

Toward a Healthy Campus Community: A College-Wide Initiative



*Working Together to Create Conditions
for Well-Being at George Brown College*

2015 Report

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What is the Healthy Campus Initiative?

The Healthy Campus Initiative is a whole-campus, whole-student approach to building a culture of care at George Brown College. 'Healthy Campus' is a health promotion framework exploring the impact of well-being on learning that's spreading quickly across the college. It's also a movement of people organizing and transforming their environments based on a shared commitment to Healthy Campus principles and a desire to create conditions at college that enable all students to thrive. Healthy Campus ideas have been influencing and informing a number of shifts, innovations, and new ideas at George Brown College over the last few years, particularly in the Student Affairs department.

This movement didn't begin in isolation. Over the last five years there has been a widespread shift in the post-secondary education sector all over the world toward practices and programs that look beyond addressing individual symptoms of poor mental health in students, embracing an understanding of how school as a context can impact student well-being. In Canada, this is most often called the 'Healthy Campus' framework of student mental health.

At George Brown College, what began as a series of activities focused on a common theme has quickly evolved into a framework of practice that meets up with these global trends. In December 2013, Student Affairs began this work with the launch of the Royal Bank of Canada-sponsored multi-year project "More Than Me". Since then, the Healthy Campus Initiative has evolved to include many new initiatives and many staff and students across the college.

In February 2014, Student Affairs joined the Centre for Preparatory and Liberal Studies in coordinating its annual mental health conference, this year focused on the concept of 'Healthy Campus'. Jonny Morris, a leader in Healthy Campus work across Canada, was the guest speaker and facilitator on behalf of the Canadian Mental Health Association. Jonny Morris led students and staff – from George Brown College and from post-secondary institutions from across the GTA and as far as Ottawa -- in thought-provoking discussions and workshops. This conference served as a springboard for the Healthy Campus Initiative at George Brown College. Through a mass voting system, conference participants decided that addressing student loneliness and engaging all staff, faculty, and students in efforts at improvements were critical.

Participating in this conference energized a group of twenty students who approached the More Than Me project coordinator at the time, Kathryn Semogas, and asked how they could get involved. The volunteer group "Healthy Campus Student Alliance" was soon created. Kathryn led the students in the creation of "Four Ways to Thrive at GBC" with a video, print materials, and display banners to be used across the college at events like orientation and in presentations. The Healthy Campus Initiative at George Brown College had begun.

Later, in 2014, a decision was made to place an increased emphasis on educating staff and faculty, and Kate Klein was hired to coordinate these research and education activities. However, despite having paid staff who are responsible for specific aspects of the Healthy Campus Initiative's functioning, many of the



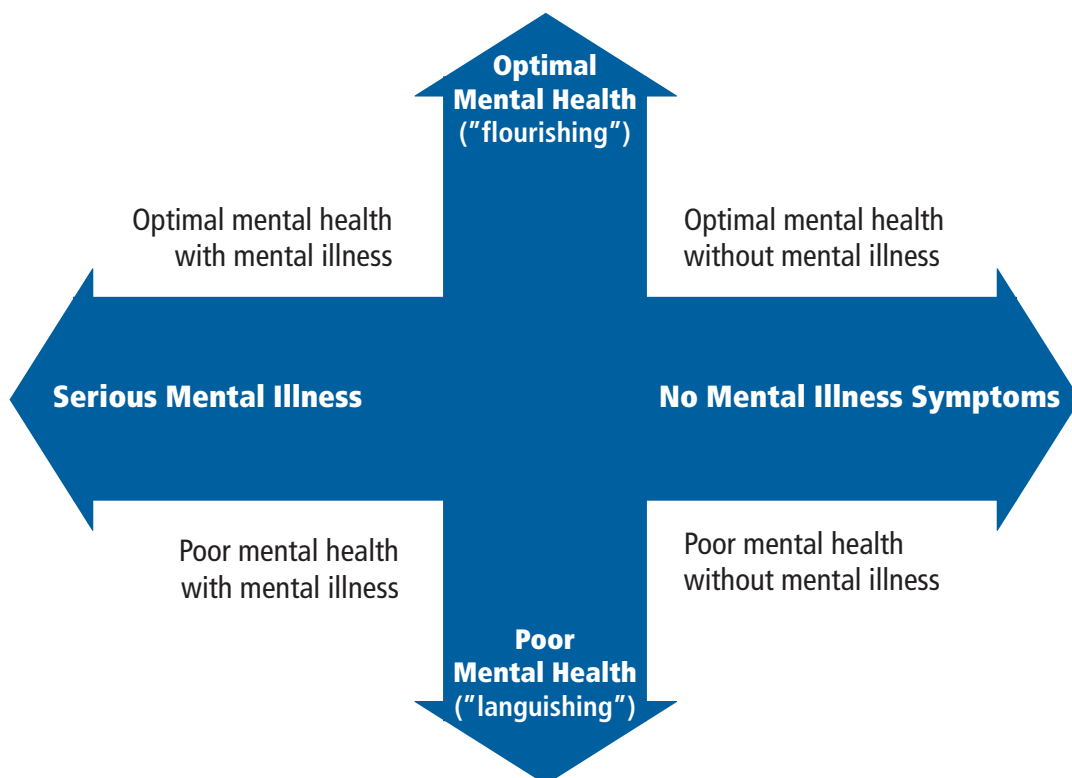
projects and trends that fall under Student Affairs' Healthy Campus mandate have been brought into existence by other Student Affairs staff.

The definition of mental health that guides the work of the Healthy Campus Initiative was developed by the World Health Organization (Kessler et al., 2006). According to this definition, mental health is:

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.

This definition notably does not equate mental health with the absence of mental illness symptoms; within the Healthy Campus framework, it is possible for those with serious mental illnesses to experience optimal mental health (that is, to 'flourish'), and for those with no mental illness symptoms to experience poor mental health (that is, to 'languish') (Keyes, 2002).

DUAL CONTINUUM MODEL OF MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL ILLNESS





Many staff in Student Affairs and other areas of the college have been thinking about mental health in the 'Healthy Campus' way for a long time, although not under this name. Part of the Healthy Campus Initiative's mandate is to expand the reach of this work and build on its successes in order to extend both proactive and responsive student support systems into all areas of the college. Formalizing our commitment to understanding mental health from a systemic perspective means bringing together George Brown College leaders in student mental health, highlighting their work, and ensuring that their knowledge has the chance to be shared. We are working hard to knit together existing efforts to support student well-being and work together better to support well-being for all.

Conceptual Framework

The Healthy Campus Initiative takes a Whole Campus and Whole Student approach. This is further explained below.

Whole Campus

Creating a healthy campus community is about everything. From college policies, the physical environment, social inclusion, curriculum, classroom interaction, education of faculty and staff, skill-building for students, counselling and crisis intervention, and more. It requires a proactive, systemic approach.

This requires faculty, support staff, administrators, student leaders, and students – that is, everyone on campus – to be engaged in understanding and enacting the role they play in creating a healthy campus community.

