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# SPEAKING YOUR LANGUAGE

**SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL  
STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH**

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# Acknowledgements

Government of Ontario

Centre for Innovation in  
Campus Mental Health

Ryerson University, OCAD  
University and University of  
Toronto



# Learning Outcomes

1. Recognize **language** international students use to talk about mental health
2. Recognize international student **key challenges** and **perceptions** towards mental health
3. Discuss **opportunities and challenges** in culturally/linguistically-specific and counselling-centered approaches



Homesick

Culture shock

Language barriers

Financial stress

Food changes

Getting Sick

Social or cultural isolation

Cultural misunderstandings

Educational system adjustments

Staff/faculty unaware

Discrimination

No Canadian friends

Housing

(Bektas, 2008)





Depressed 66%

Overwhelmed 75%

Stressed 81%

(Speaking Your Language Survey)

2X

Crisis appointments

Psychiatric hospitalizations

Suicidal ideation

(Education Advisory Board)

The definition, cause,  
prevention, and treatment  
of mental health, is  
culturally defined





It's not a mental health issue,  
**It's my life**



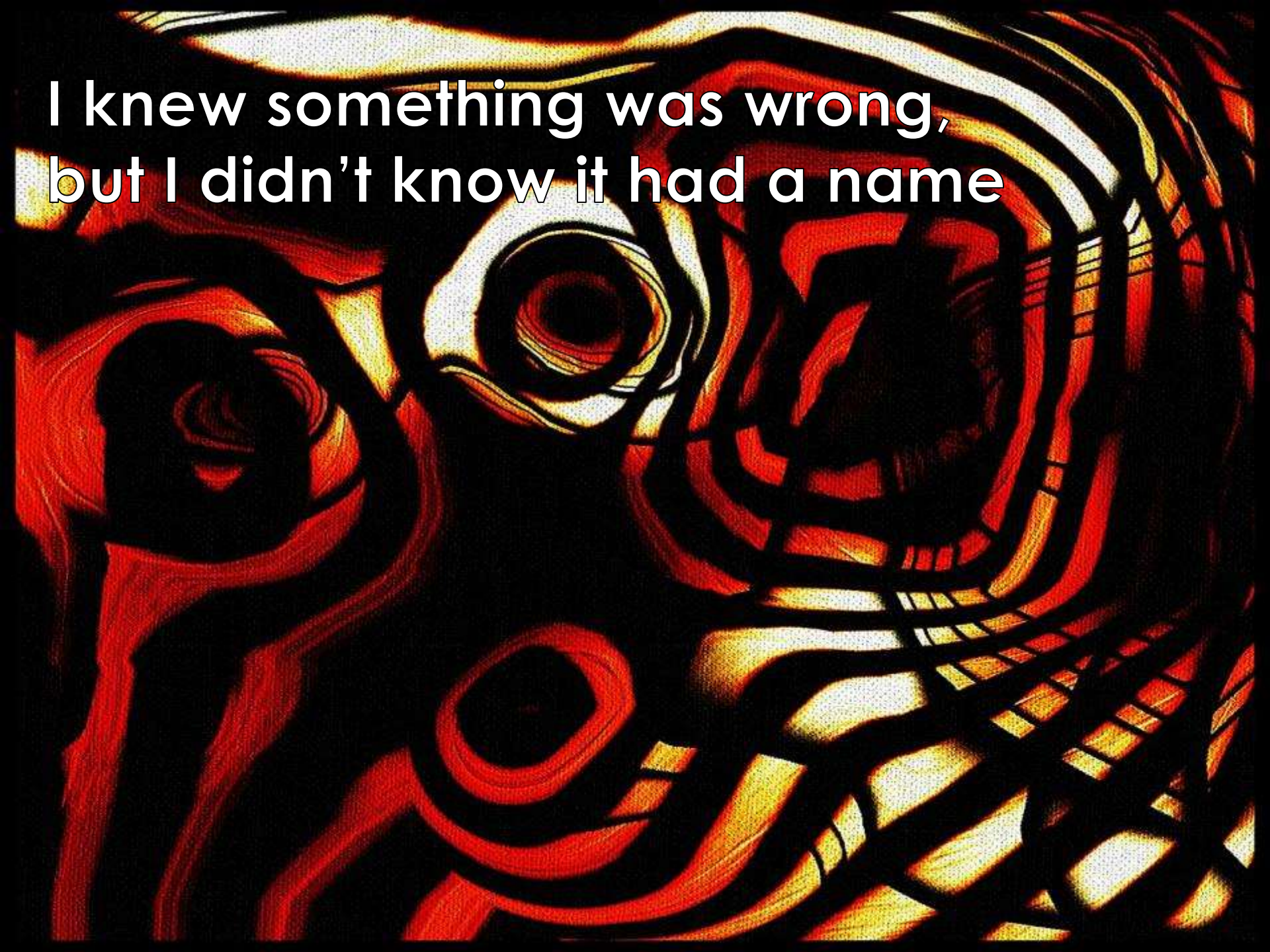
In my country there are two categories of mental health

insane

fine



I knew something was wrong,  
but I didn't know it had a name





Open, continuous intake  
through Counselling centre

Curriculum for students new to  
Canada

Concerns about information  
“getting back home”

