

Toward a Healthy Campus Community: A College-Wide Initiative

Executive Summary



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

2015 Report

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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.

Our 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.

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, 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.

Our Healthy Campus work at GBC 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.

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.



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. The rest of this document will give a brief summary of these projects and shifts.

EXPANDING OUR REACH: INTEGRATION & COLLABORATION

- **Integrated service delivery model:** 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.
- **Universal Design for Learning:** 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. 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.

BUILDING SKILLS & AWARENESS: RESEARCH & EDUCATION

- **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.
- **Foundations for Flourishing:** This three-part workshop series is designed to equip faculty and staff with the basic knowledge and skills required to create supportive and enabling learning environments and college spaces.
- **Specialized workshops and trainings:** Our staff collaborate with Staff Development and respond to invitations from service areas and academic centres to come and deliver tailored trainings and presentations on various mental health topics.

- **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.
- **'Supporting the Student Body' video series:** 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.
- **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.
- **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. The HCSA has since been

integrated into Peerconnect as a way of giving it a permanent home within the college.

- **Faculty needs assessment:** A needs assessment was undertaken in the summer of 2015 with the support of a 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.

HOLISTIC, CAMPUS-WIDE SUPPORT: NEW PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

- **'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 more ways than ever before.
- **Self-regulation pilot project:** The lessons about self-regulation learned at the 2015 Mental Health Conference sparked the beginning of a cross-college project exploring the potential to integrate strategies for promoting self-regulation into teaching and student support at George Brown College.
- **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 are being organized by staff in Counselling Services, Disability Services, and Career Services for students in this school and other interested people.

- **Wellness orientation days:** These sessions are designed to help new students 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.
- **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. These groups are open to students at any of the three participating post-secondary institutions.

SPACE MATTERS: ENABLING ACCESSIBLE SERVICE ENVIRONMENTS

- **Drop-in counselling hours:** 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
- **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. Disability Services

has recently also revamped its website to be more inclusive, clear, and engaging to students.

- **'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.



Conclusion

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. We also hope that other departments will use the Healthy Campus framework, finding ways to make this work relevant and prominent in their areas! If you have questions about doing this, please email Kate Klein at kate.klein@georgebrown.ca.



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