

Appendix A:

Details for the Online Module in Oreopoulos, Petronijevic, Logel, and Beattie (2018)

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TREATMENT

General Instructions

The University of Toronto and the Department of Economics want to better understand our students' thoughts about transitioning into university. We will use this information to evaluate the resources we plan to provide for future students.

This exercise involves 2 parts:

- In Part 1, **you will be asked to think about your own** education and future. This will help us understand how students think about various strategies for having a good year and working towards their goals.
- In Part 2, **you will be asked to tell us why you think other students** struggle and to suggest ways your peers might overcome challenges. This section is intended to help us understand how UofT can support future students to overcome barriers

The exercise should take about 45 to 90 minutes to complete. Please try your best to write for the amount of time specified and feel free to take longer if you need to. Please take your time and be thoughtful. If you need a few minutes to walk around and take a break, please feel free to do so.



You'll be asked to help us understand your thoughts and feelings about getting the most out of university.

At the end of the exercise, we will email a copy of your notes to your account address. Reflect on them at a later time, as you may have additional thoughts.

If you need to take a break or two to get up and walk around or help you think, please feel free to do so. Thank-you and Enjoy!

Proceed through the exercise by clicking the [Next \(Save\)](#) button. You can go back to previous pages by clicking [Previous \(Save\)](#) . Each time you click Next or Previous, the data you have entered on that page will be saved.

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Study enough

Study effectively

Get help when you don't understand

Keep up and go to class

Stay motivated

Be patient and take a long-term perspective

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Part 1: How to Succeed at U of T

Faculty and administrators propose the following six tips as a general recipe for university success:

1. study enough;
2. study effectively;
3. get help when you don't understand;
4. keep up and go to class;
5. stay motivated;
6. be patient and take a long-term perspective.

Please help us understand what UofT students think of this advice by answering some questions below.

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1) Studying Enough

Many students who perform better than expected at UofT attribute their success to increasing study time. There is a strong relationship between studying more and doing well. **Students who treat preparing and studying for all their courses like a full-time job do very well.** Finding at least 20 hours each week to read, write, and prepare allows students to learn the material in-depth, feel in control, and get the most out of the course, including higher grades.

Think how this relates to the number of courses you are taking this year, your other responsibilities, and the grades you would like to earn. If you follow this tip, how many hours of studying will you need to devote to each of your courses in a typical week? Are you able to devote this much time, more, or less?

Part of staying on track with studying enough is knowing where and when to study. Please write a rough schedule of when and where you will study each week. Be realistic. Let your mind imagine the vivid details of your environment.

Think and write about this for about **3 to 7 minutes**, then move on.

0 word(s)

How many regular hours of studying will you need to devote to each of your courses in a typical week to attain your goals?

What is your schedule plan in a typical week, without an immediate exam or assignment deadline, to help you reach those needs?

Where and when will you study? (the more detail the better)

Are you working at home, in your room, or the library? What time of day is it? Where are you sitting? What does the desk look like?

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1) Studying Enough

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Think how this relates to the number of courses you are taking this year, your other responsibilities, and the grades you are aiming for. How much studying will you need to devote to each course this much time, more, or less?

Part of staying on track with studying is creating a rough schedule of when and where you study. Write down vivid details of your environment.

Think and write about this for about 70 words.

0 word(s)

Really think about and write down a rough study schedule and the details around it. Please write for at least 70 words. How exactly will your study schedule look like during a typical week? What about as you get closer to midterms or the exam period? When will you find time to complete writing assignment? How can you help ensure you don't miss class? Your detailed responses are very helpful and appreciated.

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Really think about and write down a rough study schedule and the details around it. Please write for at least 70 words. How exactly will your study schedule look like during a typical week? What about as you get closer to midterms or the exam period? When will you find time to complete writing assignment? How can you help ensure you don't miss class? Your detailed responses are very helpful and appreciated.

OK

2) Studying Effectively

Each year, some students become frustrated because they put in many hours of studying but do not do well in their courses. This is often because they waste time on ineffective studying, and they rely on memorization. But in university, students are also graded on critical thinking and applying concepts taught in class to other contexts.

To study effectively, consider next these six suggestions from the book, "[Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning](#)" These actions help students cut down their overall study time by making each hour more efficient.

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2.1) Studying Effectively by Asking Lots of Questions

Just reading course material over and over is not studying. Neuroscience research shows that practicing retrieving new information from your memory is how you learn and retain what you have learned. Quiz yourself by asking lots of questions and see how well you can explain the answers, or use questions at the end of your textbook chapters.

What fraction of incoming UofT students do you think already used this study strategy in high school?

This year, how often do YOU plan to ask yourself lots of questions?

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2.2) Studying Effectively by Studying Early

A lot of students cram - but research shows the content does not transfer to their long term memory. You may do okay on that test the next day, but you won't retain the information you need for the final, or for next year, when you need the information again.

What fraction of incoming UofT students do you think already used this study strategy in high school?

Select a percentage

This year, how often do YOU plan on starting to study early?

