How Can We Help All Students RISE? A Framework to Create Learning Environments in Higher Education that Will Help All Students Grow as Collaborative Thinkers, Partners, and Leaders

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This collection of short essays utilizes a narrative approach to present the RISE framework, with four pillars centered on promoting student Resilience, Identity, Strength in Scholarship, and Empowerment. Each short essay aims to draw attention to the spectrum of challenges that students currently face during their higher education journeys in Canada and what innovative solutions have been or could be implemented to address these adversities in accordance with RISE. The application of the framework to evaluate and reorient learning environments in Canadian higher education holds immense potential to help all students grow as collaborative thinkers, partners, and leaders that will leave academic settings well prepared for their life as leaders in their community.

Dans cet article qui rassemble de courts essais, nous utilisons une approche narrative pour présenter le cadre RISE en l'appuyant sur quatre piliers permettant de promouvoir la Résilience, l'Identité, la Solidité universitaire et l'Émancipation. Chacun des courts essais vise à mettre en relief, d'une part, l'éventail des défis auxquels les étudiants font face actuellement dans l'enseignement supérieur au Canada et, d'autre part, les solutions novatrices qui ont été mises en œuvre – ou qui pourraient l'être – pour s'attaquer à ces difficultés dans le contexte de RISE. L'application de ce cadre dans l'examen et la reconfiguration des environnements d'apprentissage de l'enseignement supérieur au Canada est pleine de promesses. Voilà qui pourrait aider tous les étudiants à devenir des penseurs collaboratifs, des partenaires et des leaders qui, lorsqu'ils quitteront l'université, seront prêts à agir comme des chefs de file de leur communauté.

We are students. But we are also researchers, change-makers, and innovators. Even as we continue to navigate our educational journeys, many of us are not waiting for our graduation days to shape

the world around us. But that is not always easy; there exist increasing disparities between students in our abilities to access, complete, and thrive in higher education. As students, we have all experienced

challenges during our educational trajectories due to the lack of available or effective student supports. However, as 3M National Student Fellows, we were each fortunate to have found the strength to develop and advocate for initiatives to support ourselves as well as other students experiencing similar challenges. Informed by the culmination of our unique lived experiences overcoming adversity, we have developed a framework to reorient learning environments in higher education to help all students RISE as collaborative thinkers, partners, and leaders. The R.I.S.E. framework consists of four pillars: Resilience, Identity, Strength in Scholarship, and Empowerment. We acknowledge that we are only 10 students and that there are many other voices of our peers that should and need to be elevated as well. However, it is our hope that our personal experiences of rising above challenges in accordance with the four components of the R.I.S.E. framework can be utilized to start conversations to benefit all post-secondary students in Canada. Throughout this piece, we illustrate the value of supporting students to RISE by sharing how we rose above adversities during each of our higher education journeys.

R – Resilience

Resilience means facing adversity and rising to challenges by accepting and working through personal obstacles or hardships—with adequate help and support. Students face so many challenges as we complete our higher education. Unfortunately, many educational institutions often forget that last part, ‘with adequate help and support’, and leave many students to face our adversities alone. That needs to change; resilience starts with community.

Re-writing a Culture of Self-Sacrifice in Higher Education

After starting my first year, I immediately felt envious of my peers. They were research assistants, clinical volunteers, and club presidents. I was none of the above. This compelled me to pursue experiences that could be highlighted on future job applications or

interviews. In my pursuit of future career success, I sacrificed myself and my relationships with others. This came at great cost. I recall nights in my second year when I would wake up clutching my jaw—a futile attempt to nurse away the splitting pain elicited by grinding my teeth all night. I developed temporomandibular joint syndrome. My case was unfortunately not an exception; studies have found that temporomandibular disorders affect around 45.2-77.2% of undergraduate students (Akhter et al., 2019; Modi, Shaikh, & Munde, 2012; Lung et al., 2018). The evidence aligns with my personal observations. I have seen many students, like myself, wading through swamps of fears or chilled to the bone by storms of anxiety. Struggling and coping have become ubiquitous to the student experience—when instead we should be learning and thriving.

