

Student Scenarios

Practical Tool



Part of the Holistic Mental Health Approaches Toolkit.

Introduction

About the Tools and Toolkits

These tools and toolkits are hosted by **Healthy Campus Alberta**, a provincial community of practice committed to cultivating caring campus communities in Alberta. Originally developed by **Alberta Campus Mental Health Innovation** (an initiative carried out by the **Alberta Students Executive Council**), the tools and toolkits are learning-focused, living documents that serve to support our community of practice.

About the Holistic Mental Health Approaches Toolkit

This toolkit is an introduction to systemic and comprehensive approaches to a mentally healthy campus and community strategy. It has been developed to support the policy-mandated collaboration of the Alberta post-secondary student mental health strategy. Achieving the intended outcomes of this strategy requires post-secondary institutions, student leaders, healthcare organizations and community support agencies to work closely together to align services and supports, and navigate student transitions. This requires common understanding of terms and diverse worldviews, shared frameworks, and tools. This toolkit can be used to support purposeful, theory-based approaches for designing and implementing health promoting and health-enabling environments strategies.

About Student Scenarios

The **Student Scenarios** tool provides some tools for considering the possible diversity of student experiences, and can be used for the range of strategies involved in a comprehensive strategy (i.e. one that aims to cover both health promotion and illness or disorder diagnosis, treatment, and recovery-oriented services).

Who could use this tool?

- Individual services, programs, and organizations
- Regional hubs;
- Funders and government.

What purposes could this tool serve?

- Learning about the student experience and ways to center the student experience in mental health strategies;
- Offering helpful tools to be used in everyday practice by staff, and faculty.

Scenarios

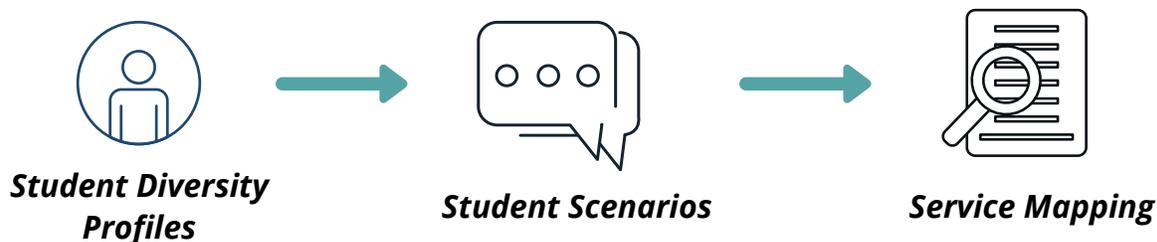
A student's mental health is personal and unique, so a student body will have many different paths. Scenarios help stress test or reality check programs and services. Student Mental Health Scenarios are a tool to work within the reality that each student's journey is personal and unique. However, a post-secondary institution or community agency needs a core approach in order to plan and manage services. One way to bridge this dual requirement is to approach it with a mass customization approach. This means establishing a core approach based on the appropriate underlying worldview – which can then be adapted by program designers and front-line staff to match the specific circumstances they are working with. Management and policy architecture will have been developed with the same worldview in order to support this adaptation by the front-line professionals and staff.

Scenarios provide a way to achieve this dual requirement – to 'road test' potential program design and management processes, as well as the required characteristics of policy to support BOTH adaptation at the front line to match individual clients' realities, AND congruence with the desired overall outcomes at the societal level.

How to Use this Tool

Using the worksheet on the next page, think of the major life events that students may experience on your campus, and the support available to them. Then, think of some of the mental health journeys of the "typical" student on your campus. Use the profiles you created in the Student Diversity Profiles activity think of possible scenarios.

The starter set of scenarios are inspired by stories but are not a single person's story. They may help with imagining student scenarios on your campus.



This can be an individual exercise or completed as a team activity.

Student Scenario Worksheet - Part 1

What are some daily stressors that students might experience?

e.g., receiving a low grade

What are some major life events that students might experience?

e.g., breakup with a significant other

How might students cope with daily stressors or major life events?

e.g., seeking counselling, using substances

What are some sources of support for students who are in distress?

e.g., family members, campus wellness centre

Student Scenario Worksheet - Part 2

Student Profile - fill this in from the Student Diversity Profile Worksheet

Age & Demographics

Program & Campus

Living Conditions

Life Goals

Life Stressors

Life Strengths

Family Status

Work & Leisure Activities

Student Scenario

What daily stressors and major life events did this student experience?

How did they cope? Who and what were the major sources of support?

Student Scenarios Starter Set



Max

This scenario is inspired by students' stories but is not a single person's story.

Max had a rough start – challenges in school made it rough as his parents were divorced and he couldn't rely much on his family for positive support or role modelling. Mostly he stayed out of their way rather than watching them fight. Fortunately his athletic skills made him someone that others wanted to hang out with and he was smart enough to do reasonably well in school without much effort.