Whole Student

Creating a healthy campus community is about the whole student, recognizing the powerful link between physical health, emotions, thinking, behaviour, social interaction, and student success. It means taking a holistic approach and not artificially separating 'academic' support needs from 'personal' support.

This approach is about all students, all of the time. It is about recognizing that mental health and well-being can fluctuate, and that the focus needs to be on flourishing at college, recognizing that mental health and well-being is much more than an absence of illness.

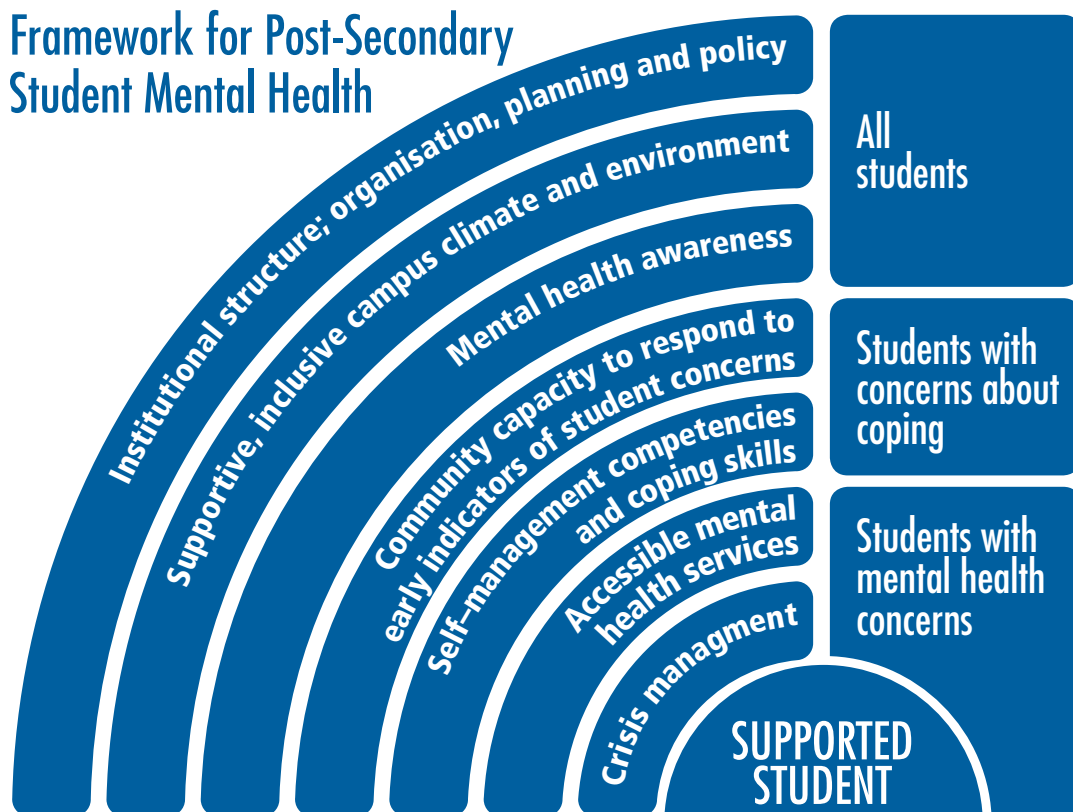
Healthy Campus Strategy: Exploring the Critical Areas

The Healthy Campus work of Student Affairs over the last few years has been highly informed by a document created by the Canadian Association of College & University Student Services (CACUSS) and the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) called *Post-Secondary Student Mental Health: Guide to a Systemic Approach – Supporting the Creation of a Campus Community that is Deeply Conducive to Transformative Learning and Mental Health* (2013). This guide offers a framework for promoting and supporting student mental health and well-being that focuses on seven critical areas of intervention. At present, each of the areas below is being addressed at George Brown College, with extra emphasis on areas 2-6:

1. Institutional structure: organization, planning, and policy
2. Supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment
3. Mental health awareness
4. Community capacity to respond to early indicators of concern
5. Self-management competencies and coping skills
6. Accessible mental health services
7. Crisis management

What follows is an illustration of these seven different areas of intervention that the CACUSS/CMHA guide argues must be included in any systemic approach to promoting student mental health in a post-secondary

Framework for Post-Secondary Student Mental Health





education institution. In the development of a Healthy Campus framework for George Brown College, Student Affairs has been working to ensure that the entire scope of our activities covers a wide variety of these critical areas, since we know that any effective mental health strategy must include all of these areas of intervention.

An explanation of each of the critical areas will be given on the next page. These explanations are directly quoted from the CACUSS/CMHA guide.

1. Institutional structure: organization, planning and policy

It is widely accepted that the 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. How a post-secondary institution is structured and its strategic goals, policies and practices therefore impact student mental health, which in turn, impacts student learning (CACUSS/CMHA, 2013, p. 10).

2. Supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment

A supportive campus climate and environment supports student engagement, which has been found to have a positive impact on both academic performance and mental health. By creating conditions for meaningful participation in the campus community including the fluid and authentic exchange of ideas, such an environment helps students feel connected and facilitates holistic, integrated learning and development. Such an environment is fundamentally committed to social justice and sustainability and identifies, addresses and remedies barriers to full participation of all students (CACUSS/CMHA, 2013, p. 12).

3. Mental health awareness

Mental health awareness initiatives strive to improve student mental well-being by increasing knowledge and understanding of the determinants, nature, impact, prevention, and management of mental health issues. Increased knowledge and understanding builds resilience and capacity to maintain well-being (CACUSS/CMHA, 2013, p. 14).

4. Community capacity to respond to early indicators of student concern

All students experience difficulties from time to time in their academic programs. While many students are able to address these concerns as they emerge, other students continue to struggle. Those who interact

with students in the course of their day on campus are in the best position to notice early indicators of concern [and to] reach out to a student and help connect them to appropriate resources and supports (CACUSS/CMHA, 2013, p. 17).

5. Self-management competencies and coping skills

The post-secondary student experience involves all aspects of living and learning both in and outside the classroom. Self-management competencies and coping skills strengthen students' resilience and ability to manage the multiple demands of student life (CACUSS/CMHA, 2013, p. 18).

6. Accessible mental health services

Mental health services are a critical part of a systemic approach to supporting student mental health. They are uniquely placed to contribute to a systemic approach on multiple levels (CACUSS/CMHA, 2013, p. 19).

7. Crisis management

Crises such as acute distress and imminent risk of self-harm have a significant impact on students' mental health and academic success. It is essential that all staff and faculty understand their role within the institution's crisis management protocols and what is expected of them (CACUSS/CMHA, 2013, p. 22).



Why This? Why Now?

It is widely accepted that health and well-being are essential elements for effective learning

(El Ansari & Stock, 2010, p. 2)

There are many reasons why the Healthy Campus way of thinking about mental health is taking off at post-secondary education institutions all over the world, and why it is relevant to our work right here and right now at George Brown College. The following section will outline some of the factors informing why this is a much-needed undertaking.

There are proven connections between well-being and learning.

