



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

STUDENT HEALTH AND WELL-BEING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO:

A report on the findings from the National
College Health Assessment

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“In 2016, we collaborated across all three U of T campuses for our first institutional survey administration.”

Introduction

The University of Toronto cares about the health and well-being of our undergraduate and graduate students. On all 3 campuses health and wellness programs and services are designed to serve a diverse student population. To better understand the health-related experiences of our students, we have engaged in initiatives, including the Mental Health Framework (www.mentalhealth.utoronto.ca) and the recommendations on Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence (safety.utoronto.ca/sexualviolencereport), to assist in our prioritization of programs and services.

In the winter of 2016, the University of Toronto, together with universities and colleges across Canada and the United States, participated in the National College Health Assessment (commonly referred to as the NCHA survey). This survey is delivered every three years and is organized by the American College Health Association (ACHA) to assist university health service providers, health educators, counsellors and administrators in collecting data about students' habits, behaviours and perceptions regarding the most prevalent health topics.

Methods

In previous rounds of this survey, the University of Toronto used a decentralized approach, with each campus managing the survey locally. In 2016, we collaborated across all three U of T campuses for our first institutional survey administration. This allowed for the joint creation of U of T-specific questions. Each campus was provided with campus-specific marketing and creative material to encourage student participation. In 2016, 5,000 students from the Mississauga (UTM) and Scarborough (UTSC) campuses were sampled, along with 10,000 from the St. George campus. These were random samples of degree-seeking undergraduate and graduate students (except at UTM, where all graduate students were sampled).

Data & analysis

The data that follows highlights some key findings from the 2016 survey. In this report many comparisons are made to 'Canadian Peers'. These are 16 universities across Canada that have an enrolment of more than 20,000 students. In this report a "*" denotes statistical significance (at $p < .05$). If the * is beside the U of T statistic, it means that the University scored higher or is doing more of that activity. If the * is beside the Canadian Statistic, it means that our Canadian Peers scored higher or are doing more of that activity

Part 1: Responses & student characteristics

Response rates

U of T surveyed 20,000 students. The breakdown of how many were invited, responded and the response rate is to the right.

Campus	Invited	Responded	Response rate
UTM	5,000	1,229	24.6%
UTSG	10,000	2,579	25.8%
UTSC	5,000	944	18.9%
Total	20,000	4,752	23.8%

Overall, the U of T response rate was just under 24 per cent. The average response rate among participating Canadian institutions was only 19%. It should also be noted that the ACHA survey included more than 400 individual questions, many of which were of a highly personal nature. In this survey, we only received data for students who completed every question.

Student characteristics

Student characteristics

Before looking at the data, it is important to look at the demographic characteristics of the students who responded and how they compare to our Canadian Peers.

The chart to the right shows data on the characteristics of respondents from both the U of T and Canadian Peers groups.

This table shows that the characteristics of the students who responded at U of T and within the Canadian Peer group were very similar in terms of year and level of study, enrolment status, gender and citizenship. U of T however, had a higher percentage of graduate and professional students.

	U of T	Canadian Peers	
% of Responses by Campus	UTM	26%	
	UTSG	54%	
	UTSC	20%	
Year & level of study	First year	18%	20%
	Second year	17%	19%
	Third year	18%	19%
	Fourth year	17%	15%
	Fifth year or more	6%	7%
	Total undergraduate	76%	80%
Enrolment status	Graduate or professional	23%	18%
	Part-time	7%	6%
Gender	Full-time	91%	93%
	Female	65%	67%
Citizenship	Male	30%	31%
	Non-binary	3%	3%
	Canadian citizen	87%	89%
	Not Canadian citizen	13%	11%

Part 2: Safety and campus climate

The second part of this report focuses on perceptions of how safe the campus is and examines various forms of aggression on campus.

Safety at U of T

Students were asked how safe they felt on campus and the community during the day and night. The following responses were provided.

The data shows that U of T students reported feeling quite safe at the institution during the day, but less so at night. Students also felt less safe in the community during the day compared to our Canadian Peers.