I was lucky. In times of great need, I found a space that disconnected me from the storms in my own mind—a pen and blank paper. I became reconnected with the things that nurtured my soul: my hobbies, socializing with friends, and spending time with my family. Too often, we navigate our perilous personal wellness journeys alone. There is thus great impetus for reframing student wellness to be an institutional responsibility—instead of a student’s individual burden—that provides care proactively instead of reactively. One possible institutional intervention is to braid wellness curricula into the fabric of undergraduate education. Longitudinal wellness curricula are being embedded into undergraduate medical programs across North America (Agarwal & Lake, 2016; Drolet & Rodgers, 2010; Velez et al., 2019). There is much to be learned from these student wellness initiatives. Their reports reinforce the value of teaching self-care strategies and fostering a culture of wellness that encourages students to not be afraid to ask for help. Developing integrated wellness curriculums across all Canadian higher education environments would equip all students with the skills to take care of ourselves; and as a result, be able to take care of others.

Being a Student-Parent

I gave birth to my first child while being a full-time student in a very demanding degree program. It was the happiest time of my life and something I had looked forward to, yet balancing school and work with my new responsibilities as a parent was not an easy experience. Being a new parent, I did not know what to expect, and when my son was born I was overwhelmed, exhausted, and worried. I wanted to be the best mother I could be but at the same time I did not want to neglect my “pre-motherhood” responsibilities, career goals, and dreams. Overall, I was lucky. My degree program and my family were supportive and accommodating. But not all women are as lucky as I was and for many, giving birth means the end of their academic path (Lynch, 2008). The perceived role of women as primary caregivers in our society impacts all women but it is particularly challenging for women in academia. It impacts decisions made by hiring committees for tenure track positions, but also the way that they perceive their own motherhood and careers.

Seeing friends and neighbours considering dropping out or changing their career goals, I started a support group for student-mothers at the university that aimed to allow student mothers to be there for each other and support each other on campus. During our sessions, we spoke a lot about how inflexible the education system currently is, the physical and mental strains around coming back to school shortly after giving birth, considering the short parental leave given to students (if at all), our financial concerns and difficulties achieving a healthy work-life balance. Together, we transformed these conversations into ideas and concepts for change: for lectures to be recorded, for the option to work from home or part-time in the months following birth, for nursing rooms to be available on campus, for shorter waitlists and more affordable campus daycares, for financial aid for full time parents and, if applicable, the arrangement of clinical placements closer to home. If made available in all higher education institutions across Canada, these would reduce

attrition and would help student-mothers be successful in their academics and careers.

Mental Health in Post-Secondary Education

Resilience is an important quality for withstanding post-secondary life. The post-secondary environment is often competitive, standardized, and does not always validate different learning styles or needs. Mental health on campuses is a prevalent and critical issue that has been on the fore-front of recent debate surrounding post-secondary education in Canada. In 2016, 46% of students in Ontario felt “so depressed in the previous year it was difficult for them to function” (National College Health Assessment, 2016). The increasingly high demand for mental health services on campuses leads us to question whether mental health protocols and programs at post-secondary institutions effectively meet the needs of students. A 2016 national survey on mental health services at post-secondary institutions in Canada found that while most institutions have some form of mental protocol in place, they are not adequately meeting the needs of students nor are they an effective use of resources (Jaworska, De Somma, Fonseka, Heck, & MacQueen, 2016).

As students and faculty, we should advocate for more comprehensive mental health protocols and services at our institutions to ensure students have access to effective and timely services. An innovative solution to the limited access to mental health services on campuses is the use of an anonymous, online counselling service for students. The service could provide students an immediate outlet to talk to a professional about their urgent crisis, create a safe and more comfortable space to talk about their mental health, slowly de-stigmatize mental health issues on campus, and address long waitlists for counselling services on campuses.

We all have a role in fostering a more accessible post-secondary environment that acknowledges and accommodates the different learning styles and needs of its students. The future depends on the well-being and capacity of our

student population to drive our world forward and to save our planet for generations to come. We invite you to advocate for more effective mental health protocols and services in post-secondary institutions, find ways to reduce mental health stigma on campuses, and make the post-secondary environment more accessible to those who struggle with their mental health.

I – Identity

We all start our higher education journeys with diverse stories and experiences in tow. Bell curves and standardized testing—common instruments used to evaluate students in settings of post-secondary education—have the tendency of reducing student identity into a set of grades and performance measures, when instead the uniqueness of our identities should be cultivated. Not doing so stands the risk of alienating students, making them feel like they do not belong in academia, and thereby stifling their potential. After all, celebrating the differences in our identities helps us think differently and come up with new and innovative solutions to old problems.