He had met who he thought was the love of his life in high school and they married soon after graduation – though looking back he realizes that it was probably his way to fill the gap of family loss and disconnection. He'd gotten a job in the oil patch and made good money. Him and his wife would drink and party with their friends. While the early years were great, they started to realize they had little in common. They started to fight most of the time he was home. He also found living in the camps to be lonely.

Then the oil industry collapsed, he lost his job and decided he needed to go back to school and get a job in another field. He had always been interested in IT and impulsively enrolled in a 2-year program in a polytechnic. He had some savings but it was clear that money was going to be tight for awhile. This was when his wife left him.

Although it had its challenges, Max felt he had a good life, certainly compared to lots of his family, and as long as he had lots of energy and felt his body was strong he was certain he could manage anything. A series of challenges – death of a family member, another with a terminal cancer diagnosis and a good friend moving away make it all too much. He begins to depend on alcohol and prescription drugs to make it through the day.

An intervention, treatment and an ongoing recovery program helped rebuild a life without drugs and able to look at how traumas of his childhood were influencing his adult life.

Max started volunteering in a program that provides athletic equipment to underprivileged children. Finding meaningful connections with a new community of friends and peers is also helping him to make different choices.

Max graduates post-secondary with much more capacity than he started. He's looking ahead to the future with the idea that he can make it.

Student Scenarios Starter Set



Mary

This scenario is inspired by students' stories but is not a single person's story.

In high school, Mary had a very stressful time in which her aunt was diagnosed with cancer, but after the initial scare, a treatment plan with positive prognosis helped settle everyone down. Preparation for first year of university was a challenging – she worried about how to cover financial costs if she needed to live away from home. She shared ideas and asked questions of her Facebook friends and talked to others about how they'd found their first year of college.

She chose a school in another country – in a province called Alberta. She was full of excitement about moving to a new country! The transition was difficult. She found drinking with her friends on Friday night helped her relax at the end of the week. She was anxious about grades and found the work-load of her classes harder to manage than she'd expected. Fortunately, she can keep some of her routines – especially regular meals. Then her father lost his job and she was under pressure to send money home.

In second year, Mary was sexually assaulted by someone who was a part of her social circle. Her friends started to avoid her because they're not sure how to interact with her. She started to spend more time alone and her grades start to slip. Then she failed her exams and, as a result, her scholarships fell through.

Mary found a counsellor off-campus, who helped her make sense of the crisis. She started to be able to focus more on her grades, and learned coping strategies that work for her. She also found more supportive friends. Mary finally felt able to tell her family about her sexual assault.

Mary started to run every day, sees a counsellor regularly, and gradually lowers the amount she uses alcohol as self-medication. A couple of bad dates created smaller crises but she worked through them with her counsellor's support. Mary graduated with a close-knit circle of friends who have supported each other throughout the years. She had a bit of trouble finding a job in her field of study, but when she did, she moved into a new apartment that's close to her network of friends.

Student Scenarios Starter Set



Ying

This scenario is inspired by students' stories but is not a single person's story.

Ying is 22 years old and a member of a large extended family, though she lives on her own now, and is working as a line cook. Her grandfather emigrated to Canada as a boy. His wife, Ying's grandmother, died when Ying was young, but her aunts and uncles tell vivid stories about her cooking and house-making. Ying likes to keep balance in her life – she also loves to cook, and likes to spend her weekend with food preparation for the week's meals. Her relationships and cultural practices are important to her.

Ying has been practicing mindfulness since high school. From the outside, Ying's life looks like it's very busy and intense. She enrolled in a demanding academic program. But, there's always someone in the extended family to support her when she needs it.

She created a routine for studying and was able to juggle many priorities while staying above the average in her classes. She had a boyfriend who was supportive too. She had a bit of trouble sleeping sometimes, but mostly things work pretty well.

Ying was elected to the Students' Association, and that added a lot of unexpected surprises and demands. She found it harder to meditate and stopped cooking for herself. Zoning out with Netflix in the evenings was more and more regular. She broke up with her boyfriend – he was just adding more and more demands.

Then her grandfather got sick and she stepped in to help take care of him. She fails her first midterm. That woke her up. Ying thought back to what worked for her in high-school and remembered the value of mindfulness. She started yoga and reached out to a peer supporter, who encouraged her to see the campus counsellor. She learned some time management and healthy coping skills with the counsellor.

Ying downsized her schedule and gradually regained some of her routines. Upon graduation, Ying started to look for a job in her field, feeling pretty confident that she could manage the stresses of relocation and a new job. Now, she has a new boyfriend who is great at making her laugh. She is much better at managing the balance of personal and family commitments and looks forward to the future with hope and excitement.