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ENGWELLNESS MME GRADUATE NEWSLETTER

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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 DUANE CRONIN

[What are some important character traits that you've seen in successful graduate students?](#)

I think probably the biggest thing is a passion for discovery and a genuine interest in the topic. You have to find the topic that you're doing exciting and interesting. It doesn't have to be interesting to the whole world; it can just be interesting to you. I think it's also super important that you have the necessary resources to be successful if you're doing computational or experimental work. Opportunities for conference attendance and things similar to that to develop your reputation in the community would be beneficial. But I would say that ultimately it's all about your passion, interest or love of what you're doing, and if you find it important and exciting.

[How necessary is work and life balance in grad school? Any recommendations on how to achieve it?](#)

Boy, I mean that's really the big question these days -- this concept of work life balance. Yeah, I think it's super critical for everyone, but it probably comes in lots of different...maybe I'll call it shapes and sizes in terms of a person's personal circumstances and what they might need to achieve a balance. You know, some people are in a mode where they may be able to work for days, weeks or months at a time and then take a break and other people might need a break that's more regular. That might be every day or every week they need some sort of disconnection. So I think it really does come in different shapes and sizes for everyone, but the commonalities I would say is that you really do need friends, family and a social network or a community that you're in. I'm an advocate of having an in-person social network, as well as a believer in the importance of remain connected to your family. I personally think physical activity is really important and hobbies are important too. So you can't just, you know, sort of say, well, I'm not working now, so I'm just going to sit here and do nothing. You know, you need to have something else that you're passionate about that gives you a break from things. I think people who are successful know that it's important to have a balance. I don't think that's what makes them successful, but I think they know that that's an important thing to have in their life. And people who are really passionate about what they do are often passionate about all sorts of things, even their hobbies like playing music or a sport or yeah, anything. So I don't know if it's one or the other. I think it's just the people who are successful maybe recognize the need for that to some extent. But I would also say that that in a research environment, if you're doing a research degree, it's just going to take a little time, dedication, effort, and focus. That's just one of the things that's built into that. And so you have to be able to go for stretches where you're working in a pretty focused, intense environment and then you can take your breaks. And so that's another thing that's probably an important element. [Any recommendations on how the different types of people can achieve that?] Oh, boy. Well, I think you just have to find things you really enjoy and are excited about. I don't have a good answer for that one, it's a really hard question. I think it's really important to find stuff that you love doing that's outside of work or different from work and to have a community. And when I say community, it doesn't have to be a large one.

It could be people to talk to, one person or two people that you're close with as friends and remain connected to your family. Those things are, I think, super important if you're going to achieve that balance in your life because you need people to talk to. You need people to commiserate with as well. I mean, when everybody in in our research team, when people are going through their thesis, there's other people who have done it before that are there and they talk to them and everybody kind of helps each other. Additionally, and let's call it a double edged sword, is having a plan/planning. So it's important to plan both short term and long term so that you've got an idea of a direction and a focus. And in a research environment there's always a million paths that present themselves, so you have to figure out which path to take. Planning helps you decide on that and figure out what's a productive path to take and. But I've also seen situations where people over-planned where they could spend their entire day planning for what they're gonna do that day instead of getting stuff done. So plan but don't over plan is the take-away here.

It's also what another thing that I've seen to have a productive grad career is to make your goals or your steps achievable and incremental.

[What practical advice would you give to grad students to have a productive grad career?](#)

A double edged sword, is having a plan/planning. So it's important to plan both short term and long term so that you've got an idea of a direction and a focus. And in a research environment there's always a million paths that present themselves, so you have to figure out which path to take. Planning helps you decide on that and figure out what's a productive path to take and. But I've also seen situations where people over-planned where they could spend their entire day planning for what they're gonna do that day instead of getting stuff done. So plan but don't over plan is the take-away here. As an example, and I go through this a lot with people who are writing their thesis, is they'll say 'this weekend I'm gonna write this whole chapter' and I'll say well, wait a minute. Firstly, this is the weekend, so maybe you need some work life balance. But secondly maybe you need to think about, OK, today I'm gonna write, I've got to get through at least a page and I'm going to create these graphs or something. So a more incremental focused target rather than saying today I'm going to write my thesis. Because we we know that's not gonna be. It's not gonna happen. And so you'll come away at the end of the day feeling like you didn't achieve your goal. But the goal was unachievable. So you have to really set targets that are achievable in incremental. Another thing that I've seen is to make your goals or your steps achievable and incremental. For a productive grad career, people have to focus on high quality and targeted research, so they have to address a challenge that's important not only to them, but has some meaning in the world as well. I think I find that people really get excited and fired up if they have an application or an outlet for their research that the world cares about. People should also try to figure out what Graduate School can give them towards their future careers. Generally there seems to be 2 different paths that people could go with their grad studies: research and faculty position or industry position. If you're going into research or want to get a faculty position, having publications is absolutely essential. IF you're going into industry, maybe you're focused on developing industry relevant skills and things that you can use to market yourself. Soft skills are very important for either option.