Percentage of students who feel “very safe”

	U of T	Canadian Peers
At U of T - day	86%	87%
At U of T - night	31%	35%*
Community - day	59%	64%*
Community - night	19%	21%

Safety

For more information about safety programs and services, including sexual violence prevention and reporting, please visit safety.utoronto.ca.

Examples of additional resources include:

Emergency Information at UTSC

<http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/hwc/Emergency-Information>

CampUS Safety Project at UTM

<http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/health/health-promotion/camp-us-safety-project>

Community Safety Office

<http://www.communitysafety.utoronto.ca>

In the last 12 months, did you/have you experienced?

	U of T	Canadian Peers
Verbal threats	17.7%	20.1%
Sexual touching without consent	8.5%	10.7%
Emotional abuse	7.7%	9.3%
Stalking	6.4%	5.7%
Physical fight	4.0%	4.5%
Physical assault	3.3%	3.4%
Attempted sexual penetration w/o consent	2.8%	3.3%
Sexual abuse	2.0%	2.2%
Physical abuse	1.7%	1.8%
Sexual penetration without consent	1.6%	1.9%

Participants were also asked if they had experienced violence and aggressive behaviour in the past 12 months.

Students reported experiencing aggressive and violent behaviour, although within these 10 questions, students at U of T reported fewer cases of being threatened verbally, sexually touched without permission and emotional abuse than our Canadian Peers.

University of Toronto Sexual Violence Prevention and Support Centre (tri-campus):
416-978-3908

Safety at the University of Toronto
safety.utoronto.ca

Community Safety Office
 All campuses: **416-978-1485**
 (9 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

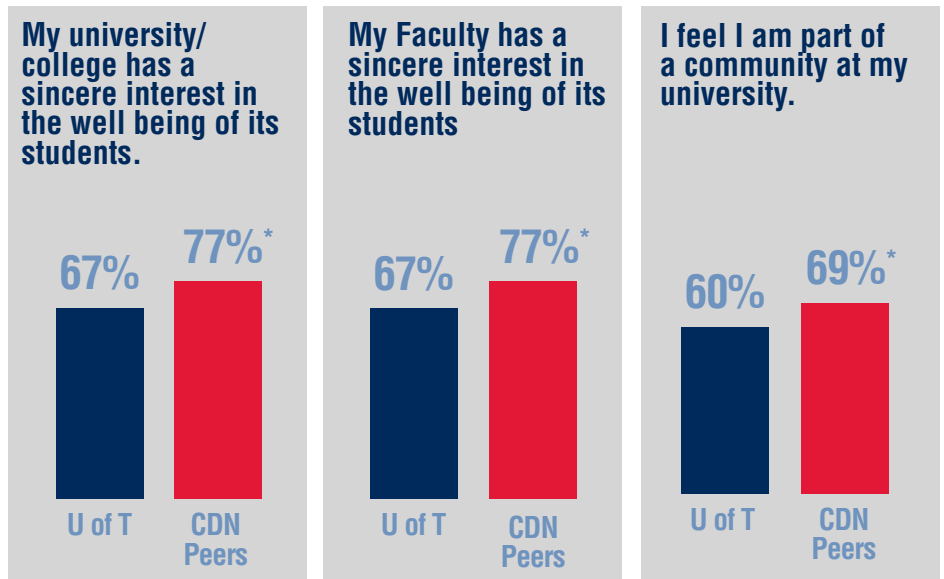
Campus Police
 St George: 416-978-2222
 UTM: 905-569-4333
 UTSC: 416-287-7333

Perceptions of the University

Participants were also asked three questions about their perceptions of the institution. Students were asked if they felt their institution and faculty had an interest in their well-being, as well as a third question about community.

In each of these three cases, the percentage of U of T students who chose “agree” or “strongly agree” was lower than our Canadian Peers.