Isolation in Academia

A little-addressed yet critical issue in education is isolation. Without an effective social network, one can often feel discouraged and out of place, which can affect both academic performance and personal wellbeing. I experienced this myself when I first moved to Canada. Being an ESL student, I found that I had little in common with others in my class. In fact, I later learned I was not alone; it is expected that 40% of the US population will be a language minority by 2030 (Drake, 2014).

However, we need not look at language minority or immigrant students in the US to see the effect of isolation on education. Inuit students in Canada remain on the fringes of Indigenous scholarship, facing lower graduation rates and significant challenges within the education system (McGregor, 2013). On a recent trip to Nunavut, I heard from high school students on issues of access

to courses they need to graduate or to attend a program of their choice, high turnover rates among teachers, and a sudden transition from a bilingual education from grades K -3 to an English education from that point forward. The stories I heard are not isolated, and are well documented in research (McGregor, 2014 and Government of Canada).

With high teacher turnover rates, and a struggle to learn in an unfamiliar language, students in Nunavut often feel isolated and stuck. That is how I met Tonya, a grade 10 student from Iqaluit who was passionate about helping her community. Tonya and I became good friends, and she confided in me that she often felt isolated from her classmates and teachers because of the educational climate. One day, I received a call that no one ever wishes to receive – Tonya had taken her own life. Isolation has real consequences, both educationally and personally.

Tonya's story did not end well, but many others do. Walton and Cohen (2011) found that a simple intervention that promotes a sense of connection to the broader academic environment bridged the achievement gap among African American and European American students by 79% in three years. The study identified the quality of social relationships as the most critical defense against isolation. This is where academia can play the greatest role in fostering a sense of belonging. By facilitating a sense of community within the classroom, and forming meaningful bonds with students, instructors at all levels can facilitate a greater sense of community and help minority students find their voice in the academic world.

The Imposter Phenomenon

One of the biggest barriers I have faced thus far in my post-secondary career is my perceived fraudulence. For years, I have worked tirelessly to pursue my career goal of practicing medicine, yet I have consistently refused to believe my merit, and no achievement, award, or scholarship could change my self-doubt. Once I started realizing that this feeling of constant self-doubt was causing me to seriously limit myself, I decided to do some research on the topic.

This is how I learned about the Imposter Phenomenon (IP)—a condition in which an individual constantly perceives their successes as inadequate or that they are frauds in their own lives—and it is more common than one may think (Parkman, 2016).

The fast paced, stressful, and often unforgiving process of post-secondary education forces the vast majority of students to use GPA and academic success as a sense of self-worth, and as a student yearning for a competitive career, I have seen and experienced this behaviour first hand. Feeling like a fraud can really affect an individual's self-confidence and can keep one from applying to programs or jobs where they may excel, further depriving themselves of opportunity. Though IP is not an inherited “disorder”, it has been shown to have a much higher prevalence in underrepresented or disadvantaged groups in postsecondary institutions, Indigenous students being one example (Parkman, 2016).

From my own experience, it was through honest conversations with mentors who have walked a similar path to mine that I finally began appreciating myself in a healthier way. It inspired me to start working with a team based out of U of T and Western University to find ways of building a community of support for Indigenous students who are interested in medicine. By utilizing my experiences as an Indigenous student currently navigating a system that has challenged me in many ways, I hope to help fellow peers acknowledge and actualize their own potential. Addressing this issue of IP is crucial to fulfilling the needs and rights of all Canadians as well as maintaining diversity in postsecondary institutions, as this benefits the experience and quality of education for everyone.

S – Strength in Scholarship

What do we mean when we say strength in scholarship? To us, it encompasses more than the traditional idea of the successful student. Good grades, attending class, and being a good team member all play a role, but we advocate for going

beyond the classroom to challenge frameworks in higher education that do not work for everyone, and taking action for innovation at our university and beyond.

