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Some Ideas on Creating a More Caring University

This zine is based on our collective conversation during “Imagining a Caring University: A Creative Workshop,” organized by Roberta Hawkins, Amy Kipp, and Leah Levac as a part of the Live Work Well Research Centre’s “Reimagining Livelihoods Forum” held August 2023 in Guelph, Ontario.

We acknowledge the important contributions of all those in attendance and those we work alongside. We hope some of these ideas, existing moments, and strategies can support you as you work towards creating a more caring university, wherever you are in your academic journey.

Note: This document is a plain-text version of the Canva Zine and has been provided as an alternative format for accessibility.

Some Stories of Uncaring Universities

As we work towards more caring and just universities, we are reminded of the many stories of uncare and injustice in our institutions. Here are some snippets of the stories that motivate us to push for change where we can.

Kristina’s Story: Dear Academia, I Quit

Wait, everyone always implied. Wait till tenure, wait till menopause, then you will be free. I didn’t want to wait to be happy. [...] My work expanded like a gas, seeping into every fissure. There was always more I should do, even when I was done. [...] Did it have to be

this way, so all-encompassing? Was it toxic? I asked my journal once [...] To ask it aloud would have been ungrateful.

Read [Kristina's story](#).

Dena's Story: Why They Left

My hope is for you to come together and do what I have obsessively asked for year after year—get racial and social justice right at home first before doing it disingenuously in the world [...] You did not get it right for me. I hope that you will for others.

I left primarily because Yale could not keep me safe [...] This is a persistent and pervasive problem in academe—and in many other institutions that were founded on whiteness. Many of us leave silently, and in our silence we become complicit.

Read [Dena's story](#).

Brittany's Story: Upset with Lack of Disability Accommodations

It is wildly unfortunate that it took this tweet blowing up for any accommodations to be recommended to me. I hope that faculty are reading the stories in this thread and seeing the horrors that students face everyday. The school should be ashamed. This doesn't end with me.

Read [Brittany's story](#).

Jena-Lee's Story: Experiencing Anti-Indigenous Discrimination

Part of my agreement with my band [council] was that I needed to get a signature monthly from professors proving that my funding is being used correctly, and I actually had a

professor that looked at my paper and said that ‘this isn't high school, I'm not keeping track of your attendance.’

So, I was worried that if I didn't get their signature, I wouldn't be able to get my funding. So, I ended up dropping that class and quickly swapping it for another one, which was like a barrier to me because I really wanted to take that course, and out of fear of not getting my funding, I had to drop it.

From the LWW “Imagining a More Just University” webinar.

Some Already Existing Moments of Care in Academia

During the workshop we invited participants to share moments where they felt cared for in academia.

- As sessional instructors, the dean invited us to share our input
- Others acknowledged our lived experience as valuable
- We saw others value different ways of knowing such as activist practice
- As students, our advisors provided us with guidance on things new to us
- As students, faculty noticed us struggling to find childcare
- As faculty and students, we built relationships where we felt valued and respected
- Our advisors understood our needs, helped us apply for funding, didn't pressure us
- We were in classrooms with people who cared about us
- Those in power took time to ask how we were doing
- Those with power leveraged it to support those of us with less
- As student-parents, faculty enabled us to bring children to meetings

Some Learnings from Moments of Care in Academia

We noticed a few common ideas coming up across the stories folks shared during the workshop and through our group discussion, highlighting practices that foster care in academia...

Learnings

- Cultivate relationships of care
- Notice and connect
- Acknowledge humanity
- Create spaces of care
- Leverage your power for others
- Share resources equitably
- Value lived-experiences
- Provide caring mentorship

Some Strategies for Creating More Caring Academic Futures

We invited folks to consider potential strategies for creating more caring academic futures in the academic spaces in which we exist. In the following pages we share ideas that bubbled up from these conversations.

Some Strategies for Teaching and Learning

- Leverage your skillsets in the spaces where you have influence (e.g., teaching assistants in the classroom)
- Value knowledge of differently situated colleagues (e.g., faculty supporting GTAs)
- Focus on recruiting faculty with experience and interest in mentorship, not just academic 'expertise'

- Model reciprocity in the classroom and emphasize that learning goes both ways

Some Strategies for Building Campus Community and Culture

- Advocate for flexible and affordable childcare on campus for faculty, staff, and students
- Work to make the ‘hidden’ visible (e.g., hidden curriculum, marginalized experiences)
- Ask strategic questions in conversations to leverage power where you can
- Support opportunities for gathering with others across campus
- Create or advocate for more spaces to meet and work together
- Centre narratives of lived and living experiences

Some Strategies for Doing Research

- Consider where there is opportunity to do things collectively (e.g., writing)
- Push back against isolating experiences of writing and knowledge production

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