Select a frequency

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2.3) Studying Effectively by Using Paper To Take Notes and Then Rewriting Shortly After Each Lecture

Studies find that taking notes on paper is most effective for processing the material in your brain. Editing your notes within a day or two after class allows you to clarify your thoughts and check what you may have missed and make sure you have neat, organized notes.

What fraction of incoming UofT students do you think already used this study strategy in high school?

This year, how often do YOU plan to rewrite your lecture notes?

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2.4) Studying Effectively by Putting Material in Your Own Words and Explaining It to Other Students, Family Members, or Even to Yourself

Seeing if you can clearly explain concepts and course material to yourself or others is a great way to learn. The brain process you use to rephrase concepts in your own words is the same brain process that makes you learn. It is also an efficient use of study time.

What fraction of incoming UofT students do you think already used this study strategy in high school?

Select a percentage

This year, how often do YOU plan to rephrase and talk about the material you are learning?

Select a frequency

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2.5) Studying Effectively by Treating Electronic Distractions as the Enemies of Learning

In class or when studying, students are tempted to check their phones, watch videos or surf the internet. They feel like they are still paying attention and focusing, but they are not – research shows that pausing to check email creates the equivalent of a 15-point drop in IQ. Electronic distractions have an addiction-like pull, so people need strategies. Turn off your phone and put it at the bottom of your bag. Turn off the wifi on your laptop. These small barriers will keep you from automatically using them. Study away from access to screens. Some students use a [blocking program](#).

What fraction of incoming UofT students do you think already used this study strategy in high school?

This year, how often do YOU plan to cut out electronic distractions when studying?

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2.6) Studying Effectively by Being Curious and Wanting to Understand

Learning is not just for grades - it also expands your perspective on life. Seeking understanding can itself be a satisfying experience. Even if the particular material is not inherently interesting, the process of trying to understand it can develop more general skills helpful to your longer-term goals.

What fraction of incoming Uoft students do you think already used this study strategy in high school?

Select a percentage

This year, how often do YOU plan on approaching studying this way?

Select a frequency

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3) Reach Out to Others When You Don't Understand

Even when students study effectively, there are some concepts that they don't fully understand on their own. Keeping this mind, please respond to each of these next 6 points:

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3.1) Reach Out to Others When You Don't Understand

University-level classes are not designed to be "self-taught". They are designed with the expectation that to be successful, students will, at times, need to reach out to others to help work through their questions.

What fraction of incoming UofT students do you think know about this?

How well do YOU know about this?

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3.2) Don't Wait To Get Help When You Don't Understand

When students do not fully understand a course concept or know how to solve a problem in the material, it's important to get clarification sooner rather than waiting until the night before the exam.

What fraction of incoming UofT students do you think know about this?

How well do YOU know about this?

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3.3) Use Course Help Desks When You Don't Understand

Most large first year courses offer help-desk hours for students to drop in to ask any question about the course. For example, type 'math help utoronto' or 'economics help UTM' into Google to get a list of hours of operation for the help desks. In addition, course TAs' job is to help students succeed in their courses, so they will welcome students' questions.

What fraction of incoming UofT students do you think know about this?

How well do YOU know about this?

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3.4) Get Help Online, at Workshops, or from Advisors When You Don't Understand

U of T has skills/success centers that are dedicated to providing help with all sorts of issues students go through, whether it is extra help with course work beyond professors, TA's, and help-desks, help with general academic and study skills, or help with transitioning into university life. You can find solutions to many struggles and sign up for an appointment with an advisor by visiting this website: <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/our-mission-0>.

What fraction of incoming UofT students do you think know about this?

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3.5) Meet With Your Professor When You Don't Understand

Speaking with professors is an important way to get clarification and learn more outside the classroom. Most professors are interested in meeting students and helping them figure out how to solve problems they are having in the course.

What fraction of incoming UofT students do you think know about this?

How well do YOU know about this?

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3.6) Don't Be Shy When You Don't Understand

Some students feel shy or intimidated reaching out to the Professor or the TA. Or they feel that they need to have one particular, specific question to ask. In fact, Professors and TAs welcome students, and can also provide general guidance about how to succeed in the course.

What fraction of incoming UofT students do you think know about this?

How well do YOU know about this?

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4) Keeping up and going to class

It seems obvious that students need to attend class. But each year, a proportion of students don't attend.

What are some reasons you think students might (mistakenly) do this, and how can this affect their grades?

What would you tell these students about why it's necessary to attend class?

0 word(s)

Why do you think students do not attend class regularly?

Do they think most of what they are required to know can just be read in the textbook or elsewhere?

Are they so busy with other responsibilities, that they simply do not have the time sometimes?

Do they think they can just get the notes from a friend and that will be pretty much as if they attended?

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5) Staying Motivated

It's not always easy to study with so many other activities competing for students' time. Spending time with friends, watching videos, or even cleaning can seem preferable. Students can help stay committed to learning by frequently reminding themselves what motivates them.