[What are some of the biggest difficulties students face, and how have you seen them overcome those challenges?](#)

Yeah, this is a very difficult one, and it has especially been brought to light in the COVID situation. So it certainly is individual, and it depends on the person and their situation. Firstly, I think COVID has shown us that the struggles people face are all very different. For this reason it's very difficult to generalize an answer. You know, at the fundamental level, grad school is tackling a problem that no one has ever tackled before, and so there are a lot of different difficulties that people face because of that. For example, someone may have organizational skills but needs to work on technical aspects, or maybe someone is really good at understanding things but has to work on productivity. There's also a lot of students who are ESL and they're being asked to write a 100+ page thesis in good quality English scientific writing. In other cases people have challenges presenting in front of large groups of people. To extrapolate though I would say I often have to focus on improving clarity of communication with people. No matter where people go, that's always something that is needed so I am often helping people improve with that. You just have to give people room to be successful: everyone has that diamond in the rough but not everyone is as close to getting it as others.

[How important is it for students to 'figure out what works for them' in a broad sense \(i.e. not trying to copy what has worked for others\)?](#)

It is very important for people to figure out what works for them. It takes a lot of hard work, but it is exceptionally important for people to figure that out. I would qualify that statement though, by saying that it is important for people to figure out what works for them today, because what works for you at one point in your life may not work as well for you in another. For example, I sometimes have to trick myself into being productive. Like when I took my daughter to swimming in Elmira I would just go to Tim Hortons and do work there so I couldn't really do anything but work because I had nowhere else to go. But if I'm trying to work at home there are a lot of distractions and I probably wouldn't get as much work done as I needed to.

[What advice would you give to a grad student that feels overwhelmed and/or 'burnt out' by their work?](#)

Well, my experience is that everybody hits that point at least once, and maybe multiples times in their degree as they go through various stages and milestones. So, firstly, I think it's important to realize that everybody around you is probably experiencing, has experienced, or is going to experience what you are currently going through. This is why I think community is such a huge factor for us to connect with and talk to people who know about the things we are dealing with and can help. I think to avoid this, people really need to figure out how to disconnect, and to keep the big picture in mind. Sometimes you just have to agree with yourself that the ambitious goals you've made for yourself just won't get done by the time you want them to be and you need to take some time off.

[What are reasons for students to not do well or get what they want out of graduate school?](#)

This is another one that's very dependent on a person's circumstances, but I'd say first and foremost if they are struggling they need to go and talk to someone. It could be a colleague, family, friend, and sometimes supervisor, but not all supervisors are comfortable talking about those things with their students. I personally want my students to come talk to me if they are

struggling so I can try to help them. Especially since if people are struggling it can start to compound on itself. I would say the keys for students who end up being successful are often the ones who are organized and proactive. They say yes to opportunities when they present themselves, and aren't afraid of a little hard work. Obviously you have to enjoy your research too, but people need to be aware of the resources available to them. [The Writing and Communication Centre](#) for one is very helpful for people who want to improve those skills.

[Any general advice/comments for MME grad students?](#)

Grad school was an absolutely amazing time in my life and so people need to try and enjoy it while they're there. There's going to be stresses and there's going to be challenges and hard work. But it's a time in your life when you have flexibility. You're surrounded by so many intelligent, motivated interesting people, and so there are great opportunities to do things. If you want to get involved in stuff because you have this flexibility in time that you can do the things you want to do, so I would say it's about the journey, not the destination for Grad School. But it is also a fantastic professional opportunity for me too. Becoming what I felt like was a competent engineer after I had done grad school because I got to dig in on a topic and really develop understanding that I didn't really have the time to do in undergrad.



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WHAT'S HAPPENING AROUND CAMPUS?

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

Bystander Intervention Training - November 2, 5PM – 8PM

Facilitated by Stacey Jacobs from the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office!

Those who complete this training will receive a certificate!

Food, incentives & prizes will be provided!!

More details will be released via email! Keep an eye out!

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

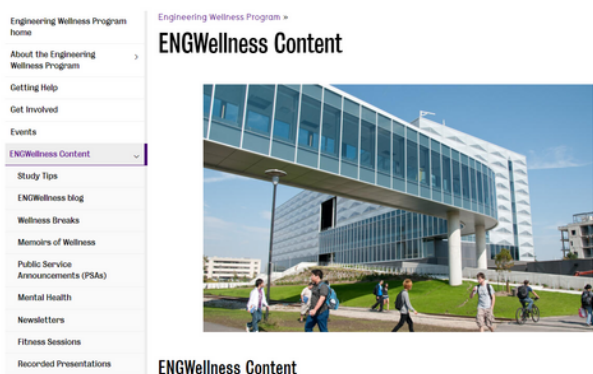
- Student Success Office: Compilation of learning and life skills resources.

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.



STAY CONNECTED

Be sure to follow us on social media to stay connected and updated.



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[ENGwellness uwaterloo](https://www.youtube.com/ENGwellness_uwaterloo)

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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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