Percentage who agree/strongly agree



Part 3: Mental health and well-being

The third section focuses on questions related to mental health and well-being. The first set of questions addressed student sentiment and action over the last 12 months. The numbers to the right are the percentage of students who felt this way in the past 12 months.

The most common sentiments shared were feeling overwhelmed, exhausted and very sad. The data from U of T students is very similar to that of our Canadian Peers with no significant differences.

In the past 12 months, have you ever felt ...?

	U of T	Canadian Peers
Overwhelmed by all you had to do	88%	89%
Exhausted	87%	88%
Very sad	73%	74%
Very lonely	67%	68%
Overwhelming anxiety	64%	64%
Hopeless	62%	60%
Overwhelming anger	47%	45%
So depressed (hard to function)	45%	44%
Considered suicide	12%	12%
Intentionally injured	8%	8%
Attempted suicide	2%	2%

Health and Wellness Programs

To learn more about the Health and Wellness programs and services to support students at the University of Toronto, please see:

University of Toronto Mississauga Health & Counselling Centre
www.utm.utoronto.ca/health/

University of Toronto St George Health & Wellness Centre
www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/hwc

University of Toronto Scarborough Health and Wellness Centre
www.utsc.utoronto.ca/hwc/

Percentage who had received mental health services from the following:

	U of T	Canadian Peers
Counselor/therapist/psychologist	29%	36%*
Psychiatrist	11%	12%
Other medical professional	16%	19%
Minister, priest, other clergy	4%	4%
U of T counselling or health service	18%	20%
Would you consider seeking help from a professional in the future?	75%	78%

This chart highlights that 29 percent of U of T students reported seeking help from a counsellor/therapist or other medical professional in the last year. About 18 percent said they had sought these services specifically from U of T. Finally, three-quarters of students said they would seek help from a mental health professional if they felt they needed to. In each of the latter two cases, U of T students scored their help-seeking or potential help-seeking at lower rates than our Canadian Peers did.

The next set of questions focused on the frequency and type of help that students sought out. The chart below highlights the percentage of students who reported seeking help from four different types of mental health supports.

Grief and Trauma Support

Grief and trauma support programs are provided for students across all three campuses. In addition to personal counseling and grief support circles that are offered through the health and wellness services, the Multi-faith Centre also provides support for students who are experiencing loss:

<http://www.griefsupport.utoronto.ca>

Familiarity with mental health supports and initiatives

	Familiar
Mental Health Awareness Month	51%
safeTALK	26%
Good 2 talk	23%
Mental Health Framework	23%
More Feet on the Ground	4%

There are a number of tri-campus programs that exist to support student well-being. The chart above highlights five initiatives and the degree of awareness U of T students had of them.

Only 23 per cent of students surveyed indicated some awareness of the **The Mental Health Framework (mentalhealth.utoronto.ca)**, which was launched in October 2014. **Good 2 Talk (www.good2talk.ca)**, a free, confidential helpline available to post-secondary students across the province had similar awareness. A much greater percentage of students had awareness of Mental Health Awareness Month (51 per cent), which happens every October. SafeTalk, a training program for suicide prevention, had 26 per cent awareness.

Mental Health Initiatives and Programs

Examples of programs that support student mental health include:

Good 2 Talk
www.good2talk.ca

Healthy U of T
healthyuoft.ca

SafeTalk:
<http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/cld/safetalk>

More Feet on the Ground:
<https://utoronto.morefeetontheground.ca>

Flourishing Project at UTSC:
<http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/projects/flourish/>

Self-reported stress

Amount of stress over the past 12 months

	U of T	Canadian Peers
No stress	1%	2%
Less than average	6%	7%
Average	32%	31%
More than average	46%	47%
Tremendous	15%	14%

“Having someone to talk to releases stress that I gather in my life and has made me stronger.”

Alaina, *UTSC*

The U of T data in 2016 is almost identical to that of our Canadian Peers. Nearly half of students reported having more than average stress and an additional 15 per cent felt tremendous stress. Only seven per cent felt that they had below-average or no stress.

