

Student Community Update Meeting December 1 2020

Congratulations on nearly reaching the end of the semester. We hope that over the holiday break, you will have the opportunity to embrace selfcare and become renewed and ready for the start of winter semester on January 4th.

Updates

Assistant Dean, Student Services

To improve the academic experience and increase support for our Master of Social Work students, we are creating a new staff position: Assistant Dean, Student Services. The person in this new role will be responsible for helping to ensure your academic success, by coordinating Faculty efforts around admission, bursaries, practicums, student services and outreach, and administration, with an eye on diversity, equity, and inclusion. We hope to have someone in this new role early in the new year.

Dinner with the Dean

Watch for an email to come out in the next few days inviting students to an online Dinner with the Dean. The purpose of these dinners is to provide a space for casual and open-ended conversation between students and the Dean. It is an opportunity for students to talk about your career goals, provide feedback, share projects you are working on, and anything else that you may wish to discuss.

January 11 Student Community Update Meeting

Our meeting on January 11 will include our annual Field of Study information session. The rationale behind this is to limit zoom meetings where we can. The meeting will start with updates. Afterwards, Field of Study coordinators will give a five-minute presentation about their Field of Study to first year MSW students. Students will have the opportunity to ask questions to help them decide which field they would like to select.

February Student Community Update Meeting

We would like your feedback and suggestions for our February meeting. We will still have updates from the dean and GSA, but are open to ideas about other topics you would like to discuss or if you would be interested in having a guest speaker. Please contact Associate.DeanFIFSW@utoronto.ca to share your suggestions.

Graduate Student Association updates

New Quercus shell

The GSA will soon have a Quercus shell to provide information on initiatives relevant to students. The GSA will still send out its newsletter; but the Quercus shell will provide another venue for information that is easily accessible to all FIFSW students.

Student feedback

The GSA has a student that will meet over the holidays to create a student feedback form. Remember that if you have any issues, feedback or complaints that you would like to share with your student representatives, you can always email fsw.gsa@utoronto.ca. Let us know what your concern is about and we will direct you to the appropriate student representative.

Annual General Meeting

The GSA will hold an online annual general meeting in January. The meeting will be recorded for those who are unable to attend live. The Association will be instituting some constitutional changes that will be important for you to be aware of. We hope you will attend!

Join the new social committee

Please reach out to the GSA's social coordinator, Heather Nuttall (h.nuttall@mail.utoronto.ca) if you are interested in joining the Association's new social committee, which will develop ways to build connections between FIFSW students. The GSA is looking for anyone interested in getting involved.

Questions

Will the new Online Clinic launching in February provide opportunities for student who are interested in volunteering to gain more experience outside of their practicum?

The Online Clinic will be staffed by 5-7 practicum students. We have completed interviews and students will begin the practicum in January 2020. Our main concern is that we have enough supervisors for the students who will be staffing the clinic. We will need additional supervisors before we can bring volunteers on board.

With the Toronto region now in the "lockdown - grey zone" are we required to do our practicums remotely?

Ontario regulation 654-20 allows for in-person teaching in the grey zone if it is required. As a result, it is up to your Field Instructor to determine whether they can provide instruction to you remotely or if it is necessary to proceed in person. Note that the current lockdown is only affecting Toronto and Peel regions right now. These restrictions will not affect those who are already engaged in remote practicums. As each practicum is unique, there is no answer that applies to everyone. Our priority is to keep you safe while you proceed towards academic completion.

Are there any mental health support programs related to academic distress and social connection for students outside of Canada?

Students can access [U of T My Student Support Program](#) (U of T My SSP) 24/7 by calling 1-844-451-9700. Outside of North America, call 001-416-380-6578. Visit the [U of T My Student Support Program webpage](#) (under Service Delivery) for instructions on accessing My SSP outside of Canada or the U.S.

U of T My SSP provides students with real-time and/or appointment-based confidential, 24-hour support for any school, health, or general life concern at no cost to you. You can call or chat with a counsellor directly from your phone whenever, wherever you are.

Ongoing support is available over the phone in 146 languages. Immediate support is available over the phone in 35 languages and over chat in simplified Chinese, English, French and Spanish.

U of T also recently launched an online Student Mental Health Resource hub at <https://mentalhealth.utoronto.ca>

I have been meeting with my psychotherapist, but U of T Health Plan only covers \$500 for graduate students (versus \$2000 for undergraduate students). I am wondering is there any way that we can advocate for increase the amount for psychotherapy services.

While there are some U of T-provided services that don't have the same financial limits, we understand that this is hard if you don't have a relationship with someone else. The University is interested in ongoing student feedback on issues related to mental health. One of the recommendations of U of T's [Presidential and Provostial Task Force on Student Mental Health](#) is to establish a wellness advisory board comprised of students, staff and faculty. The [call for members](#) is until January 11, 2021. This may be one venue through which students can advocate for increased benefits. Student organizations such as our own Graduate Student Association or the Graduate Student Union may also be able to provide support or advice on ways to advocate for change.

Dealing with anxiety and stress: group check in

It is important to acknowledge the increased and long-term impact that the epidemic has had on the mental health of our students, faculty and staff. We wanted to take some time during this meeting to check in with you about what you are doing to take care of yourself.

We asked those at the meeting to share some of the activities they are engaging in and tools they are using to practice selfcare? Here are some of the answers:

- Absolute Mindfulness (taking part in the mindfulness sessions organized by Associate Professor Ellen Katz)
- Online mindfulness apps such as MyLife, Insight Timer, and Calm. "Each have different features, so you can choose the app that works best for you."
- Jumping! "Every once in a while, I get up and jump. It's the silliest, smallest little thing, but it is high energy and short, and it really jolts you."
- "I take a moment every day to thank my body."
- "It's critical to stop and acknowledge things that are working well when they are working well."

- Normalize the struggle and talk about it. “Give yourself permission to fall apart. Give yourself a break to let go and feel it.”
- Writing thoughts in a journal.
- Taking care of my plants. “I watch them grow and appreciating their resilience.”
- “The [online U of T fitness classes](#) are great!”
- Going for walks – get fresh air
- Recognizing what works
- Listen to your body. Give yourself permission to go to bed earlier when needed.
- Play a song you like and dance like no one is watching
- “I love Tik Tok!”
- When you are drowning what is your scuba suit? Be mindful of what you need to practice selfcare and what you need to do to prepare for times when you feel you are burning out.