

MEIGHEN CENTRE & SUPPORTING STUDENT HEALTH AND WELLNESS

YEAR IN REVIEW 2022-2023



MAKING INTERNATIONAL LEARNING ACCESSIBLE

From the busy streets of Edinburgh, Scotland to the protected habitats of the Galápagos Islands.

International travel and learning experiences enrich perspectives and teach life-changing lessons. However, too often these opportunities are not possible for students with disabilities or from low-income households. Mount Allison has changed the narrative.

The University has several international field schools where students, especially those from underrepresented groups, receive funding and supports to participate. These intensive courses are approximately two weeks and students earn course credits.

"So far, there have been two psychology courses in the Netherlands, a religion course in Japan, a biology course at the Galápagos Islands, and in a few weeks there will be a drama course happening during the Edinburgh Festival," explains Matt Maston, Mount Allison's director of accessibility and student wellness.

A health and wellness staff member travels with each of the groups, supporting the accessibility needs of individual students with disabilities. They are also a valuable resource for the entire cohort.

"For many students, this is their first time travelling out of the country and often the first time on an airplane," says Maston. "Many students never thought this kind of experience would ever be possible for them. I'm proud our university has committed to helping students with the challenges and anxieties that may come with taking part, so that the students can focus on the incredible academic and life experiences that take place on these field schools."

The field schools are made possible by the Canadian government's Global Skills Opportunity program, and extra supports for students are made possible by the Johnson Scholarship Foundation.

REFLECTIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS:



"We were on the go every day at the Galápagos Islands — walking around the islands, observing wildlife and exploring the diversity, swimming as much as we can, snorkeling and learning how to identify various tropical fish. We got to observe conservation first-hand, collaborate with other students, see things people travelling as tourists wouldn't be able to."

Mackenzie Warman, participated in the Galápagos Islands Field School in Biology



"It was incredible. We went to alter shops, saw pagodas, learned about the historic temples of Japan, engaged with a lot of different community members, and I think learning in this way is far superior to the traditional classroom setting. It gives you the opportunity and flexibility to explore your interests and various curiosities. It was just a real eye-opening experience for me."

Ryan Friars, participated in the Kyoto Field School in Religious Studies



"The entire trip, from the application process to the travel itself to the connections I made with classmates, was an experience that built my confidence and shaped me as a person. I'm so grateful for the whole opportunity and the people I met. I just hope more students get an opportunity like this."

Nathan McIver, participated in the Utrecht Field School in Psychology



MATT MASTON

MESSAGE FROM MATT MASTON, DIRECTOR OF ACCESSIBILITY AND STUDENT WELLNESS

At Mount Allison, we understand that each person's path to physical, mental, and emotional health is different. It's why we take a holistic and personalized approach to support. Students have access to on-campus medical professionals, personalized supports for disabilities, academic tutoring, counselling, spiritual care advising, strategies for mental health, education on the harm reduction of alcohol and cannabis use, resources around healthy relationships and consent, and a host of other ways to pursue health and wellness.

I am very proud of our circle of care approach. I am also extremely impressed by the positions students have taken on in offering peer-to-peer support of each other. Mount Allison students are a remarkable group — whether acting in formal roles such as Student Wellness Ambassadors or Notetakers in the Meighen Centre, or acting informally as supportive classmates and roommates, they are spreading kindness and empathy and supporting everyone's success.

In recent years, we have seen an increase in the number of incoming students with disabilities or medical conditions and students requiring more widespread support. We have also seen an increased interest in self-care and exploring methods of health and wellness. I believe in part this results from a positive societal reduction of the stigmas around disabilities and asking for help, the added pressures and necessary adjustments for young people living in our post-pandemic world, and the even greater awareness of Mount Allison as a caring, student-centred community.

Increased need has led our teams in Accessibility and Student Wellness to work even more collaboratively and to strengthen connections with faculty and staff. It is important for us to be a resource for the whole of Mount Allison and an essential service and support system for individual students.

My appreciation goes to all the families, donors, alumni, and friends that support health and wellness at Mount Allison.

WHAT'S NEW AT THE MEIGHEN CENTRE IN 2022-23

THE MEIGHEN CENTRE PROVIDES SUPPORTS AND SERVICES TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND MEDICAL CONDITIONS, WHETHER PERMANENT OR TEMPORARY.

- In 2022-23, the Centre supported more than **330 students**.
- Of the students registered with the Centre, **66 per cent** identified as having ADHD or a learning disability, and **49 per cent** with a mental health disorder. Other students registered with the centre may have physical or chronic health disorders, hearing or visual impairments, concussion or neurological disabilities, or be on the autism spectrum.
- **115 students** worked as notetakers, supporting the academic success of **200 students**.
- **42 students** participated in special pre-orientation events that help new students get settled in residence and Sackville and learn more about the resources available to them.
- **14 students** are currently taking part in paid internships with a variety of organizations. These are made possible by the Johnson Scholarship Foundation and provide students valuable work-related experience.
- **19 students** registered with the Centre were supported in their participation in field courses in the Netherlands, Japan, and Galápagos Islands.



"These field schools are the types of experiences where students with particular accommodation needs traditionally discount themselves right away. And low-income students don't even think about these opportunities. What we are doing with the field schools is something great."