Over the last ten years there has been an upsurge in research exploring the connections between student well-being and student success, learning, and retention (El Ansari & Stock, 2010; DeBerard, Spielmans & Julka, 2004; California Education Supports Project, 2009; Caulfield, 2007; Larson, 2009; University of Minnesota, 2008). It has been found in numerous studies that this relationship is multi-faceted: student well-being has a positive impact on learning, stress has been linked to decreased academic performance (Felsten & Wilcox, 1992), and the learning environment can both positively and negatively influence student well-being. This research supports the implementation of a broad, systemic approach to mental health promotion in schools that examines how all aspects of college life influence student mental health. For example, “there is evidence from the elementary secondary schools and higher education settings that classroom culture, course design, curriculum, assessment, assignments, physical spaces and instructors themselves may all have the ability to impact student well-being” (Dhaliwal & Stanton, 2013, p. 2).

Fostering mental health and well-being in post-secondary learning environments has also been shown to equip students with important skills and resiliency that they carry with them after they graduate:

Mental health is essential to students’ academic success as well as their ability to participate fully and meaningfully throughout all aspects of their lives and throughout their lifespan. Empowering students to participate actively in maintaining their well-being as well as addressing mental health issues sets the foundation for increased ability to sustain well-being throughout their lives. (CACUSS/CMHA, 2013, p. 7)

Recent research in self-regulation has also greatly contributed to an understanding of how stressors impact students’ ability to learn; academic success is highly influenced by one’s ability to self-regulate (Shanker, 2012). The work of Dr. Stuart Shanker and others in the field of self-regulation helps us to understand the complex interplay between college stressors and student reactions to stress – in the biological, emotional, and cognitive domains.

For many people who work with students, the idea that students’ well-being impacts their learning feels

like common sense. However, recent research and guidance in this area can help college staff and students understand the complexity of stress and anxiety and how they might manifest in student behavior, strategies that work to help students increase self-awareness, and ways to guide students to a 'calm, focused, and alert' way of being, thus maximizing their learning potential. The existence of confirming research and examples of promising practice can be extremely helpful in turning a best practice into a mass movement. Given this fact, this moment is a very good time to be doing this work.

It's needed, according to research with students.

In today's world, students are experiencing an increasing range of external pressures and emotional stressors, including financial uncertainty, a discouraging job market, escalating technological overload, and more pressure on young people to succeed (Stixrud, 2012). According to Stixrud (2012), "this stress-soaked atmosphere is poisonous to learning, judgment, and adaptive functioning – and to the physical and mental health of individuals and organizations" (p. 135).

A study conducted by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (2014) examined the mental health and well-being of Ontario high school students and found that 15% of students rated their mental health as fair/poor, with young women being twice as likely as males to do so (21% vs. 11%). This statistic (gathered in 2013) was significantly higher than in 2007, when it was 11%. Additionally, 26% of students indicated psychological distress (symptoms of depression and anxiety), with young women much more likely to than young men (36% vs. 17%). In the same study, 28% of students reported that, in the past year, there was a time they wanted to talk to someone about a mental health problem but did not know where to turn; meanwhile, 22% of students visited a mental health care professional for a mental health matter at least once during the past year. In 2014, 66% of students at GBC had attended high school in the last five years; therefore, this information about the mental health of high school students could greatly inform our understanding of GBC students' mental health and experience in accessing mental health supports. (CAMH, 2014, p. 6).

Additionally, recent internal research conducted at George Brown College in 2014 demonstrated that 81% of respondents stated that they would benefit or greatly benefit from additional support in managing stress, anxiety, or depression. Furthermore, 85% stated that they would benefit or greatly benefit from developing greater self-awareness and self-management.

In the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities' Key Performance Indicator (KPI) Assessment, which is administered to 2nd-semester college students, students are asked to rate their experience of one variable that could help to measure some aspects of student well-being: "the concern of people at this college for your success". According to recent KPI results, 96% of students said that knowing staff & faculty at GBC cared about their success was important to them, but only 15% felt 'very satisfied' with this measure.



Another 41% felt 'satisfied' with this measure. This points to a strong need to do more work as a whole college on creating a culture of care and support at GBC. The focus of our cross-college retention work includes this emphasis, which has led to initiatives such as the "First Year Experience" committee and the "Connect" campaign.

In recent focus groups conducted with students as part of this retention initiative, the common thread was a general experience of vulnerability on the part of students. In these focus groups, students revealed themselves as vulnerable young adults coping with many fears and insecurities about college life. Some participants felt that administrators and professors thought they knew more than they actually did, and this perceived mismatch was experienced as very stressful. According to this research, students would feel more connected if they:

- Encountered more warm, friendly and supportive administrators – classroom, peers, student services & supports;
- Felt respected and recognized as individuals;
- Were included more in activities, meals, and social time outside the classroom with peers;
- Could overcome their fears about being discriminated against because of accents and immigration origin;
- Had more effective study skills;
- Received more email communication and actionable feedback from professors;
- Participated in more opportunities to validate their intellectual ability; and
- Understood better how to access and engage in administrative processes. (George Brown College, 2015b)

This research demonstrates that while students are dealing with complex social, economic, and emotional issues, they desire a sense of support and connection that includes but extends beyond counselling services. Retention research at GBC has shown that students benefit from positive relationships with peers, with faculty, with administrators, and with support staff. It is the whole college experience that facilitates a sense of belonging and well-being in students. Therefore, a whole-campus mental health strategy that supports whole students in all of the complexity of their lives is needed.

The fact that Ontario colleges and universities are being faced with an increasing amount of learner diversity and an increasing number of students in need of support is a sign that we are, in fact, becoming more accessible to a wider range of students who may have previously been excluded from post-secondary studies. However, in the face of these changes, post-secondary institutions must ensure that we are adopting a robust strategy for supporting students with a diverse variety of needs and experiences. We believe that a Healthy Campus strategy is an ideal way of making sure that the supports Student Affairs provides to students are reflective of the realities of the world around us.

George Brown College belongs in this worldwide movement.

Crouch, Scarffe and Davies (n.d.) argue that “improved general mental well-being [impacts] institutional reputation, staff and student recruitment and retention, performance in general and community relations” (p. 2). The Healthy Campus framework supports GBC’s strategic plan and will help the Academic & Student Affairs division to meet its goals and live its values.

For example, the ‘Service Values’ in Academic & Student Affairs (ASA) – Respect, Responsiveness and Accountability – would be greatly supported by an increased systemic focus on supporting the mental health and well-being of diverse students. Part of being accountable means understanding how every single person across the college has something to contribute to a college where students can thrive. Respect for students means understanding their needs contextually, and acknowledging that our work with students is both practical and emotional. Valuing responsiveness in our work means working with a true understanding of the impact that our service can have in students’ lives, and a knowledge that efficient student support systems result in fewer students ‘falling through the cracks’. In ASA, we work together to make sure that all students have what they need to be well and to meet their goals through integrated, high quality services.

George Brown College as a whole community has pledged to focus on six core areas in the years approaching the year 2020. This ‘Path to Leadership’ is guided by the following three commitments:

- We will set the benchmark to which all colleges will aspire, and be recognized as a key resource in shaping the future of Toronto as a leading global city;
- We will build a seamless bridge between learners and employment as we develop dynamic programs and workplace-ready graduates who will be the candidates of choice for employers;
- We will create a community of life-long learners, grounded in the principles of access, diversity, mutual respect and accountability.

