



Voice
CAMPUS HEALTH PROJECT

Our Team

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Institute for Healthy Living and
Chronic Disease Prevention

A Transformative Vision...



Health promoting universities and colleges transform the health and sustainability of our current and future societies, strengthen communities and contribute to the well-being of people, places and the planet.

-Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges (2015).

Community-Based Participatory Action Research



VOICE 4: Mental Wellbeing and the Campus Environment

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

What population-level factors within the campus environment affect the mental wellbeing of the UBCO campus community?

How can we address the identified issues?

How can we build on and enhance current assets?



Data Collection Methods

Population of Interest

- Everyone on campus (students, staff, faculty, administrators, campus business people)
- Engage diverse perspectives on campus

Survey

- Open-ended questions
- Demographic questions

Other methods

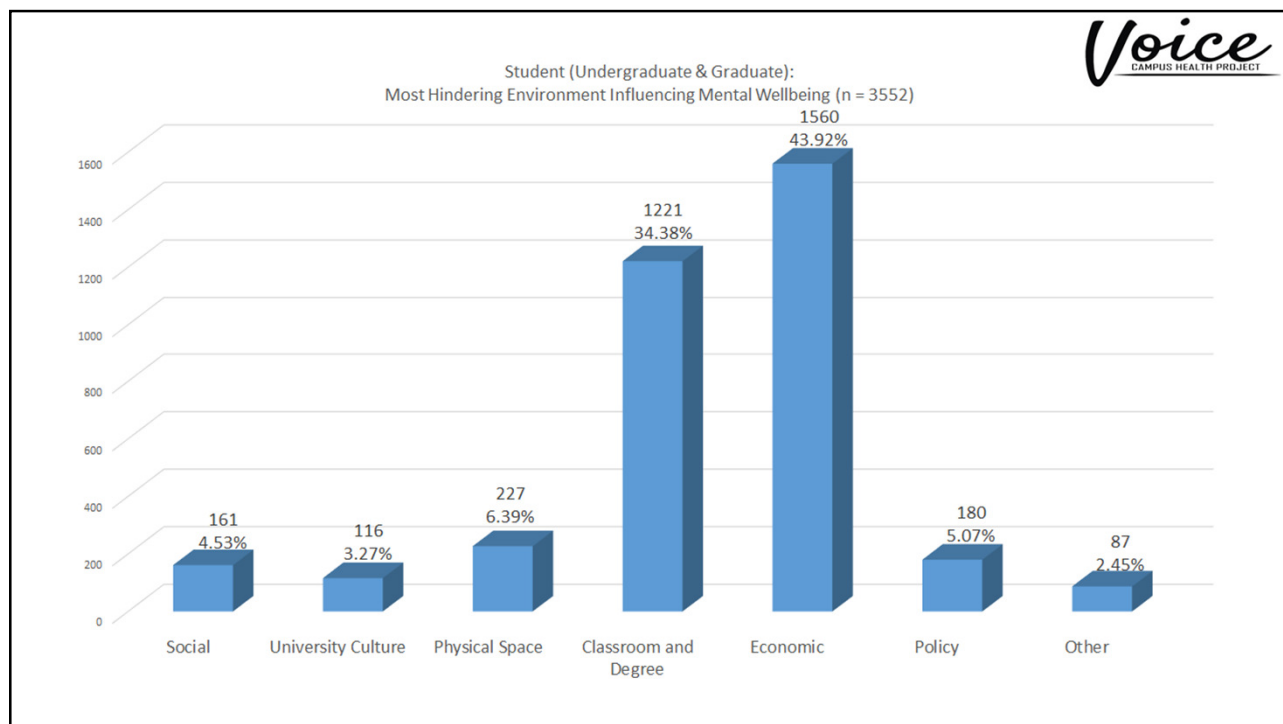
- Interviews & Focus Groups
- PhotoVoice
- Story Capture Booths
- Policy Scan and Analysis



Data collected: November 2016-June 2017

Survey Participants

UBCO Groups	Population Fall 2016	VOICE Sample	Percentage (%)
Undergraduate	7930	3481	44
Graduate	788	122	15
Staff	652	180	28
Faculty	518	77	15
Total	9888	3860	39



Results

Students reported the stress they experienced related to examination scheduling practices and policies:

1. Schedule stressors
2. Financial stressors
3. Exam hardship policy



Schedule stressors

Students mentioned the scheduling of final exams negatively impacts mental wellbeing in more than one way:

- The **reduced or no ability** to plan their exam schedule/workload/study plans
- There are **no study days** between the end of classes and start of the exam period
- Testing **outside of familiar classrooms and class times** (including weekends) can be stressful. Students do not like writing in the gym.



