

# Supporting 2SLGBTQ+ Students to Thrive on Campus

Brandon Smith, Lauren Munro, Dr. David Pereira, & Dr. Kristen Renn



# Who we are



- **Brandon Smith** (he/him), Ph.D. Candidate, Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE), Michigan State University
- **Lauren Munro** (she/her), Ph.D. Candidate, Wilfrid Laurier University & Limited Term Faculty, School of Disability Studies, Toronto Metropolitan University
- **David Pereira** (he/him), Ph.D., Office of the Vice-President, People Strategy, Equity & Culture, University of Toronto
- **Kristen Renn** (she/her), Ph.D. – Professor, HALE and Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies for Student Success Research, Michigan State University

# Agenda



1. Introductions and Our Positionalities
2. Thriving on Campus: Rationale for our Project
3. Reviewing the Literature and Institutional Contexts
4. Methodology & Methods
5. Findings
6. Implications for Universities and Colleges: Leadership, Administrators, Practitioners
7. Now what? – Critical Questions

# Thriving on Campus



- An understanding of queer thriving on campus is crucial because 2SLGBTQ+ people have “historically been and presently are pathologized, medicalized, institutionalized, and shamed in various ways” (Greteman, 2018, p. 6).
- What do we mean by thriving?

# Reviewing the Literature



- **The Okanagan Charter (2015):** support "personal development" and foster "healthy" campuses
- **Thriving:** fields of (a) higher education and (b) mindset research
- **Mindsets:** distinguishing frameworks
- **2SLGBTQ+ students:** their experiences and engagement on campus
- **Queer Thriving:** the person; the environment

# What Campuses are Saying



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## What is Thriving?

*Thriving is a researched framework that raises the bar on how we approach well-being.*

Learning from Dr. Laurie Schreiners work on Thriving, Western is aiming to support students along the 5 factors of thriving in higher education:

**Engaged Learning - Academic Determination - Positive Perspective - Diverse Citizenship - Social Connectedness**

**Western University**

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**University of Toronto, New College**



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## Thriving In Action

**September 27 – December 6, 2022**

**Thriving in Action: Tuesdays, 1:00-2:30pm**

**Thriving in Action in Residence: Tuesdays, 7:00-8:30pm**

Don't just survive...thrive!

Are you sometimes disappointed with your academic performance? Are you looking for ways to improve as a student — or in your personal life — so that you can reach your goals? Want to do better, but don't know where to start?

Thriving in Action is a program that will help you learn to thrive in both your academic *and* personal life. In this group session, students will meet weekly to learn key skills to increase motivation, optimism, and resilience. You will also be introduced to learning strategies that will improve time management and study skills. It's not too late to turn things around, and it's never too late to learn how to flourish!

## Thriving in Action

Was your last academic year tough? Didn't get the grades you hoped for? Want to do better but don't know where to start? Thriving in Action can help!

**Toronto Metropolitan  
University**

**Mohawk College**

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- Improve mental health literacy: the understanding of how to obtain and maintain positive mental health with healthy habits and self-care skills.
- Foster a caring, supportive community.
- Promote the resources to help you Thrive as student.
- Encourage a proactive, preventative approach to your wellness.

**Wilfrid Laurier  
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# Methodology & Methods



- **Overall project methodology**

- cross-sectional mixed-methods sequential explanatory design

**Phase 1:** A scan of Ontario university 2SLGBTQ+ policies, resources, and services

**Phase 2:** A province-wide online survey conducted with 2SLGBTQ+ students

**Phase 3:** Follow-up interviews with 2SLGBTQ+ students

**Phase 4:** Webinars to share the findings with community and university stakeholders

- **Interviews**

- Semi-structured interviews with 50 students (10 from each profile) attending to diversity across race, disability, and institutional context
- Topics included: day-to-day experiences, hopes for their overall student experience, discrimination, community, safe and unsafe spaces, engagement with 2SLGBTQ+ spaces/groups on campus, thriving, resonance of profiles
- Coded according to principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

# Thriving Continuum



Defined thriving as largely an individually mediated phenomenon.

Individual

Mix

Institutional

Defined and situated thriving as an institutional responsibility.

Defined thriving as both individually and institutionally mediated.