Confidentiality forms





Benefits

Hope

Company

Information sharing

Social opportunities

(Dipeolu, 2007)



## Barriers

Therapeutic vs social

Ethical boundaries

Therapist client relationship

Priority is academics

Confidentiality forms

Audio taping

(Dipeolu, 2007)



# Literature Suggestions

- Involve counsellors at events
- Design group support as skills workshops or discussion groups
- Market counselling services through videos or group tours
- Create testimonials

# Literature Suggestions

- Hold information sessions later in term
- Integrate with domestic students
- Train peer mentors to support mental health
- Extend an invitation



*You're invited!*

*Are you ...*

- lost, lonely, and homesick?
- feeling sick with headaches or stomach aches?
- not sleeping well?
- having a hard time making friends?
- confused about academic integrity?
- overwhelmed by your workload?
- stressed, unhappy, or thinking too much?
- worried that you are in the wrong program?
- ready for winter?
- wondering if you made the wrong choice by coming here?

ready to **talk to a real person** and not a postcard

\_\_\_\_\_, we invite you  
to visit your **International Student Advisors**  
and your **Campus Counselling Center!**



# International Student Services

- Cultural competency training
- Explain health insurance
- Make referrals to counselling
  - Explain





# International Student Services

- Departmental collaboration
- Normalize conversations
- Use peer mentors!

