

Redefining Student Success:

**Moving from competition to a
supportive learning environment**

August 21, 2019



**UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
COMMUNITY SOCIAL WORK TEAM**



The University of Alberta acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 6 territory, and respects the histories, languages , and cultures of First Nation Métis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant community.

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

66.5%

of students reported feeling
overwhelming anxiety

66.8%

of students reported
feeling very lonely



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CYCLE OF ANXIETY

- More students are attending University than ever before
- Creates a pressure to perform at higher levels in order to set themselves apart and access opportunities

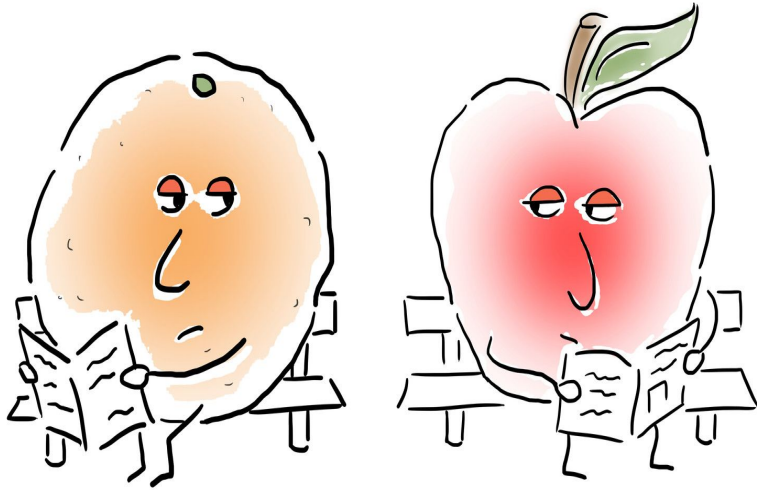


POSITIVE COMPETITION



- Focused on self-improvement
- Motivates us to reach goals
- Encourages performance

SOCIAL COMPARISON



- Social comparison is unavoidable in a University setting
- Seeing that we aren't on top can affect performance and mental health

COMPETITION RESEARCH

U.S. Air Force Cadets

- Observed increase in cadet performance when socializing with high achievers
- Intentionally mixed low achieving cadets into squadrons with a large number of high performers
- Remaining cadets were placed in squadrons together

(Carrell, Sacerdote, & West, 2013)

WHAT HAPPENED?

- A) Under-achieving cadets performed better with the influence of the high performers
- B) Under-achieving cadets scores fell when faced with direct competition from high performers
- C) Middle-of-the-road students suffered from not having the motivation of high-performers
- D) Both B and C



COMPETITION LEADS TO ISOLATION

Competition focuses our attentions on how we stack up against others instead of working with with them.

Students become pitted against each other.



Image credit: unsplash.com

COMPETITION LEADS TO STRESS



Stress and anxiety can erode a person's effectiveness which can impact their academic performance

Image credit: unsplash.com

REFRAMING BEHAVIOUR

Faculty tend to consider the following student behaviors uncivil:

- failing to participate or express interest in the course
- coming to class unprepared
- making demands and unreasonable requests toward the instructor (e.g., extended deadlines, make-up exams, extra credit opportunities)
- disrupting class by arriving late or leaving early

“When the pressure students feel to get good grades, to maintain scholarships and financial aid, and to gain access to post-graduate opportunities **clashes** with faculty members’ attempts to maintain academic standards while promoting learning, the encounters can be heated, uncomfortable, and stressful for all involved” (Gilroy, 2008).



CARE OVER COMPETITION

Students tend to find the following professor behaviours uncivil:


- Presenting lectures at a fast pace with little to no student involvement or interaction
- Acting in an aloof, distant manner toward students, or conveying to students that they are a burden
- Surprising students with unannounced assessments or unanticipated exam questions
- Permitting students to belittle or ridicule classmates

SUPPORTIVE LEARNING

Principles to create an learning environment that encourages student growth:

- Ensuring safety
- Establishing trustworthiness
- Maximizing choice
- Maximizing collaboration
- Prioritizing empowerment

Carello & Butler, 2015



Consistency

Community

Communication

Clarity

Cooperation

Care

Choice



COMMUNICATION

Let students know what to expect

Clarity

- Complete syllabus
 - Explicit guidelines
 - Lay out your own boundaries
- Explain the “why”

Consistency

- Stick to the syllabus
 - If changed, give choice
- Stick to your boundaries
- Provide samples



CHOICE

Participatory decisions encourage commitment and performance



Image credit: unsplash.com

- Help determine class policies
- 1-time extension
- Choose assignment weights
- Rolling due dates

COOPERATION STRENGTHENS COMMUNITY

Student interaction validates shared experiences and goals



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- In-class discussion groups
- Critical debates
- Case studies
- Individual + Group quizzes

CARE

Above all,

Be kind



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RESILIENT COMMUNITY



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Students respond to the environment that they are in.

If we want students to flourish, we need to create an environment that encourages growth

Thanks for your participation!

Questions?

Contact the Community Social Work
Team

Thoughts?

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Comments?

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