Challenging a Students-as-Consumers Model of Education

In many levels of education, but most notably higher education, students are often regarded as passive receptacles who come to university in order to obtain knowledge. This is evidenced by a lack of partnership between students, professors, and administrators on curriculum, course design, and even course content. When students, staff, and administrators pursue partnership practices, however, they positively impact student engagement and result in increased motivation around the learning process (Mercer-Mapstone et. al., 2017). One example of the many successful initiatives across Canada that challenged dominant ideas of “students-as-consumers” with “students-as-partners” is an experiential learning course I participated in, which focused on broadcast journalism and podcast design. Leaders at the university radio station (who happened to be students) partnered with a professor in the English department to create, administer, and teach the course. The membership of the course consisted of fifteen majority upper-year students from various disciplines who split off into groups of five to interview professors of their choice about transformative learning. Much of the guidance and training for the course was delivered by the student facilitators, while the grading and evaluation was done by peer review amongst all students. The course was highly regarded by students, who emphasized the peer-to-peer aspect and the control they felt over their own learning (Pohl, Liatsis, and Riddell 2018). Students also reported that they felt more engaged when compared to “traditional lecture-based courses” (ibid.).

This is just one example of students driving knowledge creation and providing important content to other students—all while challenging frameworks of traditional lecture-based education, which is often

not an inclusive learning model. These successes, however, are in spite of an educational and administrative context that does not value (financially or otherwise) student-driven knowledge. None of the facilitators (both student and faculty) of the course were compensated for their involvement despite the fact that all students paid standard tuition rates. As such, it remains imperative for professors, students, and administrators to not only continue to pursue innovative educational approaches, but also to fight to ensure that they are not overly difficult to institute.

The Non-Traditional Becoming the “Norm”

Do I *belong*? If so, how do I *know* when I belong? These are the questions that I have wrestled with most of my life and my time in University has been no exception. Oftentimes, within the realm of academia, a student’s intellectual capacity, and ultimately their ability to succeed, is measured primarily through grades achieved from standardized testing mechanisms such as exams and term tests, as well as research and writing assignments. While this model of education benefits certain types of learners, it fails to adequately recognize diverse ways of learning and thinking. As a result, many students with disabilities are amid those who have become left in the dust.

At Laurentian, I have seen firsthand how bright, capable, and passionate individuals perpetually struggle to meet the myriad of expectations imposed on them even when they are diligently applying themselves. Falling through the cracks, yet desperately yearning to find a sense of belonging within a society where they are far too often earmarked by their deficiencies rather than strengths, they not only begin to question the relevancy of their respective studies, but also themselves.

The pathways which lead to successful transitions into and throughout postsecondary education for students, including but not limited to those living with autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyspraxia, and other neurodevelopmental conditions are by no

means explicitly understood or well-defined. Being on the autism spectrum myself has served to ignite my determination to advocate for those who also endure disability-related challenges and who also require accommodations.

We believe that neurodiversity is invaluable to academia as it reveals different ways of being and interacting with the world. I am often reminded of a professor who once told me, “narrow thinking produces narrow findings.” The innovation and creativity incumbent to addressing our world’s pressing issues demands diversity amongst knowledge and experience to generate impactful and sustainable solutions. Higher education is, therefore, in a unique position to open new ways of seeing the world.

At a time when institutions must compete for enrolment numbers and funding, the terms “inclusivity,” “acceptance,” and “equity,” should not merely be catchphrases used for conformance or convenience. Rather, a lexicon as this one ought to be aimed at catalyzing the pursuit of knowledge and truth, one which academia has defended for centuries. Resolutions that foster Universal Design in Learning (UDL) include, for example, ensuring students are integral to instructional design processes and contributive of policy development. If the “non-traditional” is to become the “norm” in academia, differences regarding ability are to be welcomed and, in fact, embraced. As belongingness is interwoven with access to transformational learning opportunities, institutions must be willing to closely examine the very nature of scholarship, individually and collectively.

Work Integrated Learning in the 21st Century

In a constantly changing labour market, students are often required to equip themselves with skills not gained in a classroom. Thus, it has become more important for students to take on work-integrated learning experiences that will give them hands-on experience to bridge the gap between course content and implementation, all while allowing them to

network and explore potential career pathways. These opportunities usually come in the form of research studentships, internships, co-op terms, and practicums (University of Calgary, 2019).

I am excited to see that change is happening to accommodate for the drastic shifts that our country foresees in the labour market. In 2019, the Government of Canada announced that there will be an investment of \$798.2 million over the next five years to increase work placements for students. In a country where the 10 million youths (aged 15 to 34) represent about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the Canadian population, an investment on today's youths is an investment on tomorrow's future (Government of Canada, 2019).

