

# Healthy UofT

## Summary and Findings of A Needs Assessment

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## **Background and Research Method**

At the opening ceremonies for the Centre for Health Promotion in 1990, University of Toronto President Rob Pritchard remarked that the University, under the leadership of the Centre, was committed to creating a healthier environment. Since then, a Healthy UofT Interest Group was formed and a number of different projects were undertaken to fulfill this mandate.

On April 27, 1998, the Centre for Health Promotion organized a retreat at Joker's Hill to discuss how the University of Toronto could move forward, to create an attitude of caring for the physical and mental health of those involved with the university. Representatives from various campus organizations agreed that a "healthy university" is one in which the environment is conducive to learning and research, and the people work in partnership to address complex problems that challenge the well-being of those who live, work, visit, attend, or advise the university. They also agreed that a healthy university is one in which the physical environment is clean, safe and individuals respect the dignity of others.

Since the retreat, several initiatives have been launched, including a committee to establish a Healthy University Award and student-run focus groups, supervised by Professor Doug Richards of the Faculty of Physical Education and Health.

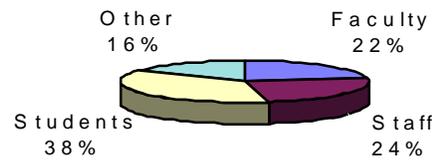
In addition, three work-study students were hired to conduct a survey, compile the data and present a report to the committee. In consultation with members of the Healthy UofT Interest Group, the students formulated questions and prepared a survey that sought to obtain information on existing Healthy University initiatives as well as to identify current needs, health issues and concerns, and underlying causes. In January, 1999, surveys were sent to 125 departments and campus community groups. As the first mailing produced a low response rate, a second mailing was sent out in February. A total of 29 responses were obtained (or 23.2%).

## **Findings**

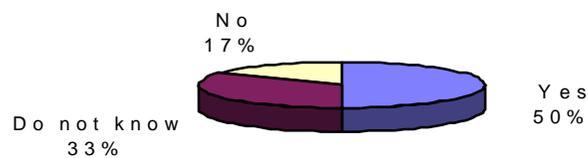
Although half of the respondents felt that the university in general was healthy more than a third (37%) also felt that their constituency specifically was either unhealthy or very unhealthy. What accounts for this disparity in the perception of the university's health and in the health of individual constituencies? Before this question is answered it is necessary to note that while stress was overwhelmingly the largest health concern, respondents cited a variety of factors as the underlying causes, such as the competitive structure and atmosphere, heavy workloads, job insecurity and economic factors. It is noteworthy, as well, that when asked what should be done to address these issues, most respondents cited social (20%), administrative (18%) and educational (16%) factors. This fits nicely into the WHO view of health promotion which suggests that "creating supportive environments" is essential to the goals of health.

It is safe to conclude then, that most campus community members, as a result of administrative and economic pressures, have become increasingly myopic in their work, and have focused primarily on achieving the goals of their specific area, rather than on the goals of the university community as a collective. This also accounts for the lack of community integration and supportive networks that appeared in the data. The fact that almost half (46%) of respondents believe that a Healthy University Coordinator is necessary, not only supports the recommendation of the 1998 retreat, but provides further evidence to the lack of community integration and cohesion.

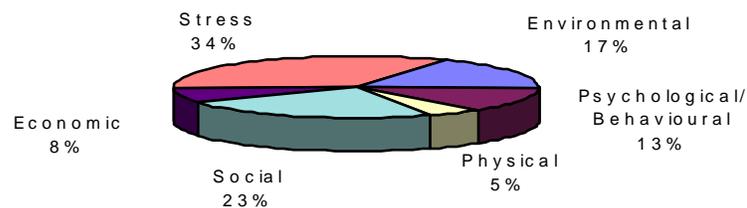
**Question 1: What is your major constituency?**



