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School of International Development and Global Studies, University of Ottawa

Students' Mental Health : A Backgrounder

This memo intends to provide some basic information for academic staff at the School of International Development and Global Studies about mental health concerns facing students in our program.

If you or someone you know is facing a mental health emergency/crisis, please call 911. If you are on campus, contact Protection Services at (613) 562-5411. A mental health crisis/situation can be defined as any time an individual is at imminent risk of harming themselves or others. To have a Crisis Team dispatched, you can contact the Ottawa region [Mental Health Crisis Line](#) at (613)722-6914.

This backgrounder contains some information that might help professors assist students in finding the support and resources available to them in the Ottawa-Gatineau community.

To begin with, it is important to establish a shared understanding of a few key terms you may encounter both in this backgrounder and in other mental health resources. Using the proper nomenclature is important to ensuring that our resources and advocacy follow best practice and contribute to mental health literacy.

Definitions:

Mental health: This pertains to our thoughts, our feelings, and our emotions. Not everyone has a mental illness, but everyone has mental health. When someone feels mentally healthy it is important to access their social supports (friends and family) and practice self-care to stay feeling mentally well.

Mentally Stressed: This could occur during exam time, for example, where there is a lot of pressure and quick due dates. It is short-term and not extremely intense. When experiencing mental stress it is important to access and reach out for support from social supports (friends and family) and to be practicing self-care.

Mentally Struggling: This regards instances where a stress turns into something that is much more intense, long-lasting, and makes a big impact. For example, someone who has had a loved one pass away, or has experienced a traumatic event recently may experience a mental health struggle as a result. This is an important time to access community supports like a counsellor, community elder, doctor, trusted adult etc.

Mental Health Crisis: When an individual is at imminent risk of harm to themselves or others. In a mental health crisis it is important to contact emergency services (911) immediately.

Mental Illness: A cluster of symptoms that is diagnosed by a doctor. This can include but is not limited to bipolar disorder, psychosis, depression, post traumatic stress disorder, etc. A mental health professional can provide comprehensive care for someone with a mental illness which can include but is not limited to: prescribing medication, seeing a counsellor, etc.

Mental health exists on a spectrum, just as mental illness does. These spectrums intersect, and an individual can and will fall on different areas of the spectrum at different times. Someone who has a diagnosed mental illness can experience optimum mental health if they are taking care of themselves, practicing self-care, taking prescribed medications, accessing community supports, etc. Just as someone who doesn't have a diagnosed mental illness can experience very poor mental health if they are not practicing self care, accessing community supports, etc.

It is important to note that the list of resources provided below is not comprehensive and does not address all barriers faced by students in accessing mental health care services, as mental health is individual, intersectional and often situational. Students can only access resources once they know they are available, and will only access resources once they feel comfortable and safe doing so. What may work for one student, may not work for another. As such, it is important that we remain adaptive and perceptive to students' needs, and foster an environment that welcomes dialogue surrounding mental health and promotes wellness.

1) *The Academic Assistants in our office are trained in mental health first aid*

If you know a student who is facing difficulty, our Academic Assistants sitting at the front desk in the office can help. Some people seeking help may prefer to talk to a person they know first rather than use a telephone menu or go to a new office.

2) *Participation and attendance grades cause anxiety for some students*

The elected representatives of our students' associations hear from a lot of our students about the stresses and worries our students face in their classroom. One of the points that comes up frequently is the stress related to participation grades. Some students have reported that they stop going to class because of the expectation that they contribute orally, especially in seminar-style classes. Of course, it is up to every professor how they run their classroom, but the following resource on different ways to evaluate participation might be useful :

- Professors may consider offering alternative methods of evaluation for students seeking accommodation (i.e. short reading summary in lieu of participation in a discussion group). The following resource from the University of Washington Centre for Learning and Teaching resource on inclusive learning includes possible accommodations for students in courses with participation grades:
<https://www.washington.edu/teaching/topics/inclusive-teaching/inclusive-teaching-strategies>
- Professors may also consider allowing for some flexibility in their attendance policies, such as allowing for 1-2 unexcused absences per semester (see point 5 on doctor's notes for excused absences).
- Students who wish to develop confidence in their presentation skills can book a Presentation Critiques session with the Peer Help Centre.