For myself, I have felt that my experience at university has equipped me with the skills that will prepare me for my career. Having been involved with sports injury prevention research and having represented my faculty on the Students' Union, all while working with cancer survivors to rehabilitate through exercise, are experiences that came with their unique stories and toolbox of skills. Likewise, I had the opportunity to engage in personal and professional development through the Scholars Academy, which has been a catalyst for my community engagement. This is not always the case, however, and coming from a modest background, I would not have had these opportunities if it were not for the support I received through scholarships. For many of my peers, it is often the case where they are unable to take on these opportunities because of the immediate financial costs associated with them.

How can we improve this at post-secondary institutions? One method is through a grant system that will provide students a stipend that will cover some costs associated with their work-integrated learning experience. This, however, is only one of many steps in ensuring that students are motivated to indulge themselves in work-integrated learning experience in the 21st century.

E – Empowerment

The definition of empowerment we have taken is “the process of becoming stronger and more

confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights” (Lexico Dictionary, 2019). However, we acknowledge that empowerment in university takes many shapes and forms. Professors, students, departments, faculties, and everyone in between have a role to play in empowering students to RISE above the challenges they will face in university and beyond, to empower them outside their comfort zone where the real learning takes place.

Power Hierarchies inside Classrooms

Students entering post-secondary education come from all over the world due to the prestige and enhanced learning environments available in Canada. Students often seek out higher education opportunities in this respected nation because such settings provide the knowledge and skill-sets they cannot find in their own countries. Unfortunately, “diversity” is a buzzword tossed around by almost every institution in Canada, due to the reality that these institutions cater to a diverse population of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, mindsets, learning styles, and more (Pariseau-Legault, 2019). The post-secondary education sector, in particular, seems to struggle with the two keywords that always appear to follow “diversity”: “inclusivity” and “equity.”

It is evident that institutional barriers exist within the Canadian educational system and hinder a university's ability to create an inclusive and equitable environment for all students (OHRC, 2019). The structural dynamics found inside a classroom is a current example of such a barrier as it mirrors a hierarchical organizational culture. Typically, the head of the hierarchy is the professor, followed by a lead teaching assistant (TA), then other TA's, and finally the students enrolled in the class.

Universities and colleges each have missions and values that are meant to serve students and cater towards student success in the many forms that this takes. However, the power structure highlighted above does not correlate with the missions and values. Considering the issues of typical hierarchies, there are many cases of abuse of power that can be

exerted from a supervisor directly towards their employees (Vredenburg & Brender, 1998). This type of abuse of power creates toxic organizational cultures in which every individual is working towards individual gains rather than institutional ones. These issues are markedly exemplified in a university-like atmosphere. Having the student at the bottom of the power structure when the mission statements and core values of post-secondary institutions revolve around students is, naturally, counter-intuitive. We believe that students should be at the forefront of higher education and that the structures of these institutions should be conducive to meeting the unique needs of their respective student population. Fundamentally, students of every background and descent, including International and Indigenous learners, are worthy of an equitable educational experience.

If the learning outcomes are standardized for each course, it is the professor's role to ensure these learning outcomes are met for each of their students to the best of their ability, and not the other way around. A system that requires students to have their first point of contact be a TA, then the lead TA, and at last the professor, will likely discourage students from seeking out support. I speak from my own experience in this regard. When professors implement top-down approaches, they distance themselves from their students, and while this may be favourable to them in attempting to preserve their own comfort, students inevitably suffer.

Breaking Silos and Fostering Human Connection

Where did my best learning come from during my time in university? It is easy to identify close friends, mentors, and supportive faculty in my life, who I aligned with and agreed with. However, the best learning often came from breaking silos and fostering connections outside of my typical peer boundaries and academic circles.

Through working on a photojournalism project inspired by *Humans of New York*, I interviewed people from all walks of life on my

campus and shared their stories through social media. In the span of 30 minutes to an hour, these connections questioned my assumptions, pushed me to think about ideas in a different way, and provided shared insights I would never have heard otherwise. This empowered me to change my perspective from being a health sciences student to a student of life. My newfound open-mindedness opened the door to new opportunities, from exploring from studying public health in India and working in management consulting to leading media projects in Uganda.

An often-invisible purpose of post-secondary education is fueling curiosity to seed meaningful interactions between people of diverse perspectives and backgrounds. Post-secondary institutions are one of the few places where individuals of all identities, ethnicities, religions, sexual orientations, and more are brought together to think, empathize, challenge each other, and debate. We belong to something bigger than ourselves, and our typical definitions of identity: we not only belong to a faculty, but also to a school, a country, and the world as a global citizen. Building bridges between people that transcend geographies and disciplines can change how we behave in the future. It prevents us from jumping to predetermined conclusions based on heuristic shortcuts or anecdotal experiences. It is the best tool to fight against the rising tide of fear and xenophobia. It leads to interdisciplinary experimentation, which is the basis of innovation in industry and academia alike. And in the process, it refines our transferable skills of active listening, creativity, critical thinking, recognition of unconscious biases, and open-mindedness to opposing viewpoints.