**Question 2: Is the university healthy in general?**

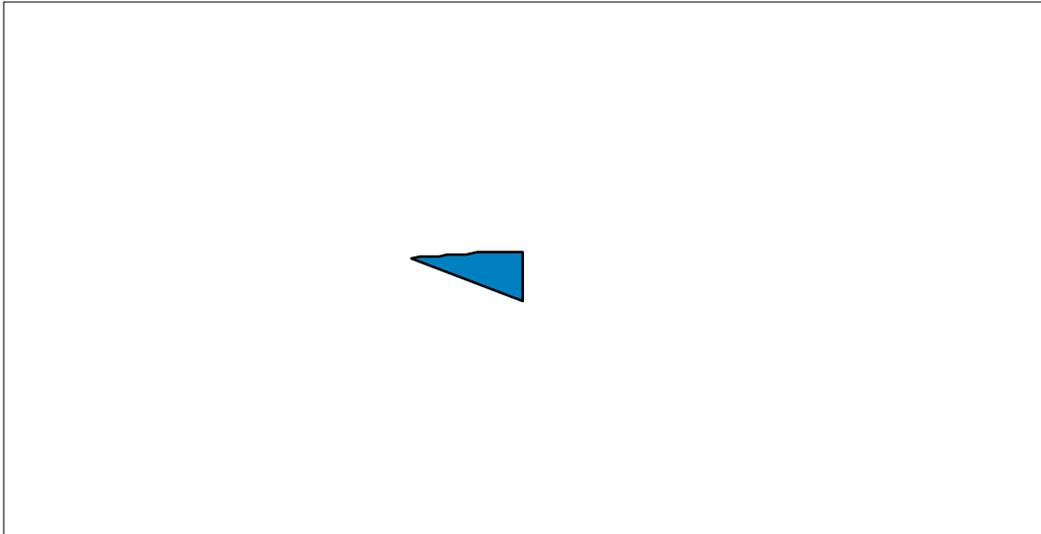


**Question 3: What are the major health concerns at the University of Toronto?**



**Some of the major health issues at the University of Toronto were identified as the following**

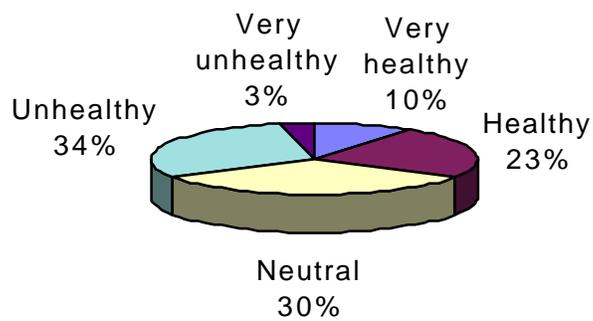
- **Environmental:** physical cleanliness, air quality
- **Psychological/Emotional:** addiction, mental illness
- **Physical:** illness, repetitive injury, nutrition, dental care
- **Social:** professional relationships, safety, apathy
- **Economic:** poverty, housing, working students, lack of funds for building repairs
- **Stress:** psychological, economic



**Some recommended actions to address health issues at UofT**

- **Education:** educational programs including stress management
- **Environment:** improve cleanliness, air circulation and quality
- **Economics:** increase funding, improve wages
- **Social:** increase community involvement and support services
- **Administrative:** more staff, more consultation with students and/or other groups
- **Psychological:** institute full benefits or provide an employee assistance program (EAP)
- **Occupation:** Reassess workload

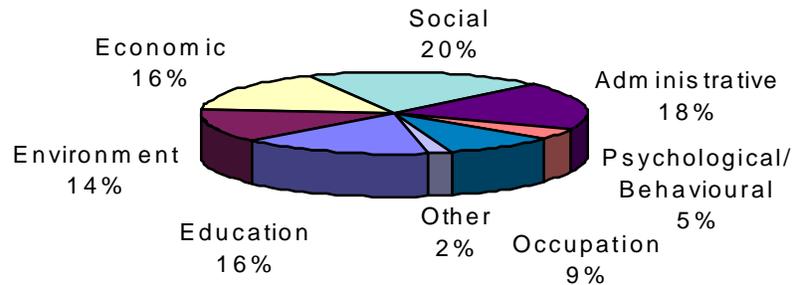
**Question 5: Is your constituency healthy?**