- 1) For some, motivation comes from thinking about how their education can be used to help achieve their long-term career and family related goals.
- 2) For others, who may not have a clear sense of their long-term goals yet, it comes from wanting to keep their options open. Good grades often open doors to graduate school and help impress potential employers after graduation.
- 3) For others, it's about challenging themselves to do their best and focusing on learning as much as they can about how the world works.
- 4) Or, for others, motivation comes from the idea of using their education one day to help others and make a real difference in the world.

Click on the number above corresponding to what you think is the strongest source of motivation for doing well in school for most incoming UofT students.

Please tell us what motivates you to do well at UofT and why

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6.1) Be patient and take a long-term perspective

University is a period of transition and discovery. As such, setbacks are often more common than in previous years.

Some students get discouraged by setbacks or even give up after one or two bad experiences or lower grades. But setbacks are an essential part of university. They are opportunities to learn the skills that lead to eventual success. Students who try to learn from their mistakes, keep trying, and are patient are often the most successful.

1/6 Do you think most students already understand that setbacks are necessary and required for eventual success?

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat

2/6 How do you use an unexpected poor grade as an opportunity to learn what you can do better?

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6.2) Be patient and take a long-term perspective

Help through UofT is available for virtually every kind of challenge students encounter. Using UofT's services when challenges arise can make a real difference and prevent challenges from becoming crises. Sometimes, though, students feel too rushed or overwhelmed to seek help.

You can check out all of the services here: <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/transition/student-resources/academic-resources>, <https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/health/mental-health/utm-gta-mental-health-resources>.

We frequently encourage students to bookmark these pages and set aside time to try these services *before* they begin to feel that they are in a crisis.

3/6 Do you think most students already understand that there are wide range of services that UofT offers to help students overcome their challenges?

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat

4/6 Take a look at the links above: What services do you think will come in handy for you?

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6.3) Be patient and take a long-term perspective

Life is a long journey, meant to be enjoyed over time, with many unexpected ups and downs. Some things you can't control. Doing your best and being proud of your effort is therefore more important than any one grade on a test or assignment. With patience and a long-term perspective, this approach tends to pay off while helping students enjoy the experience along the way.

5/6 Do you think most students already understand the benefits from focusing more on learning and effort rather than grades?

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat

6/6 Will you adopt this approach of taking satisfaction from working hard and learning about the world?

- Never
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

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Part II

That's it for Part I! Thank you for taking the time to think more about your year and where you're headed.



Now we need about 15 more minutes to get your thoughts on why some students struggle.

At U of T, we only accept students whose records show that they have the motivation, background knowledge, and acquired skills to succeed. That means that *each student in this class this year is completely capable of doing well academically.*

But every year, a proportion of students do not do well academically.

Doing well academically means different things to different students:

For some students, it means they maintain a high overall grade average.

For others it means earning the combined course-specific grades and overall GPA requirements that allow them to stay in or gain entry to their program of choice.

For some, it means avoiding failing courses or getting placed on academic probation.

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We have talked to students and success coaches to put together this list of situations that can interfere with academic success. We'd like your advice on how common you think these problems are, and how best to tackle them.

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Identifying the Barriers to Success at U of T for Students Like You

U of T accepts more than fifteen thousand new students every year. That means that it's highly likely that next year there will be at least a few new students who are a lot like you – same gender, same ethnic, religious, or national background, same age, and with many of the same strengths and struggles.

For students next year who are a lot like you, what are likely the two most important barriers to their success?

Two most important barriers to academic success for students who are a lot like you:

- Waiting too long to seek out help from classmates, tutors, teaching assistants, or instructors when class concepts are unclear.
- Not devoting enough time to keeping up with assignments, rewriting lecture notes, and generally reviewing course material.
- Feeling out of place, lonely, or socially isolated, or feeling that maybe “people like them” are not especially welcome at UofT. In other words, wondering if they belong at U of T.
- Trying to memorize course materials, or focusing mostly on answers to practice questions and past tests instead of using effective study strategies to get a deeper understanding of course concepts and materials
- Dealing with a great deal of personal stress and challenges along with classes.
- Feeling unmotivated to devote time and energy toward doing well in university.
- Needing to build up more skills to get the most out of university-level material, such as becoming more fluent in English for understanding lectures, communicating effectively or working on writing assignments.
- Wondering if they just don't have what it takes to do well academically at U of T. Feeling like other people are smarter than them and they can't compete.

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Digging Deeper Into the Top Two Issues for Future Students Who are a Lot Like You

UofT students may struggle for very different reasons. We are interested in knowing your thoughts on what the reasons would be for a student next year who is a lot like you – same gender, same ethnic, religious, or national background, same age, and with many of the same strengths and struggles.

For the top two issues you identified below you will find a multiple choice set of four potential reasons explaining why students could face this problem. Please sort them from the most to least relevant.

Then we would like your opinion on the best solution to each problem. Again, there are no right or wrong answers, so take your time and answer honestly.

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First Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Waiting too long to seek out help from classmates, tutors, teaching assistants, or instructors when class concepts are unclear.