Many of GBC’s commitments in its 2020 plan are oriented around valuing and fostering soft skills, being innovative, challenging the status quo, and building a high-performing organization. The Healthy Campus movement at George Brown College is helping to accomplish all of these goals. For example, by building their capacity to role-model soft skills like active listening, compassionate problem-solving, referral-giving, and fostering authentic connection in their interactions with students, staff and faculty at George Brown College are helping to prepare students for life in a world where these skills will be highly needed.

Applying a systemic approach to mental health means thinking about everyday issues in big ways. It means thinking outside of the box, taking chances, and finding new ways of doing old things; this work is necessarily grounded in ‘innovation literacy’.



Much of the Healthy Campus work in Student Affairs is about building skills among staff and faculty at George Brown College so that we can all work better together as a 'high-performing organization' in service of well-being and learning for all. Ultimately it's about making sure that the right resources are in place so that every single person – support staff, students, faculty, and admin – can have just what Strategy 2020 articulates as a goal: "a mindset that change is something they generate, not simply something to which they react".

Post-secondary education institutions all over the country are developing their own unique mental health strategies that position them as leaders in their field. As a college right in the heart of Toronto that has made strong commitments to innovation, workplace preparation, community-building, and life-long learning, finding our own Healthy Campus path will position us as innovators in this emerging area of practice.



Want to read more about the connections between well-being and learning? Check out these resources:

- *Post-Secondary Student Mental Health: Guide to a Systemic Approach*, by the Canadian Association of College & University Student Services and the Canadian Mental Health Association.
- *Environmental Scan of Promising Practices and Indicators Relevant to Campus Mental Health*, by Daria Parsons.
- *The Critical Connection Between Student Health and Academic Achievement: How Schools and Policy Makers Can Achieve a Positive Impact*, by the California Education Supports Project.
- *Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion in Higher Education*, by Rosalind Crouch, Philip Scarffe and Sian Davies.
- *SFU Health Promotion: Well-Being in Learning Environments Rationale*, by Rosie Dhaliwal and Alisa Stanton.
- *Is the Health and Well-Being of University Students Associated with their Academic Performance? Cross Sectional Findings from the United Kingdom*, by Walid El Ansari and Christiane Stock.
- *Influences of Stress and Situation-Specific Mastery Beliefs and Satisfaction with Social Support on Well-Being and Academic Performance*, by Gary Felsten and Kathy Wilcox.
- *Health Risks and Academic Performance: Implications for College Students, Faculty, and Administration*, by Mary Larson.
- *Why Stress is Such a Big Deal*, by William R. Stixrud.

The Healthy Campus Framework and Student Affairs: What Have We Been Up To?

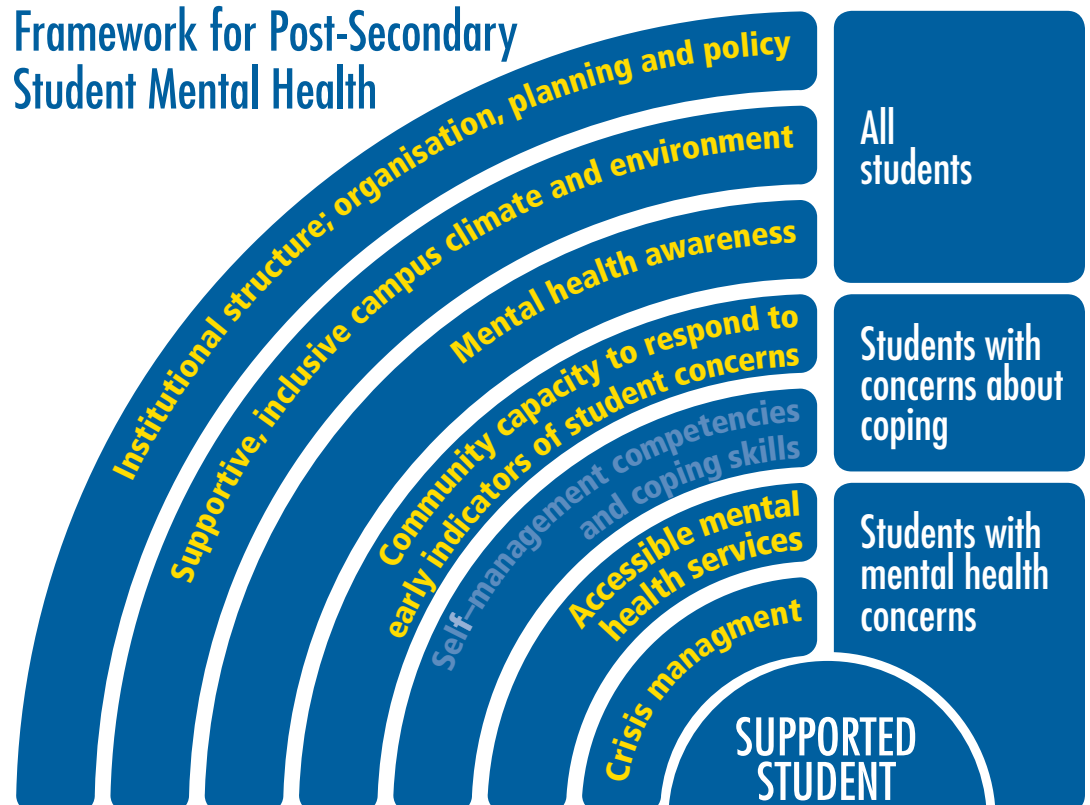
Over the last two years, Student Affairs has been undertaking a number of new projects and engaging in a number of shifts in practice in order to advance the Healthy Campus mandate of supporting whole students in whole-campus ways. This document will outline these projects and shifts.

Expanding our Reach: Integration & Collaboration

A central aspect of the Healthy Campus framework is about whole-campus approaches to supporting student mental health, and it's impossible to make this kind of large-scale change happen in silos! We need to work together. With this in mind, Student Affairs has been working to expand its reach by developing critical connections with other areas of the college. While the idea of collaboration and integration is not new to us, Student Affairs' commitment to Healthy Campus principles has brought a renewed commitment to growing and applying this effort.

Some examples of this commitment to integration and collaboration are outlined below.

Framework for Post-Secondary Student Mental Health



Integrated Service Delivery Model

A key component of our Healthy Campus work is the integration of Student Affairs staff into the academic areas, increasing alignment and collaboration, helping academic staff to increase knowledge and skills, improving access to our services, and enhancing efforts toward early alert and support for students in need. Counsellors, disability consultants, staff from Student Affairs Success Initiatives (SASI) and career advisors have all been assigned to specific academic divisions and work out of both their unit areas and the academic areas.

This integration has resulted in increasing opportunities to:

- Build awareness and understanding for Student Affairs staff on the academic realities of the students they are supporting;
- Allow staff to tailor services for specific student and staff groups, e.g. specialized in-class and outside-of-class workshops, addressing faculty and student questions and concerns;
- Build relationships between Student Affairs staff and academic staff, making referrals easier and more efficient;
- Contribute to a culture that is sensitive, supportive, and inclusive;
- Make access to a counsellor or disability consultant easier for students;
- Create a more comprehensive support network for students in crisis.

