# EXAMINING THE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION STUDENTS TRANSITIONING INTO THE LABOUR MARKET

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WatCACE/CAFCE Research Seminar

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UNIVERSITY OF **WATERLOO**

# QUESTIONS?

Please email watcace@uwaterloo.ca

# EXAMINING THE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION STUDENTS TRANSITIONING INTO THE LABOUR MARKET.

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December 4, 2015

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# OVERVIEW

- Introduction
- Literature Review
  » Sense of Belonging, Peer Support, Social Media Use
- Phase One
  » Qualitative Study
- Phase Two
  » Survey Study
- Phase Three
  » Pilot peer support program

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# LITERATURE REVIEW

- Mental Health Crisis
- Sense of belonging
  - » Implications for mental health and well-being
  - » School belonging
- Social Support
  - » Implications for mental health and well-being
  - » Social connectedness for students in co-operative education
- Social Media Use

# MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS ON CAMPUS

- As many as 450 million people worldwide suffer from a mental health disorder
  - » leading cause for absenteeism from work and exclusion from the labour force[1]
- Adolescents and emerging adults at risk for mental health issues
- Number of students on university campuses who struggle with depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and psychosis has been on the rise and intensification of students' psychological needs has been referred to as a mental health crisis on campuses[2]
- Recent epidemiological study of Canadian post-secondary students found that 15-21 year olds had the highest prevalence rate of mental illness[2]

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# SENSE OF BELONGING

- A sense of belonging has been described as among the most basic and essential human needs[3]

  » A healthy sense of belonging is an important contributor to one's overall psychological well-being[3].

  » Low levels of belonging linked to loneliness, depression, anxiety, psychiatric treatment, suicidal thinking & suicide attempts[4].

# SCHOOL BELONGING

- School Belonging
  - » Defined as a sense of commitment to one's educational institution, a sense of being recognized for one's abilities & perception of fitting in with one's peers[5].
  - » Higher levels of school belonging is associated with better academic, psychological, and health outcomes[5].
  - » Students who experience a positive change in their sense of university belonging throughout their first year have lower levels of anxiety and depression.
  - » Social integration and involvement within the school community is a major predictor of student university persistence, academic success, and self-efficacy[6].

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# PEER SUPPORT AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE

- ## Social Support
  - » Implications for mental health and well-being.
  - » Crucial for finding one's place at university .
  - » Connectedness with peers could be an issue for students in co-operative education.

- ## Social Media
  - » SNSs have an impact of sense of belonging and peer support
  - » Allows users to remain socially connected when physically distant from their social ties → important for co-op students
  - » Mixed findings in regards to the benefits of SNS use for university students

# IMPLICATIONS FOR CO-OP STUDENTS

» Co-op students may have a harder time developing sense of belonging to university and maintaining social ties due to their alternating school/work schedule

» Students have reported finding co-op program emotionally difficult and isolating during work terms – 'friend sickness'[9].

» Co-op programs may affect students' ability to access campus support initiatives such as peer support groups and mental health care.

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# METHODOLOGY

- Phase One
  - » Focus Groups
- Phase Two
  - » Large Scale Quantitative Survey & Analysis
- Phase Three
  - » Peer Support Intervention Pilot

# PHASE ONE - FOCUS GROUPS

- Focus groups to gather personal accounts of peer support and sense of belonging in the university setting

- Exploratory study

- Utilized a constant comparative analysis approach



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# RESULTS

Student's narratives of peer support and sense of belonging included common subthemes which they described as impacting their overall health, well-being and ability to make successful transitions.

