

Tea, a drink with de-stress discussion
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UOIT Health Sciences put on their first De-Stress Day to give students a place to relax, drink some tea, and learn different coping strategies to help them through exam season and past graduation. Posters with inspirational messages lined the tables' setup with an array of board games, popcorn and a stress mural. The unique mural contained traces of students' hands with examples of what stresses them out written inside.

"There's a lot of people, especially at this time of year, that are going through a lot of stresses with exams and we just wanted to promote relaxation. We are promoting mental health awareness but more than that we're just making it a fun day for students," said Julianne Baarbe, one of the student organizers.

A guest panel of four speakers gathered with students for TeaTalk to discuss stress and different ways for students to cope with daily-life stressors. The panel was arranged like a tea party, intended to provide students and speakers with a more comfortable atmosphere, allowing discussion to flow.

Sophia Bishop is a main organizer for the event. "This event is about stress and it's a fantastic opportunity for us to actually learn how to recognize our stresses and what we can do about them," she said. "In TeaTalk we will be able to discuss the messages that you actually receive and to engage and interact in discussion."

Olivia Petrie, assistant vice-president of Student Life, said performance in academic studies is tied to the state of a student's mental health. This was mirrored in what some students wrote on the mural, with lack of money, too many assignments, and exams being among the top stressors.

According to a poll presented by Dr. Jacinth Tracey, 42 per cent of the students polled said academic and/or other time management problems were their main cause of stress. Some other factors included financial problems, sleep deprivation and future plans following graduation.

UOIT's associate professor, Wendy Stanyon, spoke about mindfulness and explained it includes the importance of paying attention, being in the moment, acting on purpose, and conducting yourself in a particular way in a non-judgmental fashion.

"Most of us live our lives pretty well on automatic-pilot," she said. "We're very rarely living right here, right now. We're in the future or we're in the past and it's some of that that causes our stress. So by learning to focus our attention in the here-and-now and what's happening, the ultimate outcomes are often the better ability to handle stress and we feel more empowered."

Jarek Baginski, student case manager with UOIT's Student Mental Health Services, engaged the students in conversation about the different programs offered to them and encouraged them to fight the stigmas. He told them what is offered through the service along with where they could go to make an appointment and where they could find extra information and help.

Stanyon challenged the audience to use the information being given to them by quoting executive coach, business consultant and marketing psychologist, Martin Shervington: "You can't stop the waves of life but you can learn how to surf."