Counsellors and disability consultants are now co-located in many academic areas across the college at all campuses and off-site campus locations to increase visibility, build relationships with academic department staff, tailor services, increase supports, and enable more effective referrals for students. In Fall 2015, Peer Coaches will also be more closely connected with academic areas, providing information around events and services on a regular basis to teaching faculty and classes, and helping to effectively connect students to services when in need.

This integrated approach also facilitates the educational role that many Student Affairs staff play. For example, Disability Services has been proactively collaborating with staff across the college to share their expertise in understanding diverse learning needs, applying academic accommodations, and promoting the integration of Universal Design for Learning into curriculum. Disability consultants also run small-group sessions as a team within academic divisional meetings, actively engaging teaching faculty in discussions and providing collaborative guidance and support.

Critical Areas Engaged

- Supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment
- Mental health awareness
- Community capacity to respond to early indicators of student concern
- Accessible mental health services
- Crisis management



Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning is an educational framework that guides the development of flexible learning environments that can accommodate individual learning differences. It is a more effective alternative to retro-fitting an educational environment that has not been designed with diversity in mind. In its proactive rather than responsive approach to students' learning needs, its emphasis on flexibility in learning environments (which is known to be a facilitator of well-being in learning environments), and its implications for students with disabilities' sense of inclusion in the classroom, Universal Design for Learning is very much in line with the Healthy Campus framework.

Staff in Student Affairs have been collaborating with other departments in doing advocacy and education on Universal Design for Learning for some time now, pushing for UDL principles to be incorporated into George Brown College policy and practice. For example, recently 'Universal Design for Learning' was added to the academic plan; furthermore, Student Affairs was invited to collaborate and share expertise on all new program proposals, particularly around considerations of mental health & well-being, accessibility, and career preparation. Recently, a large contingent of GBC staff from across the college, including 23 faculty from seven departments, travelled to Montreal to attend a Universal Design for Learning conference. ASA promoted the conference across the college to encourage participation and sponsored a number of these staff to attend. After the conference, attendees convened as a working group to discuss their experience of and takeaways from the conference. This working group will continue to work in a coordinated manner to work on Universal Design for Learning projects across the college over this coming year.

Critical Areas Engaged

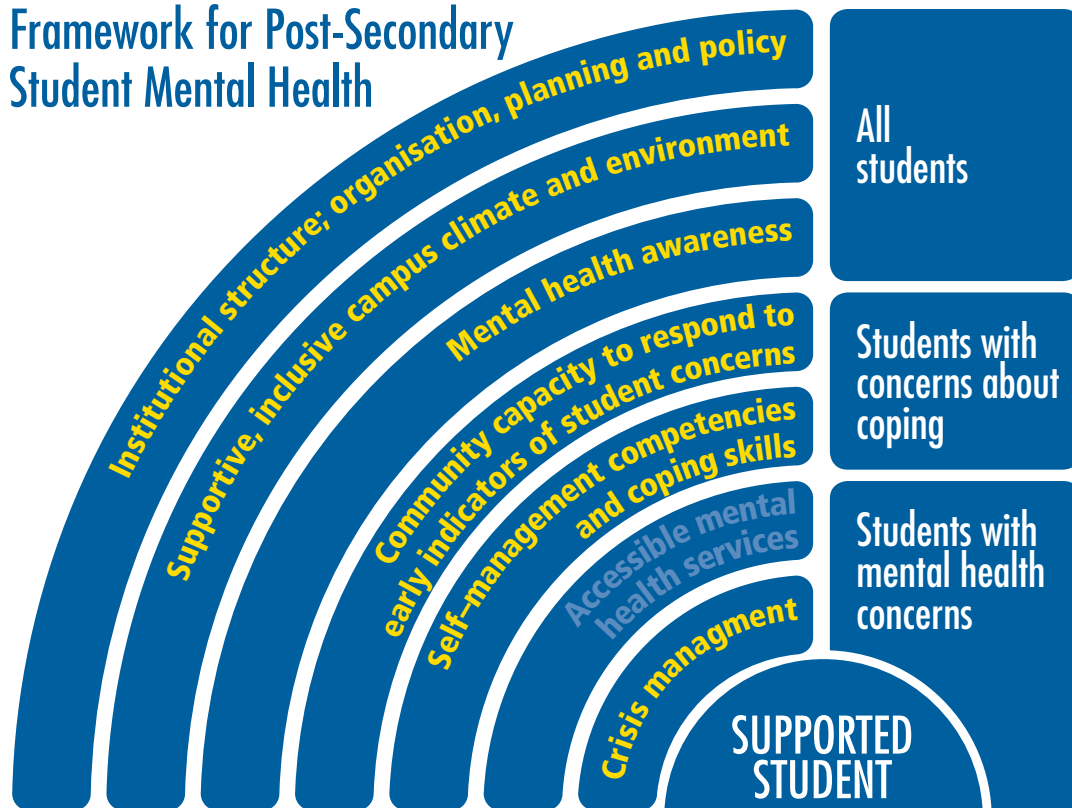
- Institutional structure: organizing, planning and policy
- Supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment

Building Skills & Awareness: Research & Education

A key element of the Healthy Campus framework is the idea that all members of the college community have a role to play in creating conditions for students to thrive. However, in order for people to contribute in these ways, they need to have the knowledge and skills required. Awareness-raising activities are also needed in order to shift the mental health paradigm at the school from an illness model to a wellness model. Research helps us to ground our supportive practice in evidence so that we can be effective and advocate for systemic change.

Some examples of research, education, and awareness-raising activities that have been undertaken as part of the Healthy Campus movement are outlined below.

Framework for Post-Secondary Student Mental Health



Mental Health First Aid

In an effort to help staff across the college understand common mental health concerns and their role in recognition, appropriate support, and effective referral, we have supported the training of seven counselors/disability consultants to deliver Mental Health First Aid. This program provides George Brown College staff with the knowledge and skills to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health problems, to provide initial help when needed, and to guide a person towards appropriate professional help. To date, our trainers have delivered the two-day training session to approximately 350 staff and student leaders and continue to offer sessions on a regular basis, to meet our goal of training 1000 individuals over five years. Some of our trainers achieved additional qualifications to deliver Mental Health First Aid: Youth as well.

Critical Areas Engaged

- Mental health awareness
- Community capacity to respond to early indicators of student concern
- Accessible mental health services
- Crisis management



Foundations for Flourishing

Developed and facilitated by the Healthy Campus Initiative's Research & Education Coordinator, Foundations for Flourishing is a three-part workshop series designed to equip faculty and staff with the basic knowledge and skills required to create supportive and enabling learning environments and college spaces. The workshop series is designed to be run in ongoing and repeating cycles throughout the year, with each workshop offered twice at each campus during each cycle. Those who complete all three units of the series are identified as Healthy Campus Champions on the Healthy Campus Initiative website, and are given a marker of their commitment to student well-being to display publicly in their office.