Figure 1- Model of the Relationship between Peer Support, Sense of Belonging, and Overall Mental Health, Wellbeing and Transitions
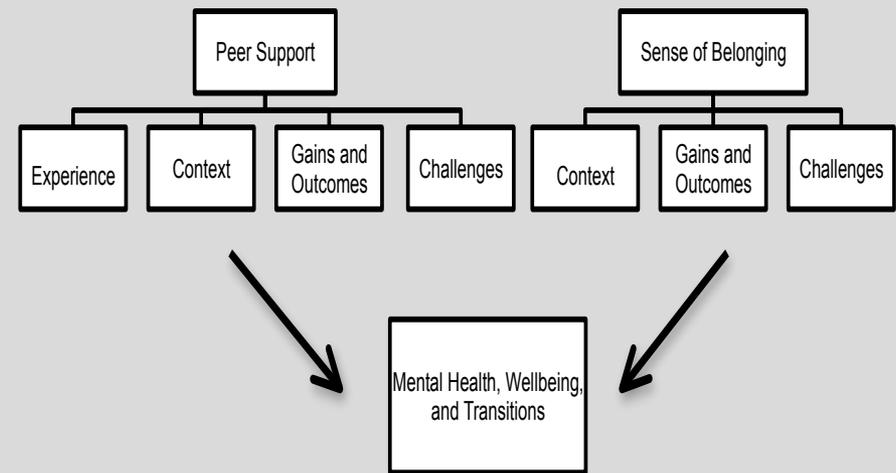
# PHASE TWO

- Quantitative data collection

- Survey Instrument (211 items)

  » Demographics

  » Sense of belonging

    - Sense of Belonging Instrument (Hegarty & Patusky, 1995)

    - Psychological Sense of School Membership (Goodenow, 1993)

    - Sense of Belonging Items scale was used (McBeath, Drysdale, & Bohn, 2015)

  » Peer Support

    - Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (Cohen et al., 1985)

    - Peer Support items (McBeath, Drysdale, & Bohn, 2015)

# PHASE TWO CONT.

» Social Media Use

- Social Media Usage items (McBeath, Drysdale, & Bohn, 2015)

» School to Work Efficacy

- School-to-Work Self-Efficacy (McBeath, Drysdale, & Bohn, 2015)

» Health and Well-being

- Self Description Questionnaire III – Emotional Stability (Marsh & O'Neill, 1984)

- Satisfaction with Life Scale (Pavot, W., & Diener, E. 2008)

- Well-Being Manifestation Measure Scale (Massé, et al., 1998)

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# DATA ANALYSIS

- Within & between subject design with demographic items as main independent variables to be investigated.

- Factor Analysis of new scales

- Dependent variables included the following measures of sense of belonging, perceived peer support, mental health, well-being, school to work efficacy

- Descriptives, analysis of variance, multiple regression

# KEY FINDINGS

- Factor Analysis – Sense of Belonging Items
    - » Hypothesized three distinct constructs that aim to measure perceptions of context, gains & outcomes, challenges
    - » These constructs were confirmed the constructs and indicated explained 23%, 15%, and 11% of the variance respectively.

# KEY FINDINGS

- Perceived sense of belonging to university community and access to high quality peer support strongly related to overall mental health and well-being.

- Demographic factors significantly related to sense belonging, peer support, and confidence in school to work transitions included age, gender, year of study, faculty, and participation in university orientation activities.

- Student who participated in cooperative education have a significantly stronger sense of school to work efficacy than non-cooperative education students

# KEY FINDINGS

- Stronger levels of sense of belonging and peer support predict better outcomes on measures of mental health and well-being.
    - Students who experience a high sense of belonging are more likely to report greater emotional stability
    - Students who experience more peer support more likely to report better mental balance and happiness

- Students are active users of social media, use supports their sense of belonging, prefer to seek support through personal channels

- High intensity of social media use is related to lower emotional stability in students.

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# PHASE THREE – PEER SUPPORT PILOT

- Peer Support Program to be piloted in Winter 2016
  - » Randomized controlled trial
  - » Participants will take place in one of three conditions
    - In person peer support
    - Online peer support
    - Control group
- International Study

# THANK YOU

Questions? Comments?

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