accommodation requests.

Access and awareness is an on-going theme within the student feedback related to mental health programming and services within the Faculty. The inclusion of a mental health statement or policy on all syllabi is an effort to be more proactive in minimizing the potential negative outcome of students in distress. The statement may also encourage classroom conversation about mental health and the stigma and barriers that prevent students from seeking help.

The statement demonstrates to students that the Faculty recognizes mental illness as a reality for some students, and encourages students to seek help from the support services available when necessary.

Suggested statements are:

“If you are unable to complete academic work due to a documented conflict or an unforeseen problem (e.g. physical or mental illness, injury, bereavement, etc.), please submit a Petition for Consideration in Course Work to your academic advisor in order to be considered for special accommodation”.

“As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as mental health concerns or stressful life events. These may lead to diminished academic performance and may reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. The University of Toronto has support services available to assist you. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus at: (insert link here)”

Recommendation #7: Utilize Universal Design principles as a paradigm when proposing new academic programs or making changes to existing academic programs.

The Task Force recommends that when new academic programs or changes to existing academic programs are proposed, that universal design principles are used as a paradigm.

Over the past decade, Universal Design (www.cast.org), also known as Inclusive Teaching or Accessible Education (<http://www.accessiblecampus.ca/tools-resources/educators-tool-kit/>), has been an emerging field of study. Since the concept was first articulated by CAST in the 1990s, it is now the leading framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people (www.cast.org). This concept explores and addresses: the variability of learners’ needs; barriers

to learning; and strategies to overcome impacts¹⁰. Instructors and curriculum designers must consider Universal Design principles to lessen the potential hindrance to a student's learning experience. The three primary principles to consider are: Providing multiple means of representation (the "what" of learning); providing multiple means of action and expression (the "how" of learning); and providing multiple means of engagement (the "why" of learning).

By adopting Universal Design principles as 'best practice' in the development of new programs or when making changes to existing programs, the Faculty becomes intentional and proactive in addressing a variety of learner needs and abilities and lessens barriers to some students' learning. The University has identified lockstep programs, such as Engineering, as cases where these principles are particularly significant and needed¹¹. By integrating Universal Design principles, an instructor is effectively integrating a diverse range of methods to: present and relate the course content (through a variety of case studies, symbols, hands-on activities, etc.); assess students' learning; and engage students' interest and sustain their effort and persistence. (<http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/whatisudl/3principles>)

This recommendation is also in accordance with the third recommendation related to mental health disabilities from the [2015-2016 Ombudsperson's Annual Report](#): "Require a section on accessibility and accommodation in all new program proposals submitted to the Committee on Academic Policies and Programs of Governing Council, as well as in the periodic reviews of existing programs, and proposed changes to programs" (pg. 12)¹². Universal Design help the University of Toronto meet the stands set out in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (www.aoda.utoronto.ca).

The Task Force recommends the Faculty Council's Undergraduate Curriculum Committee to effectively facilitate this recommendation when reviewing new programs and making changes to existing programs. Additional resources on Universal Design or Inclusive Teaching can be found at: <http://teaching.utoronto.ca/teaching-support/strategies/inclusive-teaching/strategies-for-instructors/> .

Recommendation #8: Review and further develop academic and personal support services for graduate students.

The Task Force recommends the review of academic and personal support services for graduate students within the Faculty, with a mandate to further develop the amount and quality of what is offered.

The Task Force discussed in great detail the noticeable differences in support services offered to undergraduate students compared to what is offered to graduate students. This problem is not unique to the Faculty. Recommendation 3.3 in the University's Report on Student Mental Health suggests to "create programming for graduate students that will foster a greater sense of community within and across departments and Faculties, and enhance support for graduate students in their interactions with their supervisors" (pg. 18).

Over the past 10 years, the proportion of graduate students have increased from 22.1% to 31.5% of our overall student body (Annual Report 2016, pg. 30)¹³. In 2015-2016 graduate enrolment increased in both size and diversity. The main contributor to that year's increase is the 14% increase in students pursuing professional master's degrees (e.g. MEng). This degree is course-based, similar to the undergraduate degree programs, however, MEng students do not have access to the same level of support services nor do they have the same curriculum structure that fosters community development. In addition, approximately 20% of these students are part-time students, thus possibly spending limited time on-campus to make meaningful connections.