3) *Student Academic Success Services (SASS) and University of Ottawa Health Services (UOHS) provide important services, but their resources are limited*

SASS follows a [stepped care model](#), that is meant to develop an individual approach to each student's mental health; however, this model has not met the needs of all students. Some students have reported that they have been turned away from SASS because their problems are too severe. There is a campaign organized by student and professor associations to ask the Central Administration to dedicate more resources to mental health, but there is currently more demand than supply. For example, SASS only has 21 counselors for 34,000 undergraduate students. It is also important to note that SASS is meant to be a short-term resource, with a system in place to refer students to other community supports.

Students waiting to see a mental health specialist through UOHS may have to wait months for a first appointment.

While there are serious accessibility concerns that have been brought forward in the past months about SASS services, it is also important to recognize that there are a suite of other services offered by SASS, such as mentoring and accommodations, that go beyond counselling. It is also important to have discussions about the limited capacity of SASS in a way that also highlights the availability of the other resources listed below, so as to not discourage or deter a student from seeking help.

4) *Barriers faced by students: cost of psychiatric and psychological services*

Many students may be covered by their parents' or caregivers' private or employer-based health plans, but others are not. In Ontario, psychiatric care is covered by [OHIP](#) but psychological care is not (services covered by RAMQ in Quebec : <https://www.ramq.gouv.qc.ca/en/citizens/health-insurance/medical-services>). [GSAÉD insurance](#) allows students to get a reimbursement of \$35 per visit to a Psychologist, limited to a benefit maximum of \$400.

These services can be costly. While there are some more accessible services (listed below), the average cost to see a psychiatric or psychological professional in Ottawa is \$100-200/hour and in Gatineau it costs about \$80-120/hour.

5) *Barriers faced by students: doctor's notes*

University rules require students to provide a medical note for excused absences in the 5 business days following the missing exam/ assignment deadline and for the note to be approved by their department. However, students may not always be able to get a doctors' note in time for the department to approve it. For example, if a student is in crisis the night before a paper is due, they will not be able to see a doctor, receive a medical note, submit the note to the Faculty and have the department approve the note before the paper is due. This can cause added stress for students with valid medical concerns.

The costs associated with a doctor's note may also pose a barrier to students. A doctor's note is typically free if you have a family doctor in Ontario or Québec (or elsewhere). However, the on-campus clinic charges \$20 per doctor's note when the assessment is deemed "not medically necessary." Québec and international students accessing the on-campus walk-in clinic must pay an additional \$35 fee per visit. This could put the cost of their medical note at \$55. This significant barrier is important to bear in mind in courses with graded attendance and participation, excused only by medical note. For more information on the on-campus clinic fees, please consult their [fees for uninsured medical services](#).

6) *Barriers faced by students: culturally sensitive mental health resources*

One of the main barriers in the access to resources in mental health is culture. For example, some cultures aren't as open as we are and it makes it harder for an individual coming from those cultures to open up about their mental health. They either feel like the person providing help won't understand the dynamics and the issues or they fear the judgment of their peers. One of the ways to resolve this would be to diversify the resources and the people working in that sector or to train them for those specific situations.

7) *Resources to address Sexual Violence on Campus*

Responding to Disclosures and Mandatory Training

If a student discloses an incident of sexual violence to a faculty member of the University of Ottawa, the person receiving the disclosure must refer the student to [Policy 67b – Prevention of Sexual Violence](#) and inform the student that the Human Rights Office is the point of contact to receive information about available support, services, the complaint process and alternative measures.

To be adequately prepared to respond to a disclosure of sexual violence, all faculty members are required to complete mandatory online training: <https://web47.uottawa.ca/en/lrs/node/28597>.

Academic Accommodations

In order to support a student affected by sexual violence, *Policy 67b – Prevention of Sexual Violence* recognizes the importance of implementing academic accommodations. Those measures can include exam or assignment deferral, class and/or schedule changes, among others.