**Some of the major health issues for the constituencies served by survey respondents were**

- **Environmental:** physical environment, air quality
-

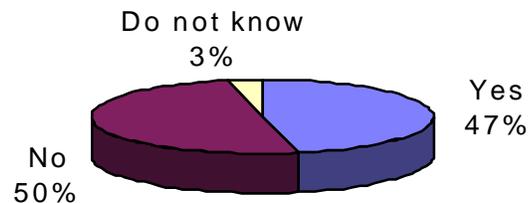
**Question 8: What should be done to address these issues**

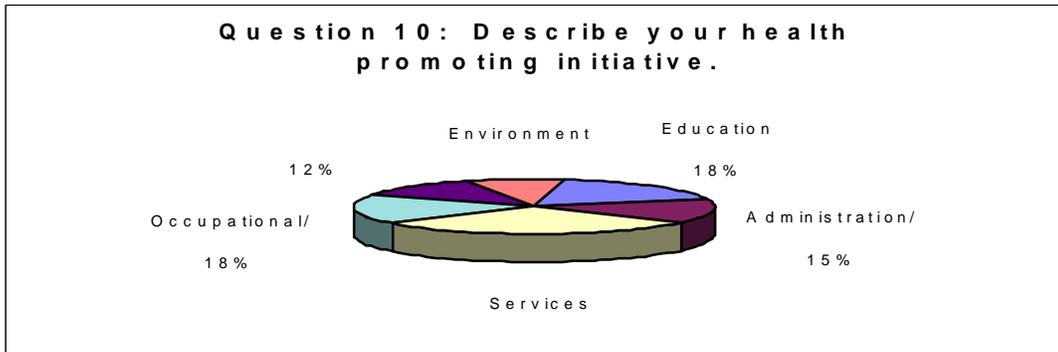


**Some recommended action to address the health issues for respective constituencies**

- **Education:** teach stress management, prevention programs
- **Environment:** improve cleanliness, improve facilities
- **Economics:** increase funding, improve wages and benefits
- **Social:** non-violent revolution, improved counseling and support
- **Administrative:** more staff, alter priorities to address student concerns
- **Psychological/Behavioural:** improve support, take responsibility for personal health
- **Occupation:** refocus on teaching and research, increase ergonomic furniture
- **Other:** provide alternative medicine services

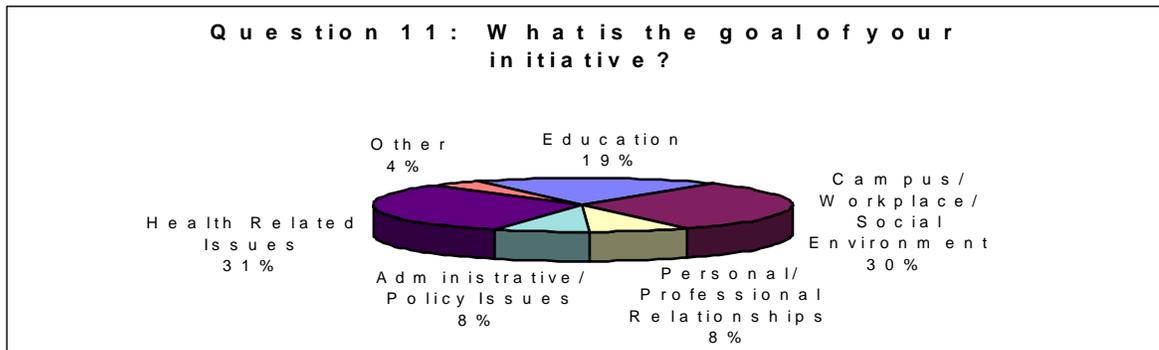
**Question 9: Does your department have an initiative that promotes health?**