“... Maybe your last class is on the Friday and your exam is on the Monday, and there’s testable material from that Friday’s course on the final, which can be a little daunting.” (Undergraduate student)



“During finals, it can be slightly unrealistic to expect students to have class on the Friday and the final exam on the Monday. Ex: Bio 366 - Final Monday, Dec 5th - last class on the Thursday.” (Undergraduate student)

Financial stressors

Students also mentioned concerns about the economic impacts final exam scheduling forced them to grapple with:

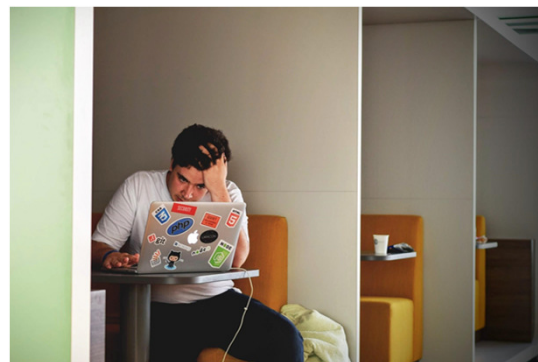
- Inability to work during the final exam period and loss of personal profits attributable to this
- Plane tickets are more expensive the later you book your flights and students are having to wait until the exam schedule is released to find the appropriate flights, making them pay more to get home for the holidays
- Delay in making winter plans with family, sometimes missing out on family vacations.



Exam hardship policy

The '3 in 24 hour Exam Hardship Policy' is not helping our students enough

- Participants indicated that **the policy is not adequately protecting students** from exam hardships due to scheduling
- Students indicated that **multiple final exams** are often **scheduled too close together**
- The hardship policy only prevents **three exams from occurring in 23:59**





"Poor communication between the prof + students leads to conflicting exams + midterms Lack of compassion over time + time management. Academic hardship during exams is weakly enforced (should qualify if I have 2 exams within 24hrs)" (Undergraduate Student)



"Had to take a leave to go see my mom who was very sick. Asked to take my final exam early and was denied then took over 2 months from a standing "deferred" to arrange a time that worked with prof" (Undergraduate Student)



Some stress during the final exam period is inevitable! However, stress caused by scheduling alone should be **minimized as much as possible** to support student wellbeing.

VOICE 4: Action phase - stakeholder interviews

- Began June 2018 by VOICE student co-researchers
- Objective: to better understand the issues surrounding exam scheduling practices and policies
- To date, we have had **11 interviews** with **16 stakeholders** including faculty, staff, & administrators



Empathy for students

- Financial impact
 - Late flight bookings
 - May have to pay more rent for housing
 - Might have less time for employment
- Workload
 - Exams plus assignments
- Exam schedule
 - Too close to last day of classes
 - Too many exams too close together
 - Examination hardship policy does not effectively support students





“Although they were strong group of students, when you have 3 exams in 2 days, the average drops so much.” (Stakeholder)

“Last year was very bad for scheduling... In 6 days they had 5 exams – this is humanly impossible” (Stakeholder)

Policies

- Examination hardship
 - Not adequately protecting or supporting students
- Requirement for first and second years to write a final
 - Many believe this practice is unnecessary
 - Allowing the option for other evaluation methods would provide faculty more options to evaluate students:
 - Application assignments
 - Self-directed studies
 - Community participation assignments
 - Group projects, including flipped-classroom techniques
- Number of exam seatings per day
 - Many okay with increasing number of seatings and reducing exam times from 3 hours
 - Some did express concern over adapting exams to fit with the allotted time
 - UBC Vancouver has 2.5-hour exams, which equates to four exam seatings per day
 - A change to four seatings per day may enable implementation of a better exam hardship policy
 - If implemented at UBCO, the number of possible seatings in an exam room would increase from **48 to 64** during the exam period



What does a better hardship policy look like?



"I would prefer 2.5 hour exams. 2 hours is easy, even 1 hour I would feel that I have enough time to evaluate students." (Stakeholder)

"The exam hardship policy is poorly written because it doesn't recognize the reality that students can have back to back exams in adjacent time blocks. It should be changed to something closer to 36 hours." (Stakeholder)



Exam schedule process concerns



- Enrollment Services bound by current policies
- Faculty requests impact scheduling and can be a challenge
 - Not all faculty respond to Enrollment Services emails in a timely manner, delaying process
- Room availability limits scheduling options (size and number of rooms)
 - Stakeholders have noted plenty of rooms that sat empty instead of being used for exams
 - Requests for exams using computers labs growing and harder to accommodate
- Double seating requests exacerbate space limitations
 - Used to help prevent cheating, but often requires a larger space
 - Many faculty are okay without double seating
 - Still some faculty requesting double seating
- Common exams add more complexity to schedule
 - Often held in the gym, students find this unfavourable
- Timing is a concern for most
 - Schedule released too late in semester
 - Also impacts faculty planning
 - Exams later in exam period leave faculty with very short deadlines for marking

Recommendations

1. Determine a project lead or host.
2. UBCO work towards a student centered approach to exam scheduling practices and policies:
 - Make schedule available at registration or earlier in semester
 - Increase number of seatings per day within the current exam period of 14 days
 - Reduce examination time slots to 2 or 2.5 hours
 - Hold exams in the same room they take the course
 - Must have flexibility with common exams
 - Review policy requiring 1 and 2 year students to write a final
 - Review the Exam Hardship Policy
3. Campus Health is ready to assist. How may we help support this process of change?



Conclusion

Our campus community members want change. Other higher education institutions use different models with success.

A student-centered approach is often also supportive of faculty.

VOICE: For action, innovation and research
on campus wellbeing