# Thriving: Individual



## Thriving as:

- Being normal
- Authenticity
- Holistic wellness
- Personal growth and success

"I don't feel like I do [thrive], so it's just something else like ... I haven't really imagined what that would be, so I don't know. I think really something that like I could do, would be being out as a TA and ... I don't do it, because I'm scared ... because ... I don't know, this wasn't at [institution], but I've had someone say that it's not professional to talk about gender identity as an academic person."

"Thriving means to do more than just survive, more than just go through the motions every day. It means to actually be engaged and wanting to improve and continue, and just wanting to grow. And as an [2SLGBTQ+] student I would - thriving would mean to be normal."

"What thriving means to me is more of just like growing as a person, understanding yourself, and then building a way to accept yourself or change certain things you do not like about yourself to an extent, like if it causes you like mental pain or something like trying to change your sexuality, then that's a different story."

# Thriving: Institutional



## Thriving as:

- Safe and welcomed
- Seen and celebrated
- Included and consulted on decision-making
- Represented in curriculum and among faculty and staff
- Supported and resourced

"Basic things need to be in place before anyone does any thriving. ... I need basic decency first. I need to be treated as a person and respected in all of my intersections. I need the racism to stop and the bigotry to stop before I can even get to, like, I'm no longer scared. Now let's talk about thriving, right?"

# Thriving: Institutional



- Welcoming and safe spaces

"[Thriving] would be having an environment that's not just like, 'Oh this professor is supportive and this centre is supportive and I feel safe at these two places.' It's actually creating an entire campus that makes people feel safe... so people don't have to hide their identities, but people can also, like, question their identities... and they don't have to, like, second guess what they're saying and who they're saying it to."

"Your campus is your home. So, it's like I'm welcomed to my own room, but I'm not welcomed in the kitchen."

"A collective effort by those in charge to make it a space where people not only feel safe—like do I feel unsafe on campus? No. But do I feel welcome and engaged based on my identity? No."



# Thriving: Institutional



- Seen and celebrated

"I think if a queer student was thriving on campus they would feel ... like their identity is celebrated, to feel like their ideas and their energies are celebrated and that the interactions that they have on campus don't empty them, but fill them up. So, that like when they're done having a class or they're done interacting with a professor they don't feel exhausted and just want to go home, they want to go and interact with the university community further. So, I think that's the difference between surviving and thriving is like if you're surviving you're getting through the day and like often you're just going home and like re-energizing yourself to once again go out. Whereas if you are on campus and you're thriving you're provided a space to fill up that cup and might continue to have fun."

# Thriving: Mix



- Thriving as a combination of previously noted factors:
  - Supported and resourced
  - Included (in spaces, curriculum and among faculty and staff)

"I think for me, like when I'm thriving really anywhere is when I feel like myself, like I feel comfortable, I can talk about who I am and my identity, and my struggles and triumphs. Yeah, so like the thriving aspect is being able to be me, and I'm not punished for it like queer folks usually are in society"

# Thriving: Mix



- Included (in spaces, curriculum and among faculty and staff)

"I think that thriving on campus like first and foremost, I think that having like queer education be integrated into the lot more subjects other than solely sexuality studies and have it recognized as like a genuine intersectionality that should be talked about, especially when talking about like social determinants of health. Or any kind of social service or policy perspective, having queer education and queer understood in curriculum, I think, would provide a lot safer and lot more like awareness about it."

"I think yes, it's important to have like 2SLGBTQ+ groups. It's also important to have that inclusion within other groups, right? So that you know you can belong there. You don't only have to go to movie night for the Rainbow club or whatever you know that, hey I can go to rainbow night but I can also go to Monte Carlo night and there's going to be a Rainbow table. Like just, it's OK for me to be wherever I am."

# Implications



- **Campus:** understand how your definition of *thriving* fits within both higher education and research contexts; caution for program replication
- **Leadership:** develop and resource systems, structures, programs that align with your campus' vision of *thriving*
- **Administrators:** evidence campus accountability — define, evaluate, and assess thriving measures on your campus; advocate above
- **Practitioners:** beyond programming...communicate and engage with students; show them you are listening and respond to what they share

# So, now what? Critical Questions:



- How does your campus describe *thriving*, and how does this align — or conflict — with research and literature? Who is framed as responsible for thriving?
- Where does your campus' 2SLGBTQ+ community congregate? Where does this community not congregate? How are these spaces designed? Who is included and excluded from these spaces?
- How does your campus make visible and celebrate 2SLGBTQ+ community (students, staff, faculty, librarians, alumni)? Are these efforts only made during concentrated times (e.g., Pride month in Toronto)?