The topics of the three units include:

- Giving Responsive Support (Unit 1): about reaching out to students in distress, listening, and connecting them with support services
- Creating Caring Environments (Unit 2): about building caring and supportive daily working environments at the college by using the power and influence you have access to
- Working Together for Student Mental Health (Unit 3): about engaging in collective action to create the conditions for student mental health

This workshop series was launched in March 2015, and at the time of this writing (November 2015) well over 100 staff and faculty have participated.

Critical Areas Engaged

- Mental health awareness (all units)
- Community capacity to respond to early indicators of concern (Unit 1)
- Supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment (Unit 2)
- Institutional structure: organization, planning, and policy (Unit 3)

In the Foundations for Flourishing workshops, two core concepts that are explored are 'responsive support' and 'proactive support'. 'Responsive support' is what is needed when a student is struggling or in some sort of distress. This support can be broken down into levels of seriousness, since the needed response will depend on whether a student is in immediate danger. 'Proactive support' is what we put in place to reduce the number of students who experience distress in the first place; even more than that, it's what we put in place to help students thrive.

Together, the Mental Health First Aid training and Foundations for Flourishing give George Brown College staff and faculty access to training on a full-spectrum range of support skills.

Specialized Workshops and Presentations

Staff in Student Affairs have been collaborating with Staff Development to provide specialized workshops as requested or as the need arises, in areas such as the following:

- Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder and the needs of students with ASD
- Suicide intervention
- Self-regulation
- Universal Design for Learning: creating inclusive space for all students
- De-escalating tense interactions
- Mindfulness meditation – for students and for staff
- Understanding disabilities and accessibility

Our SASI Coordinators also offer trainings at the Geneva Park Staff Retreat on a strengths-based approach to working at George Brown College, and integrate topics such as resilience and well-being into their delivery, connecting the importance of staff well-being with student well-being.

Additionally, our Research & Education Coordinator has been invited to give tailored workshops and presentations about systemic approaches to mental health promotion to faculty in a number of different academic areas, including the Centre for Arts, Design & Information Technology and the Centre for Continuous Learning. Session topics have included: promoting positive mental health in the classroom; social determinants of mental health; whole-campus approaches to student flourishing; and creating a supportive work environment.

Critical Areas Engaged

- Supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment
- Mental health awareness
- Community capacity to respond to early indicators of student concern
- Self-management competencies and coping skills



Healthy Campus Speaker Series

From March-May 2015 the Healthy Campus Initiative hosted a speaker series as an opportunity for staff and faculty at GBC to learn from the experts on a variety of mental health-related topics. There were three lectures (one at St. James campus, one at Casa Loma campus, and one at Waterfront campus), each focusing on strategies for addressing complex teaching issues related to student well-being. The lecture topics selected were tailored to particular needs and issues facing specific campuses. Lecture topics included:

- Building mental health literacy in male-dominated learning environments
- Strategies for trauma-sensitive teaching
- Promoting the mental health of future health care providers

Critical Areas Engaged

- Mental health awareness
- Supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment



'Supporting the Student Body' Video Profiles

As a way of encouraging staff and faculty across the college to think about how they can (or do) apply an understanding of student well-being in their work, the 'Supporting the Student Body' video series interviews staff from various programs and departments about how mental health is relevant to their work. The end result will be a series of reflections about what it means to be supportive college workers and supportive educators from a variety of roles and positions. So far three videos have been filmed, are currently in post-production, and will be released later this year. Staff from Career Services starred in the very first video of this series, and new videos will continue to be filmed and added to this growing collection.

Critical Areas Engaged

- Mental health awareness
- Supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment





Healthy Campus Student Alliance

Following our Mental Health Conference in February 2014, we formed a 'Healthy Campus Student Alliance' of students who had attended the conference and were interested in continuing the conversation on mental health and well-being on campus amongst students. This group has been instrumental in helping with a number of initiatives. In Fall 2014, they created a video called '4 Ways to Thrive at GBC', which can be found on YouTube [URL: [youtube.com/watch?v=HeDfjLhAVvQ&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HeDfjLhAVvQ&feature=youtu.be)]. The Healthy Campus Student Alliance has since been integrated into Peerconnect as a way of giving it a permanent home within the college.

Critical Areas Engaged

- Supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment
- Mental health awareness
- Self-management competencies and coping skills



Mental Health Conference

George Brown College has been organizing a mental health conference for 15 years, hosted by the Centre for Preparatory and Liberal Studies. For the last two years, Student Affairs has partnered with the Centre for Preparatory and Liberal Studies to design and host this conference. For our 2014 conference, we focused on the theme 'Healthy Campuses' and engaged students in the conference for the first time, with student groups leading workshops, students speaking on panels, and students sponsored to participate in the audience and share their perspectives on needs and concerns. The overwhelming response of the day was that we need to do more to create a community that cares, to include all students, to engage students in helping and supporting each other, and to involve faculty and other staff in this work.

For our conference this year, we focused on the topic of 'Self-regulation'. Dr. Stuart Shanker of the MEHRIT Centre, a leader in the field of self-regulation internationally, shared his philosophy and approach to helping students achieve a 'calm, focused, and alert' state of arousal to maximize their well-being and learning potential. This conference served as a springboard for a cross-college project on self-regulation, described below in the section called 'Holistic, Campus-Wide Support'.

Critical Areas Engaged

- Supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment
- Mental health awareness
- Self-management competencies and coping skills





Faculty Needs Assessment

A needs assessment was undertaken in the summer of 2015 with the support of faculty member named Jacqueline Macchione. Focus groups and key informant interviews were conducted in order to assess GBC faculty's needs when it comes to supporting students. Since the resources exist through our RBC fund to develop tools and supports for faculty that would support them in creating caring, supportive classroom environments, it is important that whatever is developed is, in fact, in line with what would be useful for faculty (both full-time and contract). Central questions asked as part of this research included:

- To what extent do you think that student well-being impacts student learning?
- What do you feel is faculty's role in supporting student well-being?
- What makes it difficult for you to support student well-being in the classroom?
- As a faculty member, what helps you to support student well-being in order to promote student learning?
- What practices do you feel promote or hinder student well-being? Do you apply any of these practices in your teaching?

Critical Areas Engaged

- Institutional structure: organization, planning and policy
- Supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment

UDL Course Pilot Project

In the fall of 2015 and winter of 2016, disability consultant Mandy Byrnes will be teaching an 'Introduction to Psychology' course. In the fall, she will teach the course the 'traditional' way, using the teaching supports and resources that are available to part-time faculty and providing accommodations to individual students. Then, in the winter, she will teach the same course in a manner grounded in the principles of Universal Design for Learning, with the goal of reducing the need for individual accommodations by proactively making the curriculum as accessible as possible.

The Healthy Campus Initiative Research & Education Coordinator will provide evaluation support to assess the relative differences in learning outcomes and 'well-being outcomes' between the two versions of the course.