What do you think is the most important reason explaining this barrier for a UofT student coming in next year who is a lot like you?

- Students feel too intimidated to approach teaching assistants and instructors. Students are worried about being judged by others when they ask for help
- Students leave their studying until the last minute, when it is too late to get in touch with others for help.
- Students find it difficult to attend scheduled office hours of teaching assistants or instructors because they have so many other time commitments
- Students are unaware of the helpful resources U of T offers for academic help in addition to course TA's and instructors.

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First Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Waiting too long to seek out help from classmates, tutors, teaching assistants, or instructors when class concepts are unclear.

You've selected

Students leave their studying until the last minute, when it is too late to get in touch with others for help.

as the main reason students struggle with this problem. Tell us why you think this is the case:

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Solution to First Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Waiting too long to seek out help from classmates, tutors, teaching assistants, or instructors when class concepts are unclear.

What do you think is the most important solution to this barrier for a UofT student coming in next year who is a lot like you?

- Students learn that, no matter what type of personalities their TA's and instructors have, these are all people whose job it is to help them learn.
- Students start preparing for exams or assignments well before they are due, so that they leave time to ask questions.
- Learning more about the academic skills centers and tutoring help the university offers outside of just TA's and course instructors. There are also excellent online sources you can look up just by Googling it.
- Students learn that U of T very carefully hires its TA's and instructors. Most of them care about students' success and want to work with them.

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Solution to First Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Waiting too long to seek out help from classmates, tutors, teaching assistants, or instructors when class concepts are unclear.

You've selected

Students start preparing for exams or assignments well before they are due, so that they leave time to ask questions.

as the most effective solution to this problem. Tell us why you think this is the case:

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Second Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Not devoting enough time to keeping up with assignments, rewriting lecture notes, and generally reviewing course material.

You've selected

Students do not see school as a priority. It is simply a means to a degree.

as the main reason students struggle with this problem. Tell us why you think this is the case:

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Solution to Second Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Not devoting enough time to keeping up with assignments, rewriting lecture notes, and generally reviewing course material.

What do you think is the most important solution to this barrier for a UofT student coming in next year who is a lot like you?

- Striking a balance between when to work and when to have fun. This involves planning a time for every fun activity and then allowing yourself to enjoy 100% of it because you know that you have planned a time for everything else.
- Understanding that doing well in university classes is NOT about how smart you are compared to other students – it's about putting in the time, using effective strategies, and reaching out for help when you need it.
- Understanding that course work is usually cumulative and requires students to keep up consistently instead of waiting to get close to a deadline. Being successful involves making note of all deadlines and creating a plan for how and when each will be met.
- Speaking to senior students, teaching assistants, counsellors, and instructors to understand how courses can be more than just a means to a diploma. For example, students can develop critical thinking and technical skills they will use in every part of their lives.

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Solution to Second Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Not devoting enough time to keeping up with assignments, rewriting lecture notes, and generally reviewing course material.

You've selected

Striking a balance between when to work and when to have fun. This involves planning a time for every fun activity and then allowing yourself to enjoy 100% of it because you know that you have planned a time for everything else.

as the most effective solution to this problem. Tell us why you think this is the case:

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First Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Feeling out of place, lonely, or socially isolated, or feeling that maybe “people like them” are not especially welcome at UofT. In other words, wondering if they belong at U of T.

What do you think is the most important reason explaining this barrier for a UofT student coming in next year who is a lot like you?

- Having trouble finding people who are “like them”. Feeling that they have different experiences or backgrounds or concerns than most U of T students.
- Thinking they are the only ones wondering if they belong. Seeing other students and thinking that they seem to feel completely comfortable at U of T.
- Feeling shy about branching out to get to know people who have different experiences and backgrounds than them, which could lead to new relationships and experiences.

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First Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Feeling out of place, lonely, or socially isolated, or feeling that maybe “people like them” are not especially welcome at UofT. In other words, wondering if they belong at U of T.

You've selected

Thinking they are the only ones wondering if they belong. Seeing other students and thinking that they seem to feel completely comfortable at U of T.

as the main reason students struggle with this problem. Tell us why you think this is the case:

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Solution to First Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Feeling out of place, lonely, or socially isolated, or feeling that maybe “people like them” are not especially welcome at UofT. In other words, wondering if they belong at U of T.

What do you think is the most important solution to this barrier for a UofT student coming in next year who is a lot like you?

- Giving it time - realizing that, in time, most students come to feel that they do belong at U of T, and come to feel at home here.
- Taking a first step - introducing themselves to some people in their class and starting up a conversation.
- Joining one of U of T’s numerous clubs, organizations, or intermural sports teams. These activities often meet once or twice a week and are a great opportunity to make friends and discuss student life.
- Coming to realize that most new university students feel lonely at times, and most students wonder, early on, if they belong at U of T. It is a common experience for students from all different backgrounds and past experiences.

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Solution to First Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Feeling out of place, lonely, or socially isolated, or feeling that maybe “people like them” are not especially welcome at UofT. In other words, wondering if they belong at U of T.