### Description of some initiatives

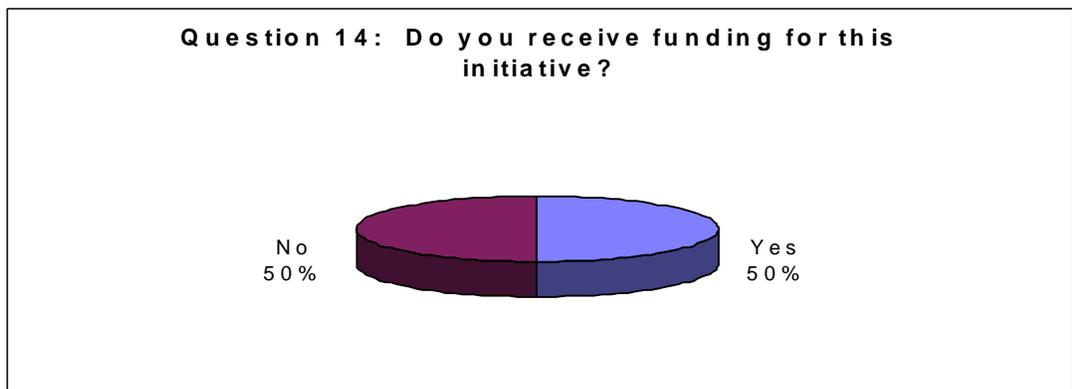
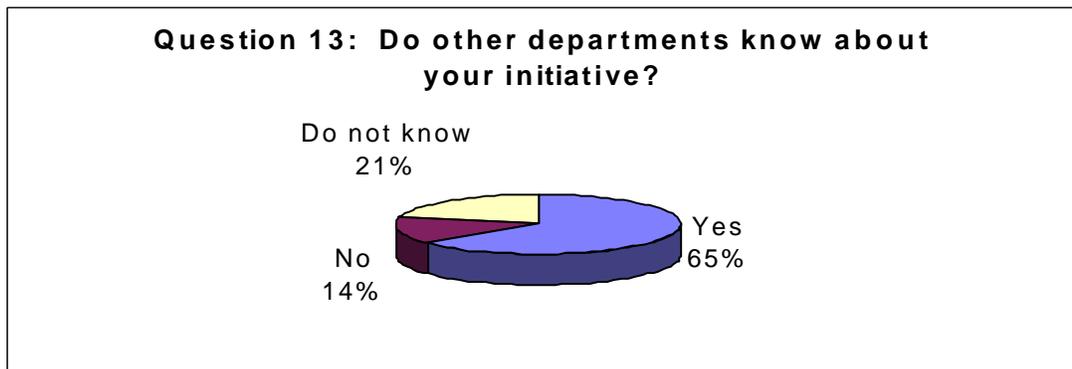
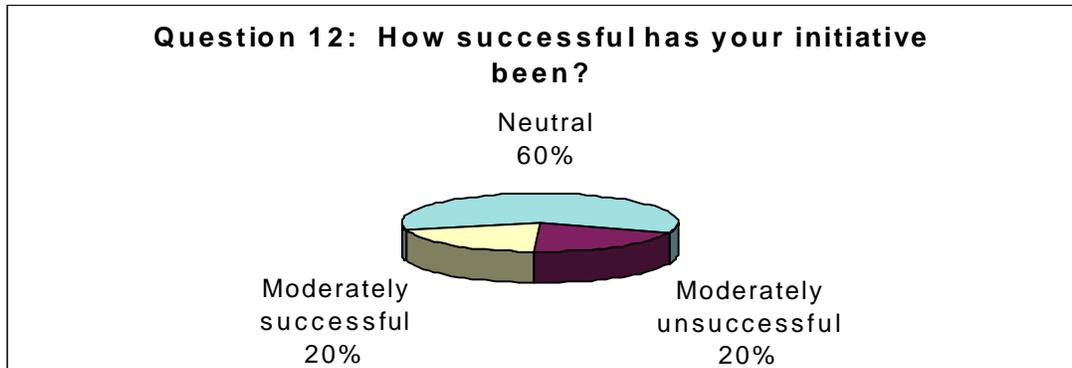
- **Education:** displays, workshops, handbooks, treatment programs
- **Administrative