Stress Management

Some more examples of programs and services aimed to support student mental health include:

Exam Jam in the Faculty of Arts & Science:

http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/exam_jam

Mindful Moments:

<http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/hwc/mindfulness#node-1205>

MoveU:

www.moveu.ca

Flourishing, moderate and languishing

The last set of questions in this section is based on the Corey Keyes Flourishing model.

The Keyes model asks a series of questions, then categorizes the set of responses into one of three categories: flourishing, moderate or languishing.

Percentage of students languishing, moderate and flourishing

	U of T	Canadian Peers
Languishing	14%	9%*
Moderate	46%	44%
Flourishing	40%	47%*

This data suggests that 40 per cent of respondents would be in the flourishing category and 14 per cent in the languishing category. These are significantly different from our Canadian Peers, who reported 47 per cent flourishing and nine per cent languishing.

Part 4: Awareness, behaviours and self-care

The fourth part of this report looks at student awareness and interest in receiving information on various health topics. It also examines experiences and perceptions of drugs and alcohol use at the University and the things students do to support their own self-care (eating, weight, exercise and sleep).

Health awareness

The first set of questions looks at nine priority areas for health and wellness across campus and the percentage of students who reported receiving some information on these topics.

“The most important aspect for me has been the ability to create space for my reactions and emotions. Being aware of myself and my body have helped me learn to create that space for myself.”

Student, UTSG

Percentage of students who have received health education information

	U of T	Canadian Peers
Stress reduction	66%	68%
Depression/anxiety	60%	66%*
Physical activity	59%*	56%
Nutrition	41%	46%*
Alcohol	39%	49%*
Suicide prevention	34%	39%*
Help others distress	30%	32%
Tobacco use	24%	23%
Sleep difficulties	16%	21%*

The most common topics students received information on were stress reduction, depression/anxiety and physical activity. There were also the top three areas in the comparison set. There are several areas where a smaller percentage of U of T students reported receiving information when compared with Canadian Peers and just one area where they reported receiving significantly more.



I suffered with high levels of anxiety and stress levels and the Outdoor Recreation program, has taught me not only how to manage them better, but has also significantly reduced my stress and anxiety levels.

Simone, UTSC



Percentage of students interested in receiving information

	U of T	Canadian Peers
Stress reduction	83%	82%
Help others distress	76%	76%
Nutritional	74%	73%
Depression/anxiety	73%	73%
Sleep difficulties	73%	72%
Physical activity	72%	69%
Suicide prevention	59%	60%
Alcohol	35%	37%
Tobacco use	32%	31%

The second set of questions mirrored the first, but focused on whether or not students were interested in receiving information on these topics.

This chart shows that the greatest interest is in stress reduction, sleep difficulties, helping others in distress, nutritional support and depression/anxiety. There were no significant differences between U of T students and our Canadian Peers in 2016.

Gaps between interested and received

The next analysis in this section combines the two data sets and looks for topics with the biggest gaps between the percentage of students who reported receiving information and those who wanted information.

	Interested in information	Received information	Information gap
Sleep difficulties	73%	16%	57%
Help others distress	76%	30%	46%
Grief and loss	56%	19%	38%
Relationship difficulties	53%	17%	36%
Pregnancy prevention	44%	11%	33%

The table to the left shows that the five areas with the biggest gaps or opportunities are sleep difficulties, helping others in distress, dealing with grief and loss, relationship difficulties and pregnancy prevention.

Sleep Management

Sleep is an important part of student wellness. In addition to providing support through personal counseling, we provide information for students including tips on getting a good sleep:

<http://healthyuoft.ca/refuel/sleep-well>

Self-reported and perceived use of alcohol

Alcohol, tobacco and drug use

This section contained questions relating to students' self-reported and perceptions of peer use of more than 20 different types of alcohol, tobacco, drugs and other stimulants.