# Students Suggested

They lead

Intentionally created supportive communities

Activity based

Informal, but with structure to encourage “real” conversations

Professionals available

Consistent relationships

# Other Topics

## **Academic Culture**

Academic Integrity

Communications

- class
- professors
- supervisors

## **Life Administration Skills**

Finances

Immigration regulations

## **Health**

Resources

Food

Stress eating

Body image

Exercise

# Students wanted:

Information  
for Parents

Web chat  
Late night  
First language

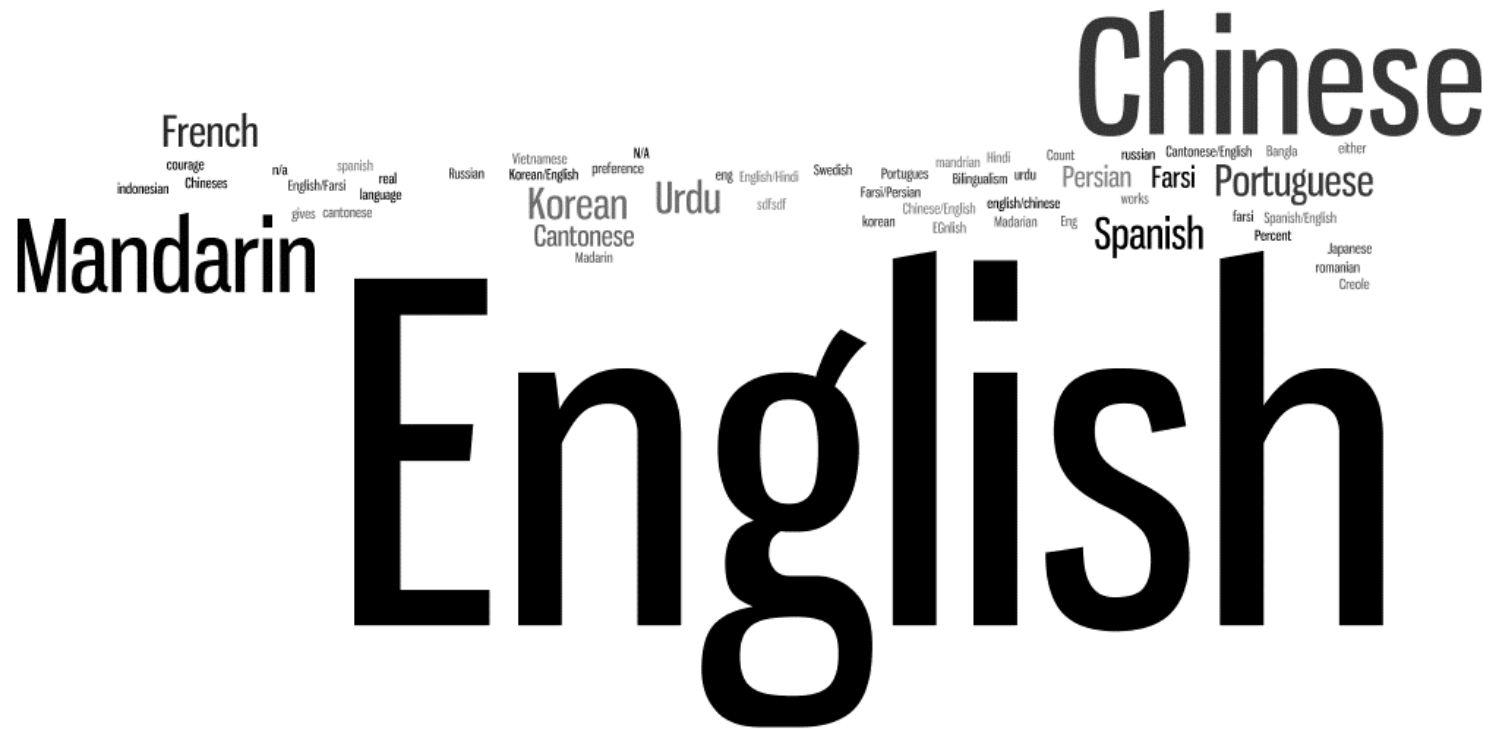
Staff  
Cultural  
Competency

To help  
each other

Peer Mentor crisis  
intervention and  
referrals



# Preferred counselling language



(Speaking Your Language Survey)

留学生身心健康小组

为你而来

## 国外是 好山好水好寂寞?

寒冬里请你喝杯热茶, 咱们来谈谈心

Let the dynamic interactions with peers, professionals and yourself empower your mind and heart. Topics may cover but are not limited to:

- Problems with language/cultural barriers that you may have in a new country/environment;
- Ways you can engage yourself to fit in with a new social system
- How to relax when you feel stressed, busy, competitive or lonely;
- Building healthy and intimate relationships; and more ... ..

Date: Monday January 19 - March 16  
Time 4:00 - 6:00 p.m.  
Location: Ryerson University Campus  
Cost: Free!

详情欢迎联络 Ingrid:

416-493-4242 ext. 3234 或 [isun@hongfook.ca](mailto:isun@hongfook.ca)

Presented by the Speaking Your Language Project among:



Highly recommended

Leadership building

Stress management

# SPEAKING YOUR LANGUAGE SYMPOSIUM!

## — x — *Day's Program*

<b>8:00 - 9:00</b>	Registration & Continental Breakfast
<b>9:00 - 9:30</b>	Aboriginal Reflections and Opening Remarks <i>Joanne Dallaire and Dr. Mohamed Lachemi</i>
<b>9:30 - 10:00</b>	Plenary Session: What did we learn?
<b>10:00 - 10:20</b>	Mental Health Break
<b>10:20 - 11:20</b>	The Student Experience: International Student Panel Discussion
<b>11:20 - 12:00</b>	Keynote <i>Jyotsna Saraf-Utterlinden</i>
<b>12:00 - 1:00</b>	Lunch
<b>1:00 - 2:00</b>	Building Alliance: Counsellor and International Advisor Panel Discussion
<b>2:00 - 2:30</b>	Mental Health Break
<b>2:30 - 3:30</b>	4 Ideas in 60 Minutes
<b>3:30 - 3:50</b>	Aboriginal Closing <i>Joanne Dallaire</i>
<b>3:50 - 4:30</b>	<b>Concurrent Sessions</b> 1. Departmental Collaboration (UofT) 2. Departmental Collaboration (Ryerson) 3. Sun Life UHIP Presentation 4. Guard.me Presentation
<b>5:00 - 7:00</b>	Guard.me Reception

Internat'l  
Peers

Trained  
peers

Informal

Academics



Domestic  
students

Staff  
invited

Structured

Life



Time

Legal  
liability

Training

Fun



Partnerships

MOU

(Memorandum  
Of  
Understanding)

Support

Fun

# Contacts

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of International Student Services

Ryerson University

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# References

Vigor, J. (2015), *Speaking Your Language: Promoting Mental Health Awareness and Support for International Students* University of Toronto, Ryerson University and OCAD University Partnership. Toronto, ON: Author

Education Advisory Board

# Discussion

Groups of 4.

Approaches:

- Language-specific group counseling
  - Drop-in themed discussion group
  - Mental health promotion campaign
1. Who could be involved (offices, staff, other)? What roles would they play? What strengths/assets would they bring to the project?
  2. What challenges might you anticipate (in planning, implementing, evaluating, etc.)?