

Interview with Joanne

Joanne Roston is an MSW, RSW Embedded Personal Counsellor at Queen's University in the faculty of Engineering & Applied Science

The Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health spoke with Joanne about her unique role in the faculty of Engineering & Applied Science

What are some of the strengths of this model of being embedded within a faculty?

I think that a definite strength is being able to understand the culture around a specific faculty or discipline. Engineers seem to really like looking at issues and ways to solve problems that have a middle, beginning and an end. Understanding that and understanding how students think is very helpful for me to direct programming using their (faculty and students) strengths.

Essentially all therapeutic interventions can be tailored and met where they are more directly.

How are you learning more about this specific faculty?

I get to meet with all of the first year advisors to understand their needs, their approaches and their work.

One great 'embedded' piece that I am working on that will help me learn about both engineering faculty and engineering students is that in September I'm going to audit a mandatory first year course. This course seems to be a challenging course for first year students. I'm going to observe the dynamics of the course, how groups are formed and which students have trouble and why. This will help me to offer specific interventions to faculty and students.

What were some of the first steps you took in your role as an 'embedded' counsellor?

Creating partnerships with faculty is key. I sent out feeler phone calls to all the disciplines within the faculty. I arranged to meet with as many teams and first year advisors as I could.

Meeting and connecting with Admin Assistants is also very important – as they often have strong relationships with both students and faculty members.

I do a lot of self-promotion and outreach. The faculty are really responding to my presence and will even let me know if they are concerned about their peers/other faculty. The faculty here also really wants their students to succeed and are open to anything that supports them in doing so.

There are a lot of stereotypes around engineers and engineering streams in post-secondary i.e. large cases of binge-drinking, not willing to seek mental health supports or services. Are these accurate?

Hard drinking is definitely part of the culture. But I think it's less than people would think. The perception of how much engineers drink is greater than the reality.

I see students and faculty with a wide array of concerns. A lot of adjustment issues. I am seeing everything from suicidal ideation to sexuality identity/orientation issues to early psychosis indicators.

What would you say to a counsellor who may be looking to use this embedded approach in their post-secondary institution?

Find an ally within the specific faculty – that matters a lot! It will also help you navigate the nuances of their world.

Also certain modalities or approaches to mental health may work better for certain faculties or programs. At Queen's University it seems to work well having a trained social worker in engineering, a counsellor with an education background for the school of education and a trained clinical psychologist for the graduate studies programs. These different approaches are working well.