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# PARTNERING TO PROVIDE AN ENRICHING EXPERIENCE FOR ONTARIO'S STUDENTS

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As we face the uncertainties brought about by COVID-19, Ontario's universities continue to support students – the province's talented workforce. Universities are committed to ensuring new and returning students can continue to access a high quality postsecondary education that will not only prepare them for a career, but also provide them with the life-long skills they need to be adaptable in a rapidly changing world.

Our institutions are working swiftly and flexibly to adapt and develop programming that integrates the initiatives that are vital to a student's academic success, such as virtual labs, practicums, work-integrated learning and seminars, as well as the social and cultural activities that are critical to the university experience that students value.

Below are just a few examples of how universities are pivoting course models, student supports and activities in order to ensure students can continue to access high quality programs, services and experiences.



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## ● Adapting course models to help students thrive

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- To help students reach their academic goals for the 2020 spring/summer term, **Algoma University** swiftly built a robust online learning experience with interactive models. The university proactively digitized 100 relevant, accessible courses, as well as developed new courses, including the unique Science of COVID course.
- Eighty-six per cent of students find work-integrated learning opportunities result in an easier transition from school to a successful career. To ensure students receive these valuable experiences, **Carleton University** is providing students interested in teaching innovation and curriculum design with the opportunity to work with instructors as they prepare their online courses for the fall term.



- Students are facing a unique set of challenges during the pandemic. In an effort to support them as they transition to remote education, **OCAD University** has launched a coordinated and accelerated strategy to help address some of these barriers, such as Internet connectivity, financial hardship and, in the case of international students, different time zones.
- In an effort to increase access to leading research in a time of crisis and provide students with the unprecedented opportunity to learn from experts researching COVID-19, the **University of Ottawa** has developed courses that explore how the challenges in this time of disruption are influencing leaders and society as a whole.



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## ● Virtual resources to support student success

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- To help students adjust to a new technology enhanced learning environment, **Ontario Tech University** has adapted their peer tutor program, offering undergraduate students the opportunity to work one-on-one, or in groups, with a trained peer tutor. This program is tailored to the individual's needs to give them the added resources, connection and support they need.
- Some students need extra support to reach academic success. **Queen's University** is offering a variety of online resources to support students as they transition to technology enhanced learning, including a guide for distance students and a consultation program for personalized assistance with writing and academic skills.



- Mentorship and meaningful social connections are key contributors to academic success, particularly when students are learning from home. Through a network of student volunteers and online meetings, **Trent University** has adapted its Academic Mentoring Program to ensure continuity of support and help students achieve their academic goals.

- In order to support international students with academic planning as they prepare for the fall term, advisors at the International & Exchange Student Centre at **Western University** are providing up-to-date information about housing, study permits, financial supports, travel, quarantine guidelines and more.

### ● Ensuring access to mental health and wellness supports

- Students who might be experiencing isolation, stress and anxiety can find support through the **University of Waterloo's** Empower Me - a joint partnership by the Waterloo Student Association and StudentCare. Empower Me offers mental health resources that are customized for students and includes a new student assistance program for students and their families.

- To help students navigate the emotional impacts of COVID-19, such as increased social isolation, the **University of Windsor** is providing mental health and wellness resources through its Wellbeing Portal. The portal includes information for students to better understand why they might be experiencing feelings of stress and anxiety, and how to cope with these emotions.

- Ensuring students continue to have access to mental health services and academic supports that are timely, effective and flexible is critical, particularly during the pandemic. **York University** is offering easy access to virtual student counselling and development services through a confidential telephone or video platform.

### ● Enriching social, cultural and community experiences

- A rich social, cultural and community experience is a key part of university life. As a way to encourage cultural connection while physical spaces are closed during COVID-19, **Brock University's** Aboriginal Student Services is ensuring students remain connected through social media posts, interactive crafts and online Elder visits.

- When students struggle with food insecurity, it can impact their health, grades and even graduation rates. To help, the **University of Guelph** is ensuring its students have access to affordable food and free food bank services, delivering food hampers to students still living in residence and donating to local food banks.

- Conferences, workshops and networking events are an important part of a student's learning experience. To help students find new ways to showcase their undergraduate research during COVID-19, **Nipissing University** adapted their Undergraduate Research Conference, allowing students to share their work with the broader research community online.

- To ensure students continue to connect with their peers during COVID-19, **Ryerson University's** student life and career services moved their support programs online. The services are creating even more online touch points and exploring new ways to virtually connect with students through initiatives such as online social gatherings and daily virtual check-ins.

- Incoming first-year students look forward to the social connections they make when they begin their university education. **Wilfrid Laurier University** is offering a virtual first-year orientation program that includes virtual orientation events, a welcome party and live course registration support. The resources are designed to foster academic success and keep students engaged up to, and beyond, their first day of class.

### ● Financial supports for students in need

- Community support can be vital during times of crisis, especially for students who don't have strong networks or reliable income to see them through. In response, **Lakehead University** created a Student Relief Fund to provide immediate relief for students who are facing challenges with their living and food expenses due to recent job loss or reduced earnings.

- Students are better able to focus on their academic success when their basic living needs are met. Whether the challenge is securing a reliable home Internet connection or finding alternative housing and affordable food, **Laurentian University** has established a Student Emergency Support Fund to help students in need of financial support during this challenging time.

- Financial barriers can negatively impact student success. To help students who are facing financial hardship during COVID-19, **McMaster University** created a student relief fund, providing immediate financial assistance to students who qualify for support. Through one-on-one support, advisors assess each student's unique circumstance and offer financial aid advice.

- In order to support students who may be experiencing financial challenges during COVID-19, **University of Toronto** created a student emergency bursary fund for those who need it most. The Emergency Student Bursary Fund was established to provide \$500 to \$2,000 in financial supports and allows students to apply more than once should their situation change.

