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ENGWELLNESS ECE UNDERGRADUATE NEWSLETTER



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Your New ENGWellness Ambassador!

Hello hello! It is so wonderful to meet you all! My name is Spencer and I will be your new ENGWellness Ambassador for the Fall 2022 Term! I am a 4th year psychology student here at the University of Waterloo! I got interested in psychology through volunteering in specialized-care homes throughout high school. As of right now, I plan to pursue a career in mental health to learn how to help people as best as I can!

At UW, I've been a part of the 2022 Science Orientation Team welcoming in the new first year students (and hyping up those 2nd year students who wanted to enjoy some in-person orientation!). In my free time I love the outdoors; going on hikes, camping, or kayaking whenever I can! I am also a HUGE fan of the video game Dark Souls! Anyways, I am SO excited to be a part of the ENGWellness team and can't wait to meet everyone one of you!

WELLNESS BREAK

Wash the dishes. Vacuum the floor. Do the laundry.

None of these tasks sound exciting, or particularly inviting. But if I think about it, imagine life without it, I start to see how it can be enticing.

In my experience, physically active breaks are the best for recharging your mental energy. The main reason I feel tired isn't due to any physical, muscle-related fatigue. It's because I've been thinking too much. Schoolwork, job search, hobbies, they all require thinking, and sometimes, just like my arms and my legs, my brain gets tired. Take vacuuming the floor as an example. It's a monotonous chore, but that's exactly what I need. Turn off your brain, and let your body do the work. After vacuuming for around 10 minutes, I am constantly surprised at how refreshed I feel upon returning to my work. It's two birds with one stone. I recharge my mental capacity, finish my work faster, and the floor is spotless as a result! Household chores are probably the most efficient things I do.

WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL STUDENT? AN INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR DAVID WANG

How do you think students should frame the idea of success?

A lot of students tend to frame the idea of success with marks, but students should rethink this. First, they should focus on learning, not marks. Unfortunately, the current educational system is not set up for people who have learned the content but cannot write tests well in a high pressure final or midterm exam. For these students, their marks do not reflect their understanding of the material. Regardless, based on my three decades of counselling students, I have found that experience and a person's CV/resume are what determine future success, not marks. As well, your engineering specialty does not determine your future success either. A lot of students want to switch specialties because they believe there are more job opportunities. Don't do that. A career and specialty should be chosen out of passion, not financial possibilities. Take coding for example. Although there are many employment opportunities, sitting in front of a computer for 8 hours a day is not enjoyable for some people, and even if you can make money doing it, you won't be happy. Do what you're passionate about. Finally, focus on your soft skills of communication, teamwork, and networking. These skills are often neglected by students.

Someone who has very high marks but who lacks these skills will often be much less successful than someone with these skills who has lower marks. The outside world is very different than the 5 years in your undergrad, and it is important to realize that.

What notable behaviors, beliefs, values, habits, have you seen in students that are able to achieve this "success"?

Having grit and persevering in the presence of failure are huge. Allowing yourself to adapt and recognize your weaknesses are two massively important skills that successful students develop. The best way to learn is to learn from your mistakes, so you can't be afraid of failure. High schools don't really teach that, and even in university, we do not encourage that. The old saying 'what doesn't kill you makes you stronger' is sort of opposite to what today's youth seem to be adopting. Many seem to think 'whatever hurts you should be avoided at all cost'. They need to realize that going through tough times causes emotions. If you feel frustrated because you failed an exam, that's an emotion. If you feel angry because you don't have the mark you want, that's an emotion. Emotions aren't right or wrong, they just are. Successful students simply acknowledge emotions but do not give into them. Instead, successful students are the ones that are action oriented. They take steps to improve themselves by scheduling extra study sessions, consulting the professor, work on their note-taking and/or improve their time management skills. These are all actions that will get them closer to their goals. Successful students are also often well-rounded -- they're involved in many different extra-curricular activities. Successful students are aiming to achieve a school-life balance, which helps put their emotions and failures into perspective. For example, try volunteering in a homeless shelter or the food bank. That will put your difficulties into perspective.