You've selected

Giving it time - realizing that, in time, most students come to feel that they do belong at U of T, and come to feel at home here.

as the most effective solution to this problem. Tell us why you think this is the case:

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Second Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Wondering if they just don't have what it takes to do well academically at U of T. Feeling like other people are smarter than them and they can't compete.

What do you think is the most important reason explaining this barrier for a Uoft student coming in next year who is a lot like you?

- Feeling like every assignment or test is not just a measure of how well they understand the course material, but a measure of how smart they are as a person.
- Getting a lower mark on one of their first exams or assignments, having never received such a low mark before.
- Believing, falsely, that some people at U of T are just smarter than others, and that they can't do much to change their academic ability.
- In high school, they did not have to try hard to get good grades. Now that they have to work hard, they wonder if that is a sign that they aren't as smart as they thought they were.

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Second Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Wondering if they just don't have what it takes to do well academically at U of T. Feeling like other people are smarter than them and they can't compete.

You've selected

Feeling like every assignment or test is not just a measure of how well they understand the course material, but a measure of how smart they are as a person.

as the main reason students struggle with this problem. Tell us why you think this is the case:

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Solution to Second Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Wondering if they just don't have what it takes to do well academically at U of T. Feeling like other people are smarter than them and they can't compete.

What do you think is the most important solution to this barrier for a UofT student coming in next year who is a lot like you?

- Ⓐ Remembering that any U of T student can increase their academic ability by taking the time to learn the material, using strategies to learn it, and reaching out for help when they are struggling.
- Ⓑ Realizing that research finds that there are few, if any, differences in academic ability between university students. When it looks like some students have more academic ability than others, in fact those students have usually had more exposure to that subject material or that way of thinking.
- Ⓒ Keeping in mind that marks are just marks. They are a reflection of how much a student focused, studied, the strategies they used, and even their past exposure to the course material. They are not a reflection of how smart a student is compared to other U of T students.
- Ⓓ Learning that concentrating in class and thinking hard while studying actually changes students' brains to grow their academic ability by creating new neuron circuits.

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Solution to Second Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Wondering if they just don't have what it takes to do well academically at U of T. Feeling like other people are smarter than them and they can't compete.

You've selected

Realizing that research finds that there are few, if any, differences in academic ability between university students. When it looks like some students have more academic ability than others, in fact those students have usually had more exposure to that subject material or that way of thinking.

as the most effective solution to this problem. Tell us why you think this is the case:

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First Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Needing to build up more skills to get the most out of university-level material, such as becoming more fluent in English for understanding lectures, communicating effectively or working on writing assignments.

What do you think is the most important reason explaining this barrier for a UofT student coming in next year who is a lot like you?

- The many other stressors associated with transitioning into university cause students to question themselves, hurting their confidence levels and making it difficult to perform well and learn new skills.
- Students were not adequately prepared by the curriculum in high school, and did not learn the necessary math, writing, or communication skills.
- The students who struggle most with this problem are often international students who are not native English speakers.
- Students sometimes change their minds about the programs they'd like to enroll in right at the last minute, so they end up in programs where others have a stronger background or level of preparation, making it difficult to keep up.

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First Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Needing to build up more skills to get the most out of university-level material, such as becoming more fluent in English for understanding lectures, communicating effectively or working on writing assignments.

You've selected

Students were not adequately prepared by the curriculum in high school, and did not learn the necessary math, writing, or communication skills.

as the main reason students struggle with this problem. Tell us why you think this is the case:

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Solution to First Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Needing to build up more skills to get the most out of university-level material, such as becoming more fluent in English for understanding lectures, communicating effectively or working on writing assignments.

What do you think is the most important solution to this barrier for a UofT student coming in next year who is a lot like you?

- Ⓒ Understanding that UofT carefully thinks about its admission standards, and that if a student was admitted into a program or course, he or she is capable of succeeding there. If others have stronger skills or preparation, being successful may require working harder initially but then being right on track.
- Ⓒ Talking to counsellors at the Health and Wellness Center or at and Academic Skills/Success Center to get the non-academic areas of life on track so that students can feel comfortable to freely focus on developing new skills.
- Ⓒ Making sure to speak, read, and write in English as often as possible, even in social settings where other languages would often be used. Agreeing to do this with friends is a great way to develop communication skills.
- Ⓒ Working with Academic Skills/Success Center counsellors to help learn some of the skills that students feel they are missing.

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Solution to First Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Needing to build up more skills to get the most out of university-level material, such as becoming more fluent in English for understanding lectures, communicating effectively or working on writing assignments.

You've selected

Talking to counsellors at the Health and Wellness Center or at and Academic Skills/Success Center to get the non-academic areas of life on track so that students can feel comfortable to freely focus on developing new skills.

as the most effective solution to this problem. Tell us why you think this is the case:

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Second Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Trying to memorize course materials, or focusing mostly on answers to practice questions and past tests instead of using effective study strategies to get a deeper understanding of course concepts and materials

What do you think is the most important reason explaining this barrier for a UofT student coming in next year who is a lot like you?