The objectives of this project include:

1. Deliver a course based on UDL principles;
2. Reduce requests for individual accommodations by providing an accessible curriculum;
3. Design a model for faculty to incorporate UDL principles into their teaching methodologies;

4. Provide the Disability Services office with an opportunity to understand the challenges that faculty face first-hand in the classroom with: i) accommodation requests, ii) the incorporation of UDL principles, and iii) teaching as a part-time faculty member;
5. Assess overall student experiences and grades to note differences pre- and post-UDL implementation.

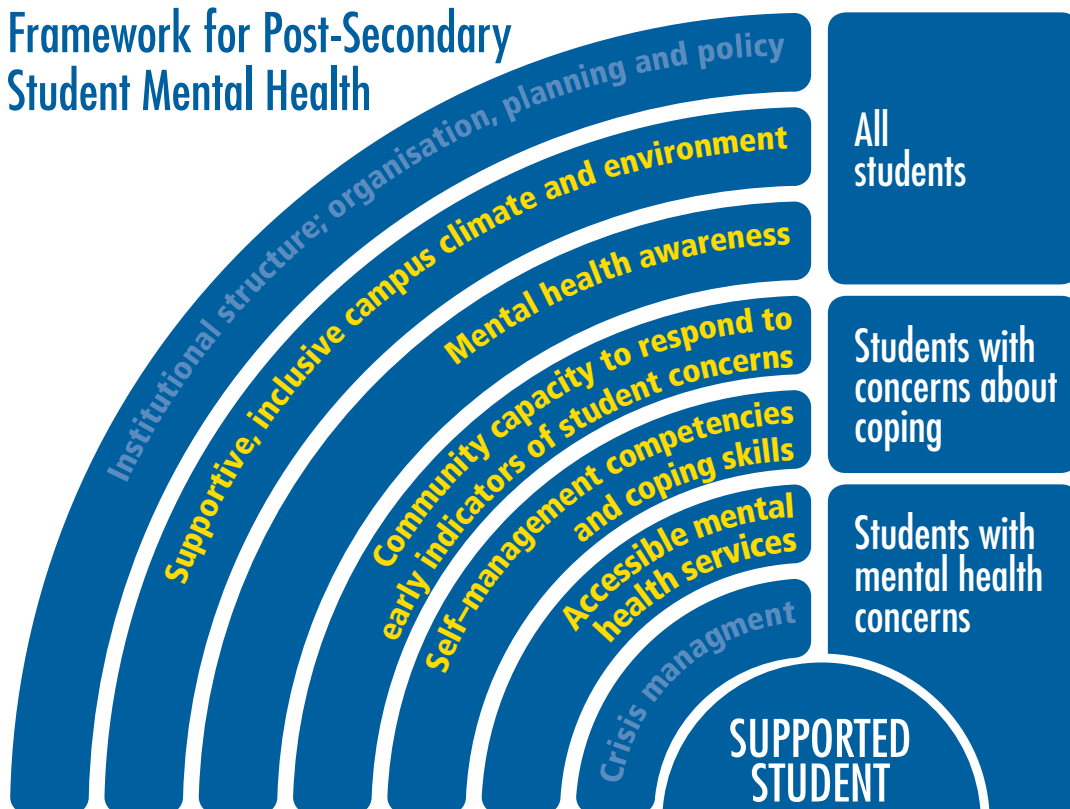
Critical Areas Engaged

- Institutional structure: organization, planning and policy
- Supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment

Holistic, Campus-Wide Support: New Programs and Services

Student Affairs has introduced a number of new services and programs that have expanded our approach to student support beyond a traditional counselling model – reaching students earlier, easier, and at a range of stages in their education.

Framework for Post-Secondary Student Mental Health





'PAL Centre' becomes 'PeerConnect'

Since Fall 2014, the PAL Centre has revised its focus to include mental health and well-being, re-branding itself as 'PeerConnect' and re-envisioning the role of peer workers. Peer supporters are now called 'Peer Coaches', receive extensive training and ongoing feedback and guidance, and provide support to other students in three areas:

1. Academic learning skills
2. NEW – Essential employability skills (e.g. teamwork, communication, interpersonal skills)
3. NEW – Health and wellness skills, including mental health

Activities under the 'wellness' pillar of service have included mindfulness meditation, yoga for stress reduction, nutrition workshops, therapy dog drop-in hours, 'High Five Mondays' (greeting students as they enter the college), one-on-one goal setting sessions, and referrals to college services (such as counselling). The focus is on community building, helping all students to feel connected and included, and creating physical and psycho-social spaces that are conducive to flourishing. Just this year, as many as 3,000 students have engaged in well-being promotion activities through PeerConnect, which will continue to grow with the development of new online outreach strategies.

In 2013-2014, PeerConnect piloted a number of peer support initiatives in order to explore what might work best for students. These initiatives included:

- Peer mentorship program for international and new immigrant students
- Peer mentorship program for students with learning disabilities (initiated and run in collaboration with Disability Services)
- Peer connection group for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (initiated and run in collaboration with Disability Services and Counselling Services)

The impact of these initiatives are currently being evaluated and will be reported in 2015.

Critical Areas Engaged

- Supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment
- Mental health awareness
- Self-management competencies and coping skills

Self-Regulation Pilot Program

The lessons about self-regulation learned at the 2015 Mental Health Conference sparked the beginning of a cross-college project involving Student Affairs, the Centre for Preparatory and Liberal Studies, the School of Early Childhood Education, and Academic Excellence on the potential to integrate strategies for promoting self-regu-

lation into teaching and student support at George Brown College. The term self-regulation describes the ways in which learners develop strategies to cope with various forms of stress, and the ability to regulate your body, mind, and emotions to meet the requirements of the situation. Incorporating an understanding of self-regulation into teaching and student support means, in part, understanding that things that may seem like 'problematic' student behaviours are often manifestations of self-regulation challenges. Supporting self-regulation means supporting students in developing better self-awareness – of stressors and their unique responses to stressors -- and helping them apply strategies that work for them, acquiring skills that will help them be 'calm, focused, and alert' and ready and open to learning.

Critical Areas Engaged

- Supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment
- Self-management competencies and coping skills

Unwind Wednesdays/Thursdays

As part of their integrated approach to supporting the needs of the School of Community Services, a series of wellness-related sessions were organized by staff in Counselling Services, Disability Services, and Career Services from February to April 2015 for students in this school and other interested people. The wellness sessions that were facilitated as part of Unwind Wednesdays included:

- February Fitness (yoga class)
- Stress Busters (childhood favourites – board games, colouring, crafts, etc.)
- Knitting Circle
- Healthy Diet, Healthy Minds (drawing connections between mental health and nutrition)
- Take Care of Others, Taking Care of Yourself (session on compassion fatigue)
- Job Search Success
- Career Tips and Tools
- Exam Prep & Drop-In (last minute study tips and healthy snacks)

These outreach activities will be continuing in September (renamed 'Unwind Thursdays') and possibly onward.

Critical Areas Engaged

- Supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment
- Self-management competencies and coping skills



Wellness Orientation Days

'Now What?' is a wellness-based orientation for new students put on by Counselling and Disability Services. This session was designed to help individuals become more knowledgeable about the support services available at the college, to meet other students, and to learn effective ways to manage stress in order to promote academic success and wellness. The day has included a panel of students who shared their experiences of navigating college with mental health concerns and answered questions. This orientation began as an event explicitly designed for students with mental health concerns, but has opened up to all students who would like to think about how to support their own well-being while at college. This event continues to grow and change as those who organize it experiment with new formats and will continue running through the coming semesters.