Given the difficulty of an engineering degree, how would you recommend students find time outside of school?

Time-management is super important. I typically tell my students for every hour you spend in class, you should schedule 2 hours outside of it to study for that class. If you set blocks of time for this, you will maintain a high level of work ethic but will still have time for things outside of class. It is important for students to keep in mind that over-studying one topic or one assignment is very possible without these set blocks of time, causing a domino effect of falling behind. As well, if you don't schedule breaks into your day and into your study sessions (commonly referred to as the Pomodoro technique) then you will hit a point of diminishing returns very quickly and your studying becomes terribly inefficient. If you are having trouble, remember that you can also reach out to your peers or your TAs. This is a great way to save time, rather than beating your head against a wall by not reaching out for help.

What are common pitfalls students have during their degree?

I mentioned this already, but the focus on marks is huge. For a specific example, there was a group assignment in a course last term and the students ended up failing the mid-term terribly. Why? They tried to divide the assignment questions between them to maximize marks but ended up learning only the portion of the material that they tried, which was a third or a quarter of the questions, depending on the group size. To learn, you need to try each question. Some students just read over a solution, but research shows that just reading over a solution is much less effective than giving an honest try to every question. Students are often far too concerned with minor things like their class rank, and they don't focus on important things, such as their mental health. Anxiety is one of the most common issues that students face, and counselling services is a perfect resource to help students deal with it. If you have anxiety, your body is in the fight, flight and freeze mode and, physiologically, the brain shuts down its cognitive function, which then stifles any attempt to perform at your best. You can be the smartest person in the world and still flunk a test if you are in this anxious state. It is highly important to take care of your mental health by going to counselling to help alleviate any anxiety.

Does aiming at learning automatically increase marks?

The reality is that marks don't always come from learning. Marks really don't matter as much as most people think. Everyone has a 95 average coming out of high school, but as soon as you hit first year, the class average drops to around 70 and you're somewhere on this normal distribution. Half of the students end up with an average below 70, which is a huge drop from high school (which can cause the aforementioned anxiety). However, regardless of where you are on this curve when you graduate, I have rarely heard of anyone coming from UW that does not have a good career, regardless of their marks. Industry simply doesn't care about your marks. Your coop experience has a far greater impact on your career. Focusing on learning will not necessarily increase your marks, but it will definitely give you better career prospects, as it will allow you to shine during your coop terms, which is what matters in the end.

What advice would you give to someone who feels overwhelmed and is considering giving up on their degree?

Firstly, the University wants you to stay in the program. I can empathize with how a student might want to give up after failing. However, keep in mind that you can get a 60 average with two fails in a term and you can still be conditionally passed. The students who fail are often the ones who give up. However, the students that fail a term but decide to come back with improved attitudes and study skills will often come back as a stronger student. On the other hand, the ones who continue to squeak by never really improve because what they're doing is 'just enough'. In the end, guess who ends up with a better career? The one who failed, changed themselves and persevered. No matter where you are in your class, you will have a great career if you really understand the material. So, what advice would I give? Don't give up. Remember, marks don't matter as much as you think, just work to learn and the things that matter will follow.

How important is it for students to have things going on in their lives outside of school?

Super important – balance is everything. For one, you need to be physically active to be healthy, so it is highly important that there is some sort of physical activity going on outside of school. Healthy mind = healthy body. There is a study from McMaster where students that did some sort of exercise every 20 minutes to break up their study session performed significantly better at recall than those that didn't. It is very possible to over-study, so you must always try to break up your study time with other things like exercise. Having things going on outside of school also allows for important skills to develop like networking. Personally, some of my best business contacts are the guys I played soccer with for 30 years. In fact, employers repeatedly state that the two most important traits they are looking for in hiring are teamwork/collaboration and communication. The importance of these traits, often developed outside of school, cannot be overstated.

Student success stories?

I interviewed my daughter which is a perfect example of a student success story (<https://youtu.be/UgbVIFNvAZ4>). Basically, she started as a civil engineer and transferred to electrical and almost failed. In her fourth year she had above a 90 average, was a WEEF TA and her previous co-op employer made a position for her when she graduated. She didn't even have to apply for jobs during the pandemic.