	U of T		Canadian Peers	
	Self-report	Perceptions of peers	Self-report	Perceptions of peers
Cigarettes	20%	89%	25%*	76%
Alcohol	74%	95%	84%*	95%
Marijuana	30%	89%	40%*	86%
E-cigarettes	9%	80%	13%*	69%

These are commonly referred to as “social norming” questions and here, the focus is on four questions. Participants rated their own use of various types of cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana and e-cigarettes. Students were also asked to estimate how often they felt the “typical” student at U of T does the same. Compared to our Canadian Peers, a significantly smaller percentage of students at U of T reported having smoked, used alcohol, marijuana or e-cigarettes in the past 30 days. Students vastly overestimated the percentage of their classmates who used any of these in the past 30 days.

Alcohol/Substance Abuse Education and Programs

Several programs exist across all campuses that provide health education programs on several topics. Examples of programs include:

HealthyU Crew on St. George campus:

<http://healthyuoft.ca/student-outreach/healthyu-crew>

Peer Wellness Program at UTSC:

<http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/hwc/wellness-peer-programs>

Peer Health Education at UTM:

<http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/health/health-promotion/peer-health-education>

Eating, weight, exercise and sleep

The next series of questions is focused on student eating habits, attitudes and perceptions toward their weight, the frequency of exercise and the amount and impact of their sleeping habits.

Eating

The first part of this section focuses on two questions related to eating habits of. The first about how often students eat breakfast and the second how many fruits and vegetables students are eating.

Number of days students eat breakfast

Days	U of T	Canadian Peers
0	5%	5%
1-4	33%	32%
5-7	62%	63%

The data above indicates that more than 60 per cent of U of T students eat breakfast most mornings and only five per cent reported never eating breakfast. These numbers do not differ significantly from the Canadian Peers.

To learn more about Design 4 Change, a student-led initiative to design a healthier university please see harthouse.ca/events/design-for-change-d4c

Healthy Eating and Physical Activity

Healthy eating and physical activity are key aspects of wellness. In addition to the MoveU Program, there are several nutritional and activity-based programs at each campus including:

Athletics and recreation

UTM

<http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/athletics/>

UTSC

<http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/athletics/>

St. George

<https://kpe.utoronto.ca/sports-and-rec>

Hart House

<http://harthouse.ca/fitness/>

Healthy Eating

Refuel

<http://www.healthyuoft.ca/refuel>

Nutrition Program at UTM

<http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/health/health-promotion/nutrition-healthy-eating>

Nutritional Counselling at UTSC

<http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/hwc/nutritional-counselling>

Servings of fruits and vegetables per day

	U of T	Canadian Peers
0 servings per day	5%	5%
1 to 2 servings per day	55%	54%
3 to 4 servings per day	31%	31%
5 or more servings per day	9%	9%

Health Canada recommends five to nine servings per day and U of T students, like their Canadian Peers, fell far below this guideline.

Weight

The next section focuses on two questions relating to student perceptions and actions relating to their weight.

Student perceptions of their own weight

	U of T	Canadian Peers
Very underweight	1%	1%
Slightly underweight	14%	11%
About the right weight	55%	56%
Slightly overweight	27%	29%
Very overweight	4%	4%

Above we see that a majority of U of T students felt that they were about the right weight, with 27 per cent feeling slightly overweight and 14 per cent slightly underweight. These figures do not differ significantly from our Canadian Peers.

“We have all been there before, craving unhealthy foods when stressed or working late.”

Dietician, UTM

Actions taken related to their weight in the last 30 days

	U of T	Canadian Peers
Exercise to lose weight	55%*	51%
Diet to lose weight	40%	35%*
Vomit or take laxatives to lose weight	3%	3%
Take diet pills to lose weight	2%	2%

The table highlights that significantly more students at U of T were exercising to lose weight and dieting to lose weight than their Canadian Peers. A small percentage of students, that is not significantly different from our Canadian Peers, reported taking laxatives to lose weight or using diet pills.

“It’s about being both mentally and physically healthy. It’s about using your body for what it’s meant to do: move.”