- Being unsure of which course material to study, so they just memorize all of the definitions or the practice problems.
- Not leaving enough time to think deeply and critically about class concepts, so they resort to trying to memorize.
- Lacking of passion or interest in course material.
- Not realizing that studying to deeply understand the concepts is actually a more efficient way to study than memorizing, and leads to better grades.

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Second Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Trying to memorize course materials, or focusing mostly on answers to practice questions and past tests instead of using effective study strategies to get a deeper understanding of course concepts and materials

You've selected

Not leaving enough time to think deeply and critically about class concepts, so they resort to trying to memorize.

as the main reason students struggle with this problem. Tell us why you think this is the case:

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Solution to Second Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Trying to memorize course materials, or focusing mostly on answers to practice questions and past tests instead of using effective study strategies to get a deeper understanding of course concepts and materials

What do you think is the most important solution to this barrier for a UofT student coming in next year who is a lot like you?

- Ⓐ Creating a schedule that will allow for sufficient time to devote to deeply understanding course material - then committing to sticking to that schedule.
- Ⓑ Talking to people - tutors, teaching assistants, counsellors, or other students for ideas and support.
- Ⓒ Reminding themselves that university is an opportunity to develop real knowledge and skill that employers value on the job market.
- Ⓓ Learning more about effective study strategies, such as rewriting lecture notes in different words, and trying to explain concepts to others and themselves. Then committing to actually using those strategies

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Solution to Second Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Trying to memorize course materials, or focusing mostly on answers to practice questions and past tests instead of using effective study strategies to get a deeper understanding of course concepts and materials

You've selected

Reminding themselves that university is an opportunity to develop real knowledge and skill that employers value on the job market.

as the most effective solution to this problem. Tell us why you think this is the case:

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First Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Dealing with a great deal of personal stress and challenges along with classes.

What do you think is the most important reason explaining this barrier for a UofT student coming in next year who is a lot like you?

- Living with mental health problems or a learning disability and learning how to get the accommodations they need
- Living with a physical disability and learning how to get the accommodations they need
- Having significant responsibilities outside of classes, such as caring for family members or working more than 10 hours a week.
- Stressors related to their loved ones, such as a recent death, addiction, financial strain, or serious illness.

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First Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Dealing with a great deal of personal stress and challenges along with classes.

You've selected

Living with a physical disability and learning how to get the accommodations they need

as the main reason students struggle with this problem. Tell us why you think this is the case:

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Solution to First Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Dealing with a great deal of personal stress and challenges along with classes.

What do you think is the most important solution to this barrier for a UofT student coming in next year who is a lot like you?

- Taking advantage of free, expert counseling at U of T's Health and Wellness Centre (no matter which campus you attend) – counseling which would cost \$180 an hour outside of campus. Their psychologists can work with them to cope with their stressors in more adaptive ways so they can better handle them.
- Taking fewer classes each term to make room for self-care, being with loved ones, or actions they require to cope with their challenges.
- Talking to their professors at the beginning of each term before the stresses begin to take a toll on their grades or their well-being
- Working with academic advisors to create a schedule that allows them to tend to all of their responsibilities

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Solution to First Barrier to Success

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- Dealing with a great deal of personal stress and challenges along with classes.

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as the most effective solution to this problem. Tell us why you think this is the case:

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- Stay motivated
- Be patient and take a long-term perspective

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Second Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Feeling unmotivated to devote time and energy toward doing well in university.

What do you think is the most important reason explaining this barrier for a Uoft student coming in next year who is a lot like you?

- Students feel isolated, different, or like they don't belong at U of T. This makes it hard to stay motivated.
- Students do not see a clear connection between their grades and actions in university and their prospects later in their lives and careers. They think simply having the diploma at the end of the day is enough.
- Students are not really sure why they are in university or in their particular program. They wonder if they are only there because of pressure from parents or because other people were doing it.
- Students feel like they do not have the ability to do well, so they aim to just coast by.

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Second Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Feeling unmotivated to devote time and energy toward doing well in university.

You've selected

Students are not really sure why they are in university or in their particular program. They wonder if they are only there because of pressure from parents or because other people were doing it.

as the main reason students struggle with this problem. Tell us why you think this is the case:

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Solution to Second Barrier to Success

Problem:

- Feeling unmotivated to devote time and energy toward doing well in university.

What do you think is the most important solution to this barrier for a UofT student coming in next year who is a lot like you?

- Remembering that their actions today can lead to tremendous benefits in their future lives and careers. Acquiring a technical skill set, and having good grades and instructors willing to write you references, can go a long way in helping you get into graduate school or find a job.
- Taking some time to define their own clear purpose for why they are in university or their particular program, and then aligning their actions with this purpose. For example, university is an opportunity to learn not just course material, but also how to persevere through difficult challenges.
- Realizing that research finds that there are few, if any, differences in academic ability between university students. Concentrating in class and thinking hard while studying actually changes students' brains, creating new neuron circuits and growing their academic ability.
- Realizing that what when it looks like some students have more academic ability than others, in fact those students have usually had more exposure to that subject material or that way of thinking. Other students can develop those skills by taking the time to learn the material, using strategies to learn it, and reaching out for help when they are struggling.