According to *Policy 67a – Prevention of Sexual Violence*, the Human Rights Office is responsible for assisting students affected by sexual violence with their requests/needs for accommodation and faculty members are called upon to collaborate with the Human Rights Office in finding appropriate measures to be implemented in the circumstances.

Discussing Sexual Violence in the Classroom

As a faculty member, if you directly or indirectly address a topic related to sexual violence in your course, be aware that it may trigger some students. Currently, 1 in 3 women and 1 in 6 men are reported to experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime. We also know that more marginalized groups, such as indigenous women, women with disabilities and the 2SLGBTQ+ community are more at risk. It is therefore highly likely that one or more of the people attending the class might have been affected by sexual violence. In an attempt to reduce the impact that these topics may have on some students, here's some advice:

- Include the University's official statement in your syllabus that refers to the sexual violence prevention website;
- Inform students in writing, in the syllabus as well as orally, that you will cover topics related to sexual violence and indicate the specific courses in which you will discuss them in class;
- Inform students that they can receive support from the Human Rights Office, if needed.

Finally, if you are in doubt about a specific situation or if you have questions related to the prevention of sexual violence, do not hesitate to contact the Human Rights Office.

For more information, the uOttawa Mental Health and Wellness Report 2020: A Roadmap to Wellness at uOttawa:

https://www.uottawa.ca/wellness/sites/www.uottawa.ca.wellness/files/avss-20-1209_cag-wellnessreport-en-2020-finalacc.pdf

Appendix: Other resources in the Ottawa-Gatineau Community:

On Campus

Health Promotions Office

- <https://www.uottawa.ca/health/students>
- HP is an environment that supports personal and professional development through contribution to the community.
- Provide on-campus wellness events and information on how students can access and navigate off-campus mental health services
- This is a particularly good resource for students who do not feel comfortable having their mental health care linked to their academics, and who need help accessing the services available in the community.

Peer Help Centre (PHC)

- <https://www.seuo-uosu.com/services/peer-help/>
- The Peer Help Centre (PHC) is a service provided by the University of Ottawa Students' Union. It operates as a peer support service and resource centre. They offer tutor referrals, active listening sessions that occur in person or via the Peer Support Phone Line/Chat service, the Mentoring for Youth Program, peer editing, and presentation critique.
- **Peer Support Phone Line:** 613-783-1380 ext. 155
- **Link to Peer Support Chat:** <https://www.seuo-uosu.com/services/peer-help/> (bottom left corner of the page)

The Centre for Psychological Services and Research (CPSR):

- <https://socialsciences.uottawa.ca/psychology/centre-psychological-services-research>
- The Centre for Psychological Services and Research (CPSR) is a training unit of the School of Psychology of the University of Ottawa. Services offered: Psychological treatment (individual therapy for adolescents and adults, couple therapy, child and family services) Adult assessment, Child & family assessment, Career counseling

SASS Counselling and Coaching Services

- <https://sass.uottawa.ca/en/personal>
- You can book your single session in advance or you can visit 100 Marie-Curie Private on the 4th floor in person and meet with a counsellor the same day through the [SASS walk-in services](#).

UOSU Racialized and Indigenous Students Experience Centre

- <https://www.seuo-uosu.com/services/r-i-s-e/>
- A safe space for uOttawa Racialized and Indigenous students. Peer-to-peer dialogue, programming, resourcing and support.

UOSU Pride Centre and Sexual Health and Wellness Centre

- <https://www.seuo-uosu.com/services/pride-centre/>
- Pride Centre is part of the Sexual Health and Wellness services that are provided by the University of Ottawa Students' Union (UOSU) for LGBTQ2S+ students and allies

UOSU Womxns resource centre

- <https://www.seuo-uosu.com/services/womxns-resource-centre/>
- University of Ottawa Students' Union (UOSU) Womxns Resource Centre is part of the Sexual Health and Wellness services. It offers peer-to-peer support listening and referrals within a feminist and anti-oppressive framework

UOSU International House

- <https://www.seuo-uosu.com/services/international-house/>
- International House offers a space for international students to get support and resources.