Any other things you'd like to mention to all the undergraduate students reading this?

You're going to face failure, disappointment, or tragedy somewhere in your life. I lost a house from a flood, went through a bankruptcy, had a flood at the university that destroyed 20 years of research forcing me to start over, and went through a divorce. People always go through things that are grossly unfair. It is just what happens in life. Everyone, including Elon Musk, will have something terrible happen to them in their lifetime. It may not happen today, or during your undergrad, or even the next 20 years, but eventually it will happen. In all of these scenarios, we must take care of our mental health. I have had a therapist for a long time now and it has helped me tremendously in dealing with the injustices that life brings, so please reach out to one if you feel you could use it. There has been a stigma attached to counselling for many years, and I am glad that this is finally changing.

SOME UPCOMING EVENTS FOR ECE!

Therapy Dogs - October 24, 5:30pm - 6:30pm in E5 3102

Sexual Violence in the Workplace Workshop for 2B ECE - TBD!

Facilitated by Chris Martin from the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office!

Snacks & prizes provided!!

If you are not in your 2B term you can still attend!

Creating Safer Space Workshop for 3B ECE - TBD!

Facilitated by Adria Joel from the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region!

Peer-support session for femme-identifying, Trans and gender non-conforming students!

Snacks & prizes provided!!

If you are not in your 3B term you can still attend!

ECE Town Hall - TBD!

Facilitated by both the ENGWellness and ECE Undergrad Team!

Conrad Grebel Music - TBD!

A massive hit in the summer term, Conrad Grebel's music ensemble will be returning to the E7 pitch space to serenade us!

Stay tuned for more details! (in November!)

And this is just the beginning of an awesome event filled term!

Be sure to follow our Instagram account (@uwengwell) for updates, new events, and volunteer opportunities!

Wellness Representatives

The goal of the Wellness Representative initiative is to help monitor and enhance the well-being of MME and ECE Undergraduate and Graduate Engineering students in an organic, peer-supported manner. This is done not only by championing wellness initiatives and promoting wellness strategies within these departments, but also by encouraging interactions amongst peers that would occur organically anyways. If you are interested in becoming a Wellness Representative or want to learn more about what Wellness Reps do, visit our 'Get Involved' page on the ENGWellness Website or click the hyperlink!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following mental health supports are available to you
Counselling Services: 519-888-4096

The following crisis supports are available to you as well
Crisis Services Canada: 1-833-456-4566 or text 45645
UW Police: 519-888-4567 ext. 22222

Academic Support

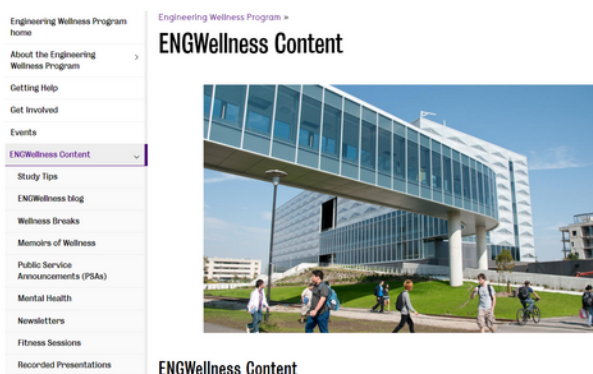
- Student Success Office: Compilation of learning and life skills resources.

Contacts to book a one-on-one coaching session:

Sam Vandekerckhove (MME) - srvandek@uwaterloo.ca / ENGWellness@uwaterloo.ca
Leah Foster (ECE) – ljsims@uwaterloo.ca / ENGWellness@uwaterloo.ca

ENGWELLNESS CONTENT

Check out our ENGWellness resources including mental health pages and PSAs. All resources as well as previous newsletters can be accessed under the ENGWellness Content section of our website.



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Get news and access to our content modules through our ENGWellness Learn 'course'! Students can enroll using the Self-Registration function within Learn.

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