

Instructor Guide to Supporting Students in Online Learning Environments

September 2020

Students in courses may be experiencing various degrees of stress as a result of the current pandemic. The purpose of this guide is to provide instructors *with suggestions of how to support students* and includes a *helpful list of resources* to which instructors may wish to refer students in a specific context.

Proactive Approaches to Support Students in Your Courses

- 1 Work to build a sense of community.** Host a virtual orientation and foster class and small group check-ins.
- 2 Make yourself available.** Convey that you care about your students' well-being and let them know you can help them find the appropriate supports.
- 3 Consider equity and accessibility.** Acknowledge challenges in this online environment and work with Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation (CTSI) to ensure materials are accessible.
- 4 Set a positive and encouraging tone.** You're in a powerful position and your words greatly impact students. Be aware of your language and tone.

Student Challenges

Students are currently coping with unique stressors from changes in life including rapidly changing learning environments. These challenges may include:

Experiencing social isolation and lack of connectedness: Many students no longer have campus to provide a way to organize and structure life and are dealing with decreased social/physical interaction.

Feeling disappointment, grief, and frustration: Unexpected changes in academic direction and a change in what they envisioned their student experience to look like may lead to a range of feelings.

Experiencing inequities in access to technology: Some students may not have the technological infrastructure to keep up with online classes or connecting virtually with peers, such as WIFI, hardware and workspaces.

Dealing with uncertainty and anxiety: Given our rapidly changing environment, students may be feeling a sense of loss of control, disruption to a sense of normalcy, and anxiety.

Living in challenging environments: Some students may be facing a range of challenges from shared housing, such as living in invalidating or abusive environments that are not supportive of all their identities, which can create unsafe circumstances.

Dealing with financial stressors: As a result of the economic impact, students or their families may be dealing with a loss of employment, income reduction, which may impact their participation in academic opportunities.

Identify, Assist, Refer

Students may exhibit a range of behaviours, or share thoughts and feelings that can indicate mental health stress or distress. For more information about how to identify, assist, and refer visit iar.utoronto.ca.

Connecting With Students You're Concerned About

Be direct and acknowledge what you have noticed that has led to you reaching out.

Acknowledge the disruption to normalcy, and how feeling anxious about uncertainty is normal.

Validate, recognize, and acknowledge the student's feelings. Empathize with their situation and thank them for trusting you with their feelings.

Listen actively, be present without judgement, and reflect back your understanding. Ask open-ended questions to better understand the student's situation.

Don't promise to keep secrets. Offer to treat information shared with sensitivity and discretion, as there may be situations where you can't keep information confidential (e.g. implied or direct threats of harm to self/others).

Avoid giving advice and resist the temptation to 'fix' what you perceive to be the problem. Instead, make the student feel supported and help direct them to resources.

Connecting Students to Resources

Acknowledge limitations and understand your role.

Depending on the issue(s) they identify, you may need to acknowledge the limits to your role and use that as an opportunity to facilitate an appropriate referral.

Share resources and services. Check-in with the student to see if they are open to receiving more information about resources. A list of resources and services that promote and support mental health on-campus are remotely are provided.

Follow up. Once some time has passed, it can be appropriate to check-in with the student to see if their situation has improved. In following up, it's important to continue to respect their privacy and decision whether or not to follow up with the referral.

Urgent situation? Contact Campus Police at **416-978-2222** if you're concerned about anyone's safety.

Have questions? Contact the faculty/staff crisis resource number at **416-946-7111**.

Resources for Students (CLICK ON LINKS TO LEARN MORE)

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Student Health Centres

Confidential mental health and physical health services provided by an interdisciplinary team of health professionals.

[UTSG](#): 416-978-8030, 214 College St., 2nd Floor

[UTM](#): 905-828-5255, Room 1123A William G. Davis Building

[UTSC](#): 416-287-7065, Student Centre, SL-270

[My Student Support Program \(MySSP\)](#)

1-844-451-9700; Outside of North America: 001-416-380-6578

Immediate and/or ongoing confidential, 24-hour support for any school, health, or general life concern at no cost to students. Ongoing support is available in over 146 languages.