Breaking silos and fostering human connection are not explicit classroom learning objectives, but they are essential in the curriculum of life. Given the rise in AI and automation of technical skills, it is increasingly urgent for post-secondaries to focus not simply on developing technical skills, but on “soft skills” to prepare students to navigate upskilling, reskilling, and working with a global community throughout their lives. However, simply having a diverse group of people does not naturally

result in these benefits. It is easy to slip into affinity groups, to build an echo chamber of people who already have shared interests, convictions, or backgrounds, which carries on into the rest of adulthood and the working world. We must all be mindful of the small personal actions we can take to talk to people we would ordinarily otherwise never approach in our classrooms and beyond. Purposefully connecting with those who are different will ultimately help students thrive in the economy of the future and build the foundation of global citizenship and collaboration.

Conclusion

The tapestries of our lives are rich with stories, challenges, and curiosity. While there is no one definition of leadership or way that leadership is developed, we look towards Indigenous storytelling and teachings to help us conceive a collective understanding of leadership through the unique amalgamation of our diverse lived experiences. In our communities, like many Indigenous communities, the notion of being a “leader” is ascribed not by one’s self, but by those around you. Like a ceremonial dance, leadership involves everyone working together to move the community forward with no voice elevated, but rather all sounding together for change. The Round Dance, therefore, best represents how we have come to understand teaching, learning, and leadership. Here, participants join hands and dance following a side-step motion in a sun-wise direction around those who are drumming and singing in the centre of the circle. The drums’ beat is symbolic of the heartbeat of community, and dancers move as one entity. We are united by this shared concept of leadership. The concept and act of leadership are ultimately embodied in resiliency through self-compassion, in identity by being at harmony with one’s own values, in strength in scholarship through a hunger to be continually learning and growing alongside others, and finally, in empowerment with a sincere desire to use one’s own success to help others succeed. Alone, we are only ten, but together we dance with the voices of history and the voices of our

communities, who compel us to speak for justice, inclusion, and change for the next seven generations of voices to come: But our educators and institutions have not always danced with us. Our dream is to have you—and the educational institutions across this beautiful nation and beyond—give every student an opportunity to RISE: leave no one behind to stumble and fall.

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Biographies

As an Indigenous Social Work graduate, researcher, and policy developer, Mathew Dueck responds to critical issues in post-secondary education and beyond, including accessibility, mental health, and Indigenization.

Enav Zusman is a Doctor of Pharmacy student at the University of British Columbia. She is an ambitious scientist, a prenatal and parental rights advocate, and a mental health awareness activist.

Owen Dan Luo is a medical student in the Class of 2023 at McGill University who has taught self-care to his peers and advocated for student wellness in many roles. He also uses the written word to tell the stories of illness, disability and the student experience of uncertainty, and the lives that they impact.

Ethan Pohl is a PhD student in Sociology at Queen's University. He holds a BA in Sociology from Bishop's University and an MA in Sociology from Queen's University.

Mathieu Chin is a medical student at the Cumming School of Medicine at the University of Calgary, where he is passionate about Sports Medicine and injury prevention in athletes."

Tonya-Leah is a second-year medical student studying at McMaster University. Outside of her studies, she celebrates and represents her Indigenous Canadian identity through music, public speaking, mentorship and policy.

Tingting is a 2nd year MD/MSc student at the University of Toronto and Junior Fellow at Massey

College. Meeting diverse friends and colleagues through her interdisciplinary work, studies, and travel have fuelled her passion for community building and learning from unexpected places.

Mariam Ragab is a Research Assistant at the Bank of Canada, and a program manager at Global Vision. She is passionate about policy development, youth engagement, and human rights.

Taylor Irvine is a senior undergraduate student in the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto. She is interested in the intersection of religion, gender, human rights, and public policy.

Hayat Showail is passionate about environmental sustainability as well as true diversity, inclusivity, and equity in Canadian culture. She is an employee at Dalhousie's career centre where she helps students begin their path towards their future.