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[Congratulations! You are finished](#)

One last thing...

Thank-you so much for your help! One last thing:

To help with your own success this year, we are starting a new program that matches you with an experienced upper-year student coach, whose job is to communicate with you regularly to help with your goals and provide extra support outside the classroom. The program is called **You@Uoft.**

This is a pilot project and you are one of the few selected by lottery to receive this support. Your coach is responsible for trying to help only you and 5 other students. He or she is available to check in on how you're doing and answer any of your questions by skype, phone, or in person.

So that your coach can contact you, please provide your mobile phone number below.

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One last thing...

[Congratulations! You are finished](#)

We think you would benefit from this additional support. Are you sure you don't want a coach? You can always try it out and decide later if you don't want the extra help.

OK, let me try it

I don't have a cell-phone

I'm sure I don't want a coach

Congratulations! You are finished

Thank-you for taking the time to complete this exercise.

Keep looking forward and enjoy the journey.

Finish

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Appendix B:

Description of Batch Text Messages Sent to Students in the Text-Messaging Treatment in Oreopoulos, Petronijevic, Logel, and Beattie (2018)

In this Appendix, we first provide descriptive statistics on the characteristics of all batch text messages students received in the fall. We then provide examples of 20 batch messages, grouped across four categories.

To provide a sense for the characteristics of the messages students received from their coaches, we focus attention on batch messages from the fall semester because engagement was highest in this semester. Table B1 below presents the relevant summary statistics. As mentioned in the main text, the average student received 32 batch messages in the fall, but there was wide variation in this number, as very few students did not receive any batch messages,¹ while some received as many as 61. The standard deviation in the number of messages received is 14.33.

Turning to the characteristics of the fall batch messages, they varied a fair amount in length, with the average text being 67 words in length and the standard deviation across all batch texts being 10.5 words. As an alternate measure of text complexity, we calculate the Coleman-Liau index for each batch text, which is a well-recognized measure of the grade level of text, designed to increase in the number of letters per word and the number of words per sentence.² Fall batch texts had an average grade level of 6.5 and a standard deviation of 1.19. The majority (64 percent) of batch messages were programmed such that they would auto-populate students' first names in the text, while 38 percent of messages included a question mark to prompt interaction. Almost half

¹ Our batch messages were blocked by the cell service provider for 7 students, which is the reason we have 983 student observations in the summaries of the number of messages received but only 976 observations in the summaries of the characteristics of the messages received.

² Specifically, the Coleman-Liau value of a text is $5.88 * (\text{letters/words}) - 29.6 * (\text{sentences/words}) - 15.8$.

(45 percent) of messages were sent in the morning (between 6am and noon) and 76 percent of messages were sent on the weekend.

Having presented descriptive statistics on the batch messages students received, we list examples of select batch messages below Table B1. We categorize messages into four categories – study tips, motivation, conversation starters, and general tips – and provide five examples of messages within each category. The list of messages was populated by randomly selecting 10 batch messages from each coach and then scanning the resulting list of 100 messages for examples that fit into each of the four categories.

Table B1: Descriptive Statistics on Batch Messages Students Received in the Fall Semester

	(1) Mean	(2) Standard Deviation	(3) Minimum	(4) Maximum	(5) Number of Observations
<u>Characteristics of Batch Messages Received</u>					
Number of Batch Messages Received	31.76	14.33	0	61	983
Average Word Count (tens)	6.73	1.05	0.4	11.2	976
Average Coleman-Liau Score	6.51	1.19	0	8.82	976
Fraction with First Name	0.64	0.27	0	1	976
Fraction with Question Mark	0.38	0.19	0	1	976
Fraction sent in Morning	0.45	0.20	0	1	976
Fraction sent in Afternoon	0.37	0.11	0	1	976
Fraction sent in Evening	0.18	0.17	0	1	976
Fraction sent on Weekday	0.76	0.09	0.33	1	976
Fraction sent on Weekend	0.24	0.09	0	0.67	976

Study Tips

Example Message 1: We all procrastinate. There are tricks to try to avoid it. One is the Pomodoro Technique: 1. decide what needs to get done; 2. find a good place to do the work (away from distractions, especially your phone or the internet); 3. work in blocks of time: 25 minutes (called a pomodoro session). Stay very focused, then take a 5 minutes break. Use a timer. 4. after your 4th session take a longer 20 minute break to refresh. 5. Then repeat until the task is done. This method helps you commit to staying focused for a short but productive time, with the promise of break as a reward for your focus. Happy studying and have a great weekend!

Example Message 2: {first_name}! It's the last stretch of the term - exams start in 2 weeks. If you still don't have a study plan together, send me your finals dates and I'd be happy make suggestions for how to spread your time accordingly. Now is the time to get your game on, stay focused, and keep your energies high. You'll be able to enjoy the holidays soon enough, after a job well done.

