**Speaking Your Language**

**Counsellor and Linguistic Database**

**Summary**

**October 2014**

**Background**

The Counsellor and Linguistic database survey was developed in order to determine cultural and linguistic capacity across the partnership universities, as well as best practices and training needs in regard to cultural competency.

The survey was made available to counsellors and mental health clinicians (excluding health promotion, nurses and physicians) from June 9, 2014 until October 17, 2014. After the Project Co-ordinator met personally with the directors of Counselling (or comparable position) at each university, an introductory email and survey link was provided to the directors for them to forward to their staff. Approximately two follow-up reminder emails were provided. In addition, the Project Co-ordinator visited Ryerson’s counselling team meeting to encourage participation. In total, there were 13 responses across 4 campuses (OCAD U, Ryerson University, University of Toronto, and University of Toronto Mississauga). It is unknown how many people the survey was distributed to, but estimated there are approximately 60 counsellors across the five campuses.

Counsellors were informed that “data collected during this study will be stored in a secure location at Ryerson University. Your name, role, department, culture, languages, and areas of focus will be part of a database available internally to Ryerson, U of T, and OCADU, and used to plan group counselling sessions, coordinated by the project coordinator in consultation with you, your manager or director. You will have the option to have your information shared in a wider, online database of community resources to be posted on <http://campusmentalhealth.ca/>. Your responses regarding best practices and training needs will be used anonymously to develop training resources.”

Detailed reports and individual interests are located in the shared MHIF/Database folder.

**Linguistic Diversity**

Of the 13 responses, there was little linguistic diversity. One counsellor at Ryerson is willing to counsel, individually or in groups, in French and Arabic; another, also at Ryerson, in Punjabi.

**Cultural Diversity**

Most counsellors identified as being Canadian. One identified as Aboriginal, two as Jewish, one as Arab/Middle Eastern/Persian, and one as Indian.

**Areas of interest, focus, or activities for future groups**

5 Counsellors responded with a variety of interests. Three counsellors (all from Ryerson) indicated interest in leading groups discussing issues relating to students new to Canada, such as transitional, adjustment, settlement issues.

**What specific counselling practices or clinical interventions work well for international students and new Canadians?**

*Individuality and Culturally Transparent*

Counsellor responses emphasized this group is extremely diverse, even within cultural groups, and need to be treated as “individuals with unique lived experiences and needs,” and a client-centred approach in terms of self-knowledge, cultural experise and needs. They spoke to allowing individual lead the conversation, and “to explore ways that cultural phenomena (as internalized by the student) interact with their presenting issues.” Several counsellors also suggested openly discussing culture, in terms of client understanding and treatment techniques, “explicitly articulating when such techniques arise from a Western philosophy or approach that they represent one way of many in approaching a problem.” “It is important to acknowledge cultural differences in an effort to elicit feedback from students regarding their unique understandings of counseling/healing, as their ideas will benefit the adaptation of clinical interventions to their particular understandings/beliefs.“ Another suggested to make cultural referrals where appropriate.

*Normalize Issues and Help Seeking Behaviour*

Respondents also encouraged normalizing their transitional challenges, as well as support-seeking behaviour. Openly address stigma, and to also address intergenerational issues.

*Narrative*

One counsellor suggested creating opportunities for student to share their stories, such as of their migration, and to be the expert on their particular family/cultural context.

*Other approaches:*

* workshops
* groups through counselling
* support groups
* creating space for discussion
* mentors
* social supports
* study groups through other offices on campus
* non-traditional
* non-medicalized
* non-pathologizing
* community-oriented
* practical
* empowerment-based approaches

**What specific topics or activities work well with international students and new Canadians?**

*Acculturation and Navigation*

* Strategies to navigate new culture and system
* Practical support
* Providing information of services and supports
* Orientation to the new country
* Adjustment, validating challenges, especially grief if they have left significant others behind

*Social*

* Connecting them to other students, from Canadian culture and original culture
* Engagement in co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities
* Relationships/boundaries

*Culture and Transition*

* Opportunity to incorporate home country's cultural values, practices and beliefs with new realities/demands
* Family/cultural issues

*Personal*

* Stress
* Expectations self/others/institution
* Trauma
* Confidence

**What training or information do you need, if any, to work better with multi-cultural or international students?**

While some counsellors felt they were well-prepared to work with multi-cultural students, or used supervision as an opportunity to work through challenges, several identified a number of needs, including:

*Student Voice*

* Access to results of what International students are saying they need
* International Students conference that provides an opportunity for discussion of current issues facing this population.

*Multi-Cultural Diversity Training and Consultations*

* Multicultural/ Diversity Conferences (like OISE's) with focus on new research and development of multicultural and diversity issues related to counselling
* Best practice models
* Diversity training: understanding of power and privilege; anti-oppression training
* Frames of reference and ethical considerations for one's work with individuals of varying ethnocultural backgrounds, and varying acculturation levels
* Various models and ways of working (e.g. informed by 'Western' philosophies, medical model, spiritual philosophies, 'Eastern' philosophies
* Access to experts to answer questions to help practitioners educate themselves
* Access to multidisciplinary teams (linguistically diverse counsellors)

*Resources and Information*

* Information on community resources and referrals
* Referrals to support students with practical issues related to visas, immigration processes, housing support, etc.
* Specific challenges or ineligibilities experienced by international students at Ryerson, as well as resources or programs available to them
* Training on sociocultural or political issues facing students of various cultural groups
* Greater understanding of the contextual factors influencing the academic and counselling concerns of students of different cultural backgrounds

**Conclusion**

Although not all counsellors participated in the database, rich data was provided in terms of student support and training needs required. The database reflected low cultural and linguistic diversity, which, anecdotally, seems representative for counsellors across the institutions. Some counsellors expressed concern with how the data would be used and stored, and only approximately one quarter indicated that they would like to be listed as a resource on a provincial database. Counsellors also expressed concern with sustainability, and participating given the project duration is less than one year. Training feedback will be used to develop professional development opportunities, and the symposium.