Off Campus

Student Support Program

- <http://mystudentsupport.ca/SoftLogin.html>
- Student Support Program for grad students who have insurance through GSAED. The program provides access to short-term counselling for personal and emotional issues.
- Students can choose from a variety of delivery methods to best suit their comfort level and lifestyle

St. Paul Counselling and Psychotherapy Centre

- https://ustpaul.ca/en/counselling-and-psychotherapy-centre-home_360_120.htm
- Offers counselling services for accessible prices

Counselling and Family Services Ottawa (CFS Ottawa)

- <https://cfsottawa.ca/programs-services/>
- Free and accessible mental health counselling throughout the city

The Counselling Group

- <https://thecounsellinggroup.com/>
- Offers counselling services on a sliding scale fee

The Walk-in Counselling Clinic

- <https://walkincounselling.com/>
- Free counselling services with mental health professionals; no appointment necessary

Empower Me

- http://studentcare.ca/rte/en/IHaveAPlan_Ottawa_EmpowerMe_EmpowerMe?utm_source=All&utm_campaign=Empower+Me+W20&utm_medium=ema
- Mental Health Resource for students covered by UOSU health care plan

Good2Talk

- <https://good2talk.ca/ontario/>
- 24/7 Counselling Call Line for post secondary students in Ontario
- By calling, students can receive free professional counselling and referrals to local resources for mental health, addictions, and wellbeing

Kids Help Phone - Resources Near Me

- <https://apps.kidshelpphone.ca/resourcesaroundme/welcome.html>
- Free resource offered by Kids Help Phone, you type in your area code and it provides a comprehensive list of all of the resources in your area

Therapy Assistance Online Self-Help

- <https://sass.uottawa.ca/en/counselling/tao>
- **TAO Self-Help** is an online platform of tools and interactive modules that can help you manage the many stressors that come with university life and can help you bounce back from challenging times.

Resources for professors seeking more information

Be there

- <https://bethere.org/Home>
- Resource developed on how to be there for somebody struggling with their mental health

Post-Secondary Student Mental Health: Guide to a Systemic Approach

- <https://healthycampuses.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/The-National-Guide.pdf>
- This guide is designed as a resource to support the creation of campus communities that are deeply conducive to transformative learning and mental well-being through a

systemic approach to student mental health in colleges and universities in Canada.

SPECIFIC RESOURCES RELATED TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE

On campus

In an urgent situation:

Protection Services

613-562-5411

In a non-urgent situation:

Human Rights Office (HRO)

The HRO is responsible for handling all disclosures and complaints of sexual violence involving a member of the University community and for providing information about available support and services. The Human Rights Office is also the point of contact for a person affected by sexual violence to obtain academic or workplace accommodations.

613-562-5222

respect@uottawa.ca

<https://www.uottawa.ca/respect/en>

Protection Services

613-562-5499 (non-urgent situation)

<https://www.uottawa.ca/protection/en>

Counselling

Counselling Services

613-562-5200

<https://sass.uottawa.ca/en/personal>

Medical assistance

University of Ottawa Health Services

613-564-3950

<https://www.uottawa.ca/health/>

Off campus

The University of Ottawa maintains a partnership with two Ottawa-based organizations, which can quickly provide specialized services to female survivors of the uOttawa community:

CALACS francophone d'Ottawa (FRENCH)

613-789-8096

<http://www.calacs.ca/>

Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre (ORCC) (ENGLISH)

613-562-2334

<http://www.orcc.net/>

Medical assistance – Sexual Assault Evidence Kit

The Sexual Assault and Partner Abuse Care Program – The Ottawa Hospital (Civic Campus)

<https://www.ottawahospital.on.ca/en/clinical-services/deptpgrmcs/programs/sexual-assault-and-partner-abuse-care-program/>

You can find an extensive list of resources, including services for women, men, the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and hotlines, among others, on the [Sexual Violence: Support and Prevention website](#).

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