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# Universities, college speak out about mental illness

Linda Givetash, Record staff

**WATERLOO REGION** — As more young people speak up about mental illness, post secondary institutions are racing to find new ways to meet the demands of their students' diverse needs.

The University of Waterloo released a report last week that reviewed current services — health, counselling and support for disabilities — and made recommendations to improve ease of access and reach out to a wider range of students.

"There's a lot of information coming forward in recent years about mental health among students and the opportunities for helping students be more successful by addressing mental health issues in new ways," said Bud Walker, special adviser to the university's vice-president academic, who spearheaded the review a year ago.

A prominent change that will be made at the university is broadening the role of the persons with disabilities department to offer support and accommodations to students with other lifestyle concerns, such as culture and gender.

Walker said he sees this as an opportunity to address problems before they escalate into more serious mental health concerns.

"If some of these things can be dealt with proactively you remove some of the potential of those students getting into the position where they feel there's no real out for them," he said.

Already, the university has contracted a director to oversee the current health-related services to better integrate and streamline the departments. An implementation team will also be formed by Sept. 1 to plan and execute changes from the report.

Short-term changes in administration and services should be implemented within the next year, said Chris Read, associate provost of students at the university.

Addressing broader issues such as the stigma surrounding mental illness will take much longer and require a change in culture and attitudes, he said.

Wilfrid Laurier University and Conestoga College have measures in place as well to adapt their services and programming to meet the needs of their students.

Mike Dinning, vice-president of student affairs at Conestoga, explained that the college takes ongoing feedback about its service from students and staff while also offering workshops and programming to educate their community about finding support when it's needed.

"What we're trying to do is make the community and the students aware of what are the identifiable issues and what are the resources available that they can access and I think that's the key to this," he said.

Working to develop a campus strategy to address mental health, Wilfrid Laurier University created the position of a mental health student support team leader to work with the students and find new ways to connect them with counselling support they need on and off campus.

"It was really important for us to have somebody who would be a conduit between students and the community and all of our internal departments here at Laurier," said Leanne Holland Brown, dean of students.

By creating the new avenue of support, Holland Brown said the team leader will be a point of contact if students need to take a break from their studies or re-enter the school system and will notify the university if any improvements can be made with services currently offered.

Holland Brown said that Laurier's full campus strategy to address mental illness proactively will be under development in the next two years and take into account students' experiences during that time.

Weighing in on why more students are accessing mental health-related services to begin with, Read said it may be a combination of having more opportunities to ask for help and increasing pressures for students to succeed.

"We need to make sure that students learn what they need to learn within the classroom but to be the leaders of tomorrow, they need to have a balanced life and have that other part of the learning experience while they're at university."

Institutions are continuing to improve accessibility to services so that students who are struggling don't slip through the cracks.

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# City to demolish washroom where Guelph student died

News services

**GUELPH** — The city has decided to tear down the south-end washroom where a 14-year-old girl was killed more than three years ago.

Colleen Bell, the city's executive director of community and social services, said Monday the decision comes after extensive consultation with Isabel Warren's family and classmates from Bishop Macdonell Catholic high school.

The washroom building at Southend Community Park has been closed to the public since June 16, 2009, when a partial cinder block wall toppled onto the Grade 9 student.

Last summer, city officials said they would hire a consultant to work with the city in determining what to do with the facility that is behind the high school, but friends of Warren contacted at the time

called on the city to remove the building.

Bishop Macdonell principal Holly Conway said she has met with Warren's classmates, who graduated in June, and the school's council to see how they now feel about removing the building "and it was unanimous everyone wanted it taken down as soon as possible.

"This will give them some closure," Conway said.

Bell said to "minimize the pain it might cause," the city decided to remove the building during the summer break "when the least amount of people would have to witness it."

The city is not revealing the precise date when the work is to take place.

Since the tragedy, a makeshift memorial wall has been created on the side of the washroom building. Bell said the city will document the tributes in photographs and make those available to the public.

# Devoted group of followers

► Blog continued from B1

In 2011, Halloran was part of a delegation that visited China to foster ongoing business and cultural relationships between the two countries. Waterloo has played host to several delegations from China.

The University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University and Canada's Technology Triangle all have offices in Chongqing.

Halloran had been asked to participate in Weibo before, but was put off because she couldn't write Chinese.

With Min's help as a translator, she was able to make it work.

Her blogs include information about the area's high-tech companies, MacLean's magazine's rating of the University of Waterloo as having the best reputation of any Canadian university, and video of her talking to the vice mayor of Chongqing when she visited last November.

Min says response has been excellent. "They never expected that a Canadian mayor who does not have Chinese heritage will open a Weibo account and actually reply to all their questions," he said.

She's received about 400 comments. People want to know about the weather and the population here.

They ask about investing in Waterloo and sending their children here, Min said.

Souping Zhao, international Relations Specialist for Waterloo International, a department for international programs at the University of Waterloo, says Halloran's blog is a big deal.

The buzz is that "People here are quite excited about this event," she said. "To

people, it's a really big thing."

For a western person to be willing to become established on a Chinese website when they don't even speak the language is "a really friendly gesture" toward Chinese people, she said.

"She wants to speak something on the Chinese Twitter. She wants to speak in Chinese even though she may not know Chinese.

"She also opens a window to people in China to see Waterloo.

"The University of Waterloo is very famous in China," Zhao said.

One of the interesting questions on her blog was how many government employees in Waterloo get free cars.

"The Chinese government owns quite a few of the cars for the mayor and other people to use," Zhao explained. "Many people aren't happy with that. They feel it's a lot of money."

The answer Halloran gave was that not many people in government get cars. Most use their own personal car.

Zhao thinks Halloran's outreach will attract many more international students and businesses.

Her blog is proving popular, Min says. "It is very popular.

"Actually, the hosting company has asked us to submit a fun story about her, so they can post it on the front page to promote the blog," he said.

To see the blog, visit:  
http://www.weibo.com/cityofwaterloo?source=blog or http://blog.sina.com.cn/cityofwaterloo

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