[Good2Talk Student Helpline](#)

1-866-925-5454

Professional counselling, information and referrals helpline for mental health, addictions and student well-being.

INTERNATIONAL, EQUITY, AND INDIGENOUS SUPPORT

Anti-Racism & Cultural Diversity Office

416-978-1259

Provides assistance and managing confidential concerns and complaints of discrimination and/or harassment based on race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship and/or creed.

Sexual & Gender Diversity Office

416-946-5624

Develops partnerships to build supportive learning and working communities at the University of Toronto by working towards equity and challenging discrimination.

Indigenous Student Services

Provides culturally relevant services to Indigenous students and programming to Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.
[UTSG](#): 416-978-8227
[UTM](#): 905-828-5437
[UTSC](#)

International Student Centers

A diverse community of international students coming to U of T and domestic students looking to go abroad.
[UTSG](#): 416-978-2564
[UTM](#): 905-569-4719
[UTSC](#): 416-287-7087

SAFETY

Campus Police

Urgent: 416-978-2222

Non-Urgent: [UTSG](#); [UTM](#); [UTSC](#)
Provides programs on personal safety, protection of property, conflict resolution, maintenance of public order, community service and referral, crime prevention and detection.

Community Safety Office

416-978-1485

Responds to students, staff, and faculty members of the University of Toronto community who have personal safety concerns.

Emergency Services

911

For life-threatening emergencies or incidents occurring in the moment where you need police, fire, or ambulance. If responding on campus also contact Campus Police to ensure prompt service.

Sexual Violence Prevention & Support Centre

416-978-2266

Facilitates access to support, services and accommodations for students, staff and faculty members who have been affected by sexual violence or sexual harassment.

TravelSafer/ WalkSafe

[UTSG](#): 416-978-7233

[UTM](#): 905-828-5200

[UTSC](#): 416-287-7022

Security Guard or Special Constable will meet you at your location. Student staff working in pairs will escort you anywhere on campus or to a subway station.

ACADEMIC AND CAREER

Academic Skills Centres

Help with navigating the university, building academic skills, staying focused and organized.

[UTSG](#): 416-978-7970

[UTM](#): 905-8282-3858

[UTSC](#): 416-287-7561

Accessibility Services

Confidential service helps students to navigate their disability and related barriers and provides peer support.

[UTSG](#): 416-978-8060

[UTM](#): 905-569-4699

[UTSC](#): 416-287-7560

Career Centres

Supports students and recent graduates as they build future in changing world.

[UTSG](#): 416-978-8000

[UTM](#): 905-828-5451

[UTSC](#): 416-287-7561

School of Graduate Studies

416-978-6614

Oversee graduate support services including grants, academic employment and professional development opportunities.

[Grad Life](#)

HOUSING, FOOD AND FINANCE

Housing

Offers the information, resources and support you need to meet your housing goals.

[UTSG](#): 416-978-8045

[UTM](#): 905-828-5268

[UTSC](#): 416-978-8045

Financial Support & Funding Opportunities

Resources to access university financial aid supports as well as provincial and federal government programs.

Off-Campus Housing Service

1-877-895-1234

Find off-campus housing and roommates.

[Residence portal](#)

Financial Aid

Resource page for more information on OSAP, government aid, UTAPS, emergency grants and other financial aid resources.

Food Banks

Provides access to good food for all students who are food insecure.

[UTSG](#)

[UTM](#)

[UTSC](#)

Student Account Office

416-978-2142

Information page regarding student fees and tuition.

COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

Hart House

416-978-2452

Centre for experiential education outside the classroom offering ways to connect through engagement with the arts, dialogue and wellness.

Athletics & Recreation

Offers sport and physical activity programs that help you get active in whatever way works best for your body.

[UTSG](#)

[UTM](#)

[UTSC](#)

Transition

Information about orientation activities and programming.

[UTSG](#)

[UTM](#)

[UTSC](#)

Student Life Programming

Support active participation in campus life and a broad range of co-curricular involvement opportunities.

[UTSG](#)

[UTM](#)

[UTSC](#)

Resources for Faculty:

We acknowledge that this is also a stressful time for you. Remember that there are resources and supports including the [Employee & Family Assistance Program](#) (1-800-663-1142) and [Health & Well-Being](#).