Example Message 3: What should you do if you don't have solutions to past exams? 1. Always try to answer them yourself, before looking for solutions; 2. Make a list of the answers that you are sure about and answers that you are not sure about; 3. For unsure answers, try reaching agreement with a study group on the right answers; 4. Take the remaining unsure answers and visit a help desk, tutor, or instructor. Maybe do this no more than 3-4 questions at a time. It's really helpful to go through past exams and know correct answers. Start early if possible to be able to get help.

Example Message 4: Hi {first_name}, a very happy long-weekend to you! Use it to relax and be thankful but also to prepare for what's ahead. You can get a lot of quality studying done if you balance your time wisely.

Example Message 5: Hi {first_name}! How is everything so far? While you're getting into a study routine try to go to every class. A strong relationship exists between attendance and grades so it's worth the effort to get into this habit. Once you get there, try sitting near the front, turning off your phone, and asking questions. Let me know how it's going. We can always try to figure out a great plan for you to help you organize your time!

Motivation

Example Message 1: "Set a goal that will make you jump out of bed in the morning", GOOD MORNING :) Tip of the day: Set weekly goals for yourself. It keeps you motivated and pushes you through the week with a positive mind set. My goal for this week: Stepping out of my comfort zone and making conversation with my professors during their office hours. (Which I did yesterday, it wasn't as scary as I thought it would be :P)

Example Message 2: Happy Friday {first_name}! Quote of the day is by Jim Watkins. "A river cuts through rock, not because of its power, but because of its persistence". Hope it inspires you as much as it inspired me :). Have a great weekend!

Example Message 3: Hi {first_name}! Hope the Monday blues are not kicking in too hard. Here's some inspiration to start things off on a positive note this week: "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step" - Confucius

Example Message 4: Happy Monday {first_name}!, how's your week looking so far? Here's some morning inspiration to get things going: "Be happy with what you have. Be excited about what you want." - Alan Cohen

Example Message 5: Happy Halloween! Some of the scariest things we face are failures and setbacks, but they don't have to be if we use them to learn how to do better. Please take some time to think about your setbacks so far this year and about what you might try differently to improve. "Forget your mistakes but remember what they taught you" - Dorothy Galyean

Conversation Starters

Example Message 1: hey so I know things are super busy and I don't want to bombard you with messages but I do want to know how things are going. Can I just get a thumbs up or a thumbs down? Thumbs up if everything (midterms, school) is going well and under control and a thumbs down if you feel overwhelmed and need help. It's just a way for me to know if I can help in any way. It would take a second (I promise)!

Example Message 2: Hey! My favourite way to stay focused and relaxed is to listen to music. What kind of music do you like to listen to?

Example Message 3: My study tip to you this week... Assign meaningfulness to concepts: apply the knowledge to something important to you, an everyday experience, or whatever you remember best! New information is most strongly engrained when you relate it to information you already know, and assign meaning to the new information. You probably don't remember what you wore last Friday, but you can remember what you wore to a special event! What is the last special event you attended?

Example Message 4: Hi {first_name}, A reminder that I'd like to touch base even just for 10 minutes over text to see how you're doing and if I might help in your preparation going into the last stretch of the term. Are you available today for just 10 minutes over text? All the best, {coach_name}.

Example Message 5: Happy Friday {first_name}, excited for the long weekend? I certainly am! Now that you have a little more free time on hand, I would love to chat with you in the coming four days (even for 10 minutes) to go over how the semester is going and come up with a plan to tackle the rest. When should I text you?

General Tips

Example Message 1: Hope you had a Happy Halloween! Did you treat yourself this weekend/week? Make sure you take some time to reflect on your results so far. Think about how you can keep improving and how far you've come since the first day of school!

Example Message 2: Don't forget your need for sleep {first_name}. Besides being the greatest way to collect your thoughts and get creative, sleep also affects our every waking moment, dictates our social rhythm, and even mediates our negative moods. Try to get at least 7 hours a day, even during exams - maybe try a nap to rejuvenate. Consider sleep part of your studying, not getting in the way of it.

Example Message 3: Happy Friday, {first_name}! Quick question: do you use an organizer or something like Google Calendar, where you can write down all of your important stuff?

Example Message 4: Happy Friday {first_name}!! My tip today is to remind you that your time here at UofT is much more than just about getting grades. It's about trying to understand a little bit more how the world works, wondering about how it could be improved, transitioning from passive student to mature adult who has something important to say, and having fun along the way. Focus on learning and being the person you want to become. The rest will take care of itself.

Example Message 5: Hi! Today's tip is to remind you it's hard to learn with just a textbook and sitting in a large classroom. Make the effort to ask questions, even if you feel shy, not up to date, or think your question is trivial. You will gain confidence if you find time to have regular conversations - at help desks, with study groups, TAs, and instructors. Try asking even just one more question each week and see how much better you'll feel.