Darcy Cormier, student wellness social worker, staff support on the Galápagos Islands Field School in Biology



ROHIL BASAPA ('20)

MEET ROHIL BASAPA ('20)

Mount Allison's Residence Life Coordinator, Health and Wellness

Mount Allison has long been known for its on-campus community of student residences. There are 12 residences and 85 per cent of first-year students live in one of them. These are active, welcoming, and supportive communities where students are introduced to new perspectives and make life-long friends.

In recent years, and as a response to the pandemic, the University increased the supports it provides residence students. The Residence Life Coordinator, Health and Wellness position was created, and Rohil Basapa ('20) took on this role in December 2022. Basapa says his primary role is to connect students with the many wonderful resources that already exist on campus. He works closely with the University's Mental Health/Harms Reduction Educator, Spiritual Care Coordinator, and EDI Student Advisor, as well as the Meighen Centre team, where Basapa previously worked as a student intern and support coordinator.

"I bring their resources and tools to students instead of students having to reach out," says Basapa.

Basapa organized many activities this past year, including:

- MtA Let's Keep Talking outreach — social media and one-on-one and group conversations, for raising awareness on mental health and the stigmas around mental health;

- presentations/discussions on reducing the harms and risks of consuming alcohol and cannabis;
- dental hygiene day to make students aware of the insurance and benefits available to them; and
- self-care events with bingo games, art therapy sessions, and journaling workshops.

One of Basapa's favourite ideas was the creation of Winnie the Hamster and their Wellness Wheel. Through an exercise on a small hand-out and outreach on social media, Winnie encourages students to periodically take the time for self-reflection and to check in on how they are doing in seven key areas. If students identify an area where they could use some more tools and resources, Basapa and Winnie point them in the right direction.

"Talking about things like mental health and sexual consent is really hard," says Basapa. "What I try to do through programming and things like Winnie is make it easier to engage and get dialogue going."

Basapa has been a part of the Mount Allison community throughout the pandemic and says one thing he has found is that students are now really gravitating toward extracurricular and social activities that have a health and wellness component.

"When I was starting as a student, I feel like the student and residence life experience was more about just the fun and exciting activities like parties. Now it's events and activities that have a health and wellness component that prove to be most popular. I see students and residences signing up more for self-care events than something like a traditional trivia night. I think the pandemic made us all more self-reflective and aware of the importance of prioritizing health and wellness."

This coming academic year, Basapa hopes to focus more on supporting the residence leadership team, providing these student leaders training opportunities throughout the year, organizing team building activities such as an upcoming kayak trip, and most importantly ensuring their own health and wellness is supported.

"Our residence leaders are really the front-line and it's very important for us to support them," says Basapa. "They are right there, living in the residences, and are the people other students will often first bring their concern or crisis to. We want to make sure our residence leaders have the tools and resources they need to not only help the students but to support their own health and wellness and mental health."

Working in the field of health and wellness was a goal for Basapa before coming to Mount Allison, and he loves that his current role meets that passion.

"Everyone faces adversities in their lives," says Basapa. "And although I think a lot of people acknowledge their adversities, they are unable to do something about it because they don't have the resources and tools they need. I want to change that."



OLIVIA JOUDREY



GREG PETER

Greg Peter is a third-year aviation student who joined the Navigate MtA team in part because of his background as a yoga practitioner and instructor and passion for discovering ways students can support students.

“I feel like having a peer-to-peer experience is helpful and makes using health and wellness resources more welcoming,” says Peter. “The training available to us was important. You learn from these great organizations and leaders how you can better support your peers. I’m so honoured to be part of this group that is so passionate about caring for each other and other students.”

Recently, the team has invested a lot of time and energy in building a new Navigate MtA website that will be a central hub of information and resources and promote help-seeking behaviour.

“We are planning a launch of the site this year,” says Olivia Joudrey, a fourth-year biochemistry student and the lead on the website project. “It’s something that I think will add a lot of value to students knowing what resources are available and how to access them and just highlighting everything that is health and wellness related at Mount A. We created a real wellness hub.”

Navigate MtA is supported by the Windsor Foundation, a longtime donor to Mount Allison and health causes.

“The Windsor Foundation grant first made these resources possible in the months following the pandemic’s outbreak,” says Anne Comfort, vice-president of international and student affairs. “It was such a tough time for our students and Navigate MtA made a big and positive difference. We are so grateful for the foundation’s support during that time and as we move forward with supporting students in the new realities of a post-pandemic world.”

NAVIGATING PATHS TO WELLNESS

Mental health programming and resources built by students for students

Navigate MtA is a suite of programs and resources meant to encourage self-care and heighten awareness of mental health and wellness throughout campus. Since launching in 2020, initiatives have included yoga and meditation sessions, therapy dogs, workshops on managing stress and substance harms reduction, outreach on where to access on-campus and community health resources, and special programming for first-year students.

Navigate MtA initiatives are led by Student Wellness Ambassadors, a group of peer-mentors that come from various academic years and departments.



GRACE MACINTOSH



“Navigate MtA is a phenomenal program that provides tools and programming for students to reflect on their own mental health, as well as resources and outreach regarding available options on campus and beyond. With several training opportunities and direct mentorship, the Student Wellness Ambassadors have become experts in the various services and options available to students and how to effectively communicate these to our peers. Together, we promote student wellness and strive to improve mental health and wellness on campus!”

Grace MacIntosh,
Fourth-year biology student and Navigate MtA team lead