The Task Force was made aware of the need to increase the academic and personal support services offered to graduate students. In particular, MEng students need to have a better understanding of their degree's outcomes and the purpose of the program's structure. The most triggering issue among research graduate students (MAsc, PhD) seems to be their relationship with their supervisor. Graduate Coordinators have reported this as an ongoing issue across all departments and the connection it has to the mental health and satisfaction of graduate students.

To address these concerns, the Task Force suggests a review of the academic and personal support services for graduate students within Engineering be facilitated by the Vice-Dean, Graduate Studies and the departmental Graduate Associate Chairs. Follow up tasks would be to increase awareness of existing programming for graduate students (e.g. the support services and activities that make up the Gradlife initiative in the School of Graduate Studies, ILead's graduate-level leadership courses and programming, the Prospective Professors in Training (PPIT) program, and sessions offered through the Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation) and to provide any recommendations for further development if needed.

Recommendation #9: Better communicate to students their program's academic objectives and how their program's requirements are designed to support them.

The Task Force recommends that throughout a student's degree program, they receive consistent and regular communication on expected learning outcomes and how their program's requirements are designed to support them.

Academic advisors make students aware of the program requirements for the completion of their degree, how and when they will be evaluated, and how courses and program expectations support their career goals. An Academic Advising Steering Committee, established in January 2017, has a mandate to develop and coordinate training opportunities that are relevant to the academic advising role within the Faculty. Explaining program expectations and outcomes is a valuable topic that should be addressed within these sessions.

As recommended in the University's Report on Mental Health, we must "clearly articulate course goals and expectations and promote best practices in assessment and timely feedback." (pg. 18). The Task Force recommends that the Teaching Methods and Resources Committee

examine the relationship between student stress and course design, and to explore effective methods for student assessment and feedback.

Mental Health Service & Programs

The [Council of Ontario Universities](#) emphasizes the importance of treating mental health issues early: “we know that 70 per cent of mental health problems and illnesses in adults – anxiety, depression, substance abuse and eating disorders – have their onset during childhood or adolescence”

The University of Toronto offers a range of support services and programs for mental health. A concerted effort must be made to better promote these opportunities. However, as many Engineering students often attest to, there is a particular need for additional services and programming offered at the Faculty level that acknowledges students’ schedules and the culture of Engineering.

Recommendation #10: Expand the capacity for embedded personal counselling within the Faculty.

The Task Force recommends that the Faculty collaborate with the division of Health and Wellness to expand current capacity within the embedded counselling program or hire an additional embedded personal counsellor.

An emerging theme from a 2016 undergraduate student focus group for the Faculty’s self-study was the limited access to (or lengthy wait times for) advising and counselling services. Given the current demand for embedded personal counselling, expanding the capacity within the embedded counselling program (specifically for personal counselling) would allow our students with lower-risk issues and concerns greater timely access to service within their community. An additional embedded personal counsellor can also help address some of the service backlog at central services.

With international students making up a significant proportion of our entering class at 27%, the Faculty must consider how we can meet the needs of this diverse cohort. Counselling services in a familiar setting can be more attractive and beneficial for international students. As cited in the University’s Report on Mental Health, “for some international students, the availability of more flexible and diverse formats of counselling services is important” (Boone, et al., 2011).

Finally, another key benefit to increasing capacity is our ability to respond effectively to early indications of student concern. As cited in the 2013 CACUSS guide, “National College Health Assessment (NCHA) data indicates a gap between the number of students reporting mental health concerns and those who report having received mental health support. The longer these concerns persist, the more they impact student learning and mental health”.

Policies & Procedures

According to the [Post-Secondary Student Mental Health: Guide to a Systemic Approach](#)¹⁴, “broader organizational context has an impact on the wellness of those within it. Institutional structure and policies contribute to its culture by reinforcing certain values, beliefs and behaviours; and discouraging others.” (pg. 8) As a Faculty, we must take a closer look at our policies, practices, and processes and how they support students’ mental health, furthering our commitment to enhancing the student experience.

Recommendation #11: Modify the current Engineering undergraduate ranking system.