Gabriela, UTSC

Exercise

The next part of this section focuses on exercise in terms of frequency, intensity and access on campus.

Frequency of physical activity in the past week: Do you...

	Do moderate intensity cardio or aerobic exercise for at least 30 minutes?		Do vigorous intensity cardio or aerobic exercise for at least 20 minutes?		Do 8-10 strength training exercises for 8-12 repetitions each?	
	U of T	Canadian Peers	U of T	Canadian Peers	U of T	Canadian Peers
0 days	29%*	25%	49%*	45%	56%*	53%
1-4 days	55%	57%	47%	49%	38%	40%
5-7 days	16%	18%	5%	7%	5%	7%

The chart above asks students how often they engaged in various forms of exercise. The data is organized by those who said they did no exercise, some exercise (one to four days a week) or a lot of exercise (five to seven days a week). In each of the three categories, a slightly larger percentage of U of T students reported doing no exercise compared with our Canadian Peers.

Not all exercise happens in an athletic facility at the University, but it is interesting to note how often students uses the on-campus facilities.

Frequency of athletic facility use

	U of T	
Hart House	31%	Unlike other analyses in this report, this chart is broken down by campus. When the three facilities at St. George are combined, 46 per cent of all students used at least one of the three, one or more days per week. This is almost identical when looking at the percentage of students at UTM and UTSC who used their athletic facilities one or more days per week.
The Athletic Centre	25%	
The Goldring Centre for High Performance Sport	12%	
Any UTSG	46%	
UTM Recreation, Athletics & Wellness Centre (RAWC)	45%	
Toronto Pan Am Sports Centre / UTSC Department of Athletics & Recreation	46%	

Sleep

The final piece of this section focuses on sleeping habits of students. The first question looked at how many days students felt well rested in the morning.

The data shows that we do not differ significantly from our Canadian Peers.

Percentage of students feeling well rested in the morning

	U of T	Canadian Peers
0 days	13%	12%
1-4 days	63%	63%
5-7 days	24%	26%

Percentage of students who...

	Went to bed because you couldn't stay awake		Had a hard time falling asleep	
	U of T	Canadian Peers	U of T	Canadian Peers
0 days	34%	35%	42%	39%
1-4 days	52%	53%	44%	47%
5-7 days	14%	12%	14%	14%

The data shows that 66 per cent of students went to bed because they couldn't stay awake at least once a week. A slightly smaller percentage (56 per cent) of U of T students reported having a hard time falling asleep one or more days a week. In both cases, the U of T data is very similar to our Canadian Peers.

“It’s important to recognize and acknowledge the complexity of our student’s needs and that all of this impacts their academic experience.”

Physician, UTM

Part 5: Academic performance

The final part of this report focuses on the areas that have a negative impact on academic performance. The chart below highlights the 10 areas that students identified as the biggest barriers to their own academic performance.

Primary factors impeding academic performance

	U of T	Canadian Peers
Stress	43%	42%
Anxiety	33%	32%
Sleep difficulties	26%	28%
Internet use/computer games	22%	20%
Depression	21%	21%
Cold/flu sore throat	17%	20%
Work	17%	16%
Concern for family member	15%	15%
Relationship difficulties	12%	13%
Co-curricular activities	10%	10%

This chart highlights the major areas affecting academic performance. The three highest factors were stress, anxiety and sleep difficulties. Compared to our Canadian Peers, we score very similarly except for slightly lower in cold/flu and sleep difficulties and slightly higher in Internet use/computer games.

Academic Support Programs

To learn more about some of the programs to support students academic success at the University of Toronto, please see:

University of Toronto Mississauga Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre
www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/

University of Toronto Scarborough Academic Advising and Career Centre
www.utsc.utoronto.ca/aacc/

University of Toronto St George Academic Success Centre
www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/asc

Conclusion

The results from the NCHA survey provide us with valuable information on the health practices and perceptions of students across the University of Toronto. The data provides us with insight that helps us better understand the services and programs available to our students.

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