Critical Areas Engaged

- Supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment
- Mental health awareness
- Community capacity to respond to early indicators of student concern
- Self-management competencies and coping skills

Campus Recovery Groups

In the winter of 2015, Student Affairs at George Brown College began a collaboration with Ryerson University, OCADU, and LOFT Community Services to offer student-focused addiction support groups on campus. Using an Acceptance Commitment Therapy model, LOFT mental health and addiction workers facilitate weekly groups to address and support students dealing with addiction challenges. These groups are open to students at any of the three participating post-secondary institutions and are a great example of an approach to expanding our mental health services in a feasible and practical way. Two of our counsellors have represented Student Affairs at GBC in this work.

Critical Areas Engaged

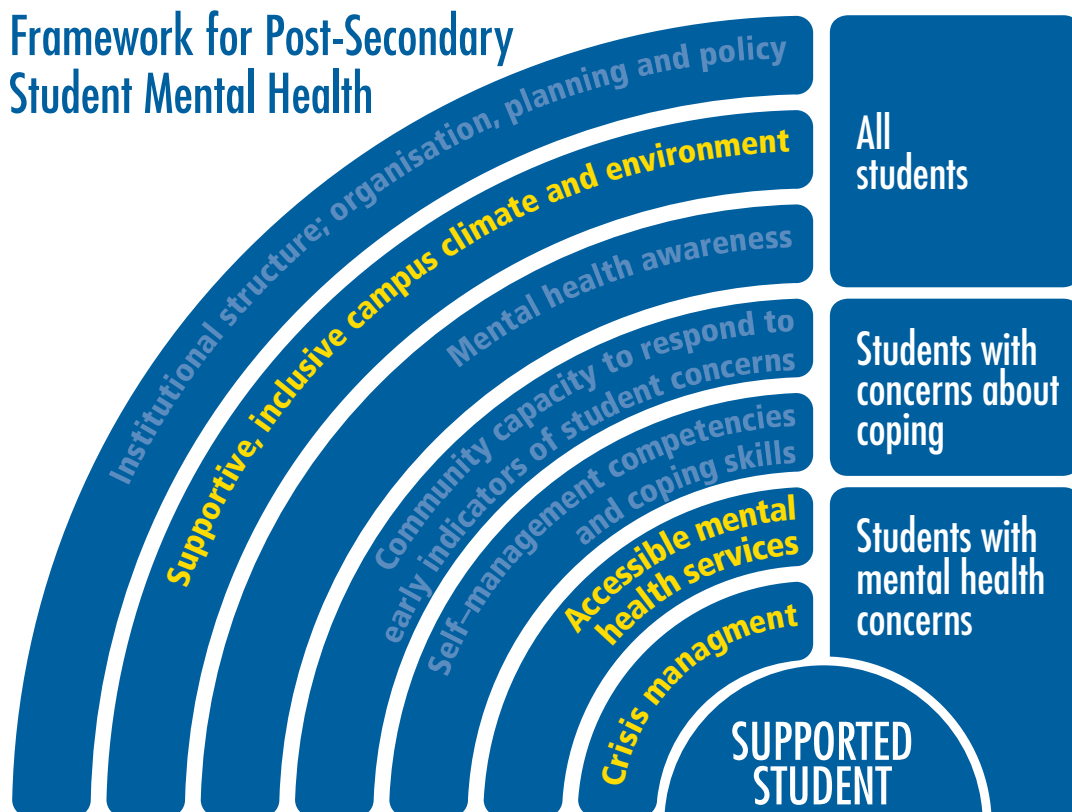
- Accessible mental health services
- Self-management competencies and coping skills

Space Matters: Enabling Accessible Service Environments

Part of the Healthy Campus framework is an understanding of how our physical environment impacts our well-being. Things like access to green space, natural light, clear signage, and visual celebrations of diversity can all reduce our stress and increase our capacity for wellness. Knowing this, programs across Student Affairs have been working at transforming student spaces (including online spaces) in service of student well-being.

Some of the ways that Student Affairs has been integrating an attention to physical space and the accessibility of services are outlined below.

Framework for Post-Secondary Student Mental Health



Drop-In Counselling Hours

In an effort to reduce wait times for counselling from a three-week wait to same-day service, a drop-in option was implemented at our main campus (where wait times were highest) in the fall of 2013 and staffing was reconfigured to provide drop-in throughout the day. Hours were also extended at the main campus, opening at 8:00am and closing at 6:00pm on certain days. These changes resulted in a substantial reduction of wait times.

Critical Areas Engaged

- Accessible mental health services
- Crisis management



Improving Spaces

A number of services in Student Affairs have been bringing their attention to the impact of physical environment on students' experience of accessing support. For example, attention is being continuously paid to making Peerconnect spaces at all campuses more inviting, engaging, and collaborative. Career Services is also in the process of improving their reception and work spaces for students at St. James campus with the same goals in mind.

Disability Services has recently revamped its website to be more inclusive, clear, and engaging to students. Attention was also paid to making the website clear and full of resources to help staff design inclusive classrooms and provide appropriate and supportive accommodations for students. Since access is an integral component of well-being, making the DSO website clear and accessible was an important step. Counselling Services will be the next Student Affairs service to undergo the process of website transformation.

Critical Areas Engaged

- Supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment
- Accessible mental health services

'Ask Us!': A Commitment to Service Excellence

A large number of staff from Academic and Student Affairs have attended a professional development training focusing on ways to provide excellent service to students. Delivered by Student Affairs staff alongside the Retention Initiative and the Centre for Hospitality and Culinary Arts, this training focused on finding small ways to build a culture of care at George Brown College through our daily interactions with students. The result of so many ASA staff going through this training is that, now, each service area within the division has been marked as an 'Ask Us!' zone. These designated zones are spaces on campus where students who have questions can go and feel confident that staff will do whatever they can to resolve their concerns and confusion, even if they're 'not in the right place'.

Critical Areas Engaged

- Supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment

Conclusion

The work of the Healthy Campus Initiative was built on the foundation of other projects at GBC that have been grounded in similar values. Projects like the Learning & Violence project carried out by CPLS, work within the Diversity, Human Rights and Equity office (including AODA, Universal Design for Learning, and Positive Space), the Free to Pee campaign, and much more work across the college all paved the way for this Healthy Campus work to exist. What is special about this moment is a particular convergence of factors: a five-year project grant, a moment in time when post-secondary education institutions all over the world are talking about systemic approaches to mental health promotion, and increased awareness of the connection between mental health, learning, student success, and persistence/retention. We have a strong foundation at GBC upon which to build even more work toward creating a healthy campus community where all students and staff have the opportunity to flourish. With the intentional activities, events, and program directions described in this report, we are hoping that five years of funding from RBC will result in permanent, integrated, and fulfilling changes in the Student Affairs division that will positively impact the college as a whole.

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