The Task Force recommends that the current Engineering undergraduate ranking system be modified to only provide rankings for the top 30% of students, and the impact of publishing honour rolls be considered.

The undergraduate ranking system and the publishing of honour rolls in Engineering have been known to cause anxiety and unhealthy competition among our students. As cited in the University’s Report on Mental Health: “Evidence indicates that excessive academic stress is negatively associated with academic performance and adversely impacts students’ mental and physical health” (pg. 17). The current structure and process causes divides in classes and may lead to negative impacts on lower-ranked students to become overly self-critical.

The undergraduate ranking system has become part of the Engineering culture and as such, instead of eliminating the system, the Task Force proposes for the system to limit rankings to the top 30% of students. Although there was discussion around the merits of publishing honour rolls during the February 2016 Faculty Council meeting, special consideration must be given to the negative impact that this may have on students who are less academically strong.

Recommendation #12: Facilitate a review of the Faculty’s accessibility and accommodations policies.

The Task Force recommends a review of the Faculty’s accessibility and accommodations policies to ensure they are in alignment with the Guidelines on Accessible Education under the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

To ensure the Faculty fosters an inclusive learning environment for students, we must ensure that our policies are up-to-date and adhere to current accessibility and accommodations policies and laws. This limits the obstacles and barriers that students with accessibility needs may experience while enrolled within Engineering. Mental illness is an invisible disability that we must consider when reviewing our accommodations policies.

The Task Force recommends the review be done in consultation with the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(AODA\) Office](#) and the [Guidelines on Accessible Education](#).

References

- ¹ American College Health Association, National College Health Assessment
<http://www.acha-ncha.org/overview.html>
- ² Open Minds, Health Minds
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/mental_health2011/mentalhealth_re_p2011.pdf
- ³The Provincial Mental Health Innovation Fund
<https://news.ontario.ca/maesd/en/2015/01/mental-health-support-for-postsecondary-students-projects.html>
- ⁴ University of Toronto Mental Health Framework
mentalhealth.utoronto.ca
- ⁵University of Toronto Provostial Report on Mental Health
<http://mentalhealth.utoronto.ca/sites/default/files/Report%20on%20Student%20Mental%20Health%202014.pdf?>
- ⁶Academic Advising Task Force Report (2016)
<http://www.engineering.utoronto.ca/files/2015/02/AATF-Final-Report-August-31-2016.pdf>
- ⁷University of Toronto Provostial Report on Mental Health
<http://www.provost.utoronto.ca/Assets/Provost+Digital+Assets/Report+on+Student+Mental+Health.pdf>
- ⁸ Aligns with recommendation #10 of the Academic Advising Task Force Report (2016)
<http://www.engineering.utoronto.ca/files/2015/02/AATF-Final-Report-August-31-2016.pdf>
- ⁹ Government of Canada. The Human Face of Mental Health and Mental Illness in Canada. (2006). ©Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2006. Retrieved May 19, 2015 from
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/human-humain06/index-eng.php>
- ¹⁰ Beaudoin, Jean-Pascal. <http://www.uottawa.ca/respect/sites/www.uottawa.ca.respect/files/accessibility-inclusion-guide-2013-10-30.pdf> . Centre for University Teaching, University of Ottawa. v10 – 2013.
- ¹¹ <http://ombudsperson.utoronto.ca/reports/reports/AdminResponse2015-16.pdf>
- ¹²University of Toronto Ombudsperson Annual Report (2015-2016)
<http://ombudsperson.utoronto.ca/reports/reports/OmbudsAnnualReport2015-16.pdf>
- ¹³Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering Annual Report (2016)
<http://www.engineering.utoronto.ca/files/2016/09/AR-2016-MAIN-BOOK-FINAL-web.pdf>
- ¹⁴ Canadian Association of College & University Student Services and Canadian Mental Health Association. (2013). Post-Secondary Student Mental Health: Guide to a Systemic Approach. Vancouver, BC: Author.

Appendices

Report of the Provostial Advisory Committee on Student Mental Health (October 2014)

<http://mentalhealth.utoronto.ca/sites/default/files/Report%20on%20Student%20Mental%20Health%202014.pdf?>