

Fact Sheet #1: How does BPMH fit into the university's priorities?

Lauren Brown, M.Ed., Ph.D. Candidate, Inlight Fellow, Program Coordinator: Mindfulness, Meditation and Yoga, Multi-Faith Centre, Division of Student Life, University of Toronto

“The University's support of mindfulness was even noted in the Presidential and Provostial Response to the Task Force on Student Mental Health in December of 2019.” (BPMH-PSD, pg. 58)

Norman Farb, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Toronto Mississauga

“Despite widespread promises from the higher administration to support student mental health, the substantive efforts by UofT to support student wellbeing are primarily limited to chatbots and a substantial investment in increasing clinical services, which, while laudatory, serve only to help students once they are already in crisis – these investments do almost nothing to support student resilience and foster a sense of wellbeing, community, and growing emotional maturity that are needed in the critical period of young adult development that coincides with undergraduate studies.”

“In fact, if one searches the University of Toronto websites for any substantive content to promote student wellbeing, by far the most prominent and positive exemplar is your own Windvane project, a rich expression of the BPMH approach to engage experts from around the university community to come together and speak directly to students about how to better understand their own minds, and furthermore to cultivate positive qualities as they move into adulthood. What message does it send to shut down one of the only programs dedicated to improving students understanding of wellbeing and flourishing?”

“[BPMH] provides students with a chance to develop virtues in addition to acquiring knowledge; it gives students an opportunity to cultivate community and a sense of belonging. It makes a lasting difference and improves the university's reputation.” (BPMH-PSD, pgs. 78-80)

Zindel V. Segal, Distinguished Professor of Psychology in Mood Disorders, Graduate Department of Psychological Clinical Science, University of Toronto - Scarborough

“To take a wider view, it seems to me that more, rather than fewer, programs like BPMH studies are needed. That is precisely why the prospect of its discontinuation is so troubling. It is also puzzling that with The University of Toronto having, established itself as a centre of excellence for contemplative studies - ranging from neuroscience, clinical science, and the humanities – would act in a way that could diminish its standing in this regard.” (BPMH-PSD, pg. 86)

Mark Dennis, Professor, Religion Department, Director, CALM Studies, Texas Christian University; and
Blake Hestir, Professor, Philosophy Department, Texas Christian University

“The University of Toronto's BPMH program is raising the university's profile by tapping into a massive “wave” of interest in mindfulness and meditation across wide-ranging segments of society, including business, professional and Olympic sports, health care, the military, and so on. These groups have done so because they have become convinced by the explosion of scientific research.” (BPMH-PSD, pg. 64)

René Marois, Professor and Chair, Department of Psychology, Winkelried Family Chair in Neuroscience, Vanderbilt University; and **Lee Ryan**, Professor and Chair, Department of Psychology, Associate Director, Evelyn F. McKnight Brain Institute, Director, Cognition and Neuroimaging Laboratory University of Arizona

“The BPMH program fills an important niche in the educational mission of the University, and its objectives are consistent with the Faculty of Arts & science’s academic plan, which aims at “enhancing the undergraduate student experience by supporting mental health and well-being, developing new academic and co-curricular opportunities, expanding innovation in teaching methods, and ensuring students are prepared to succeed beyond graduation” (FAS Academic Plan, p. 12). FAS faculty are also encouraged to “develop new programs in cutting-edge fields of study” and to “adopt innovative, high-impact pedagogical approaches, including the integration of digital pedagogies into their teaching, experiential and community-based learning” (FAS Academic Plan, p. 12). With its emphasis on well-being of the students, and on experiential and community-based learning, the BPMH’s core mission and unique pedagogical approach fits squarely with the University’s academic plan and adds pedagogical components that are uncommon to other programs. The impressive growth of the BPMH program is a testament to not only its success, but also to the demand for such a program at the University of Toronto.”¹

¹ Comments by Marois and Ryan are cited from their UTQAP External Review Report (Accepted as Final on August 15, 2022), which was based on BPMH Self-Study of January 2020 and a half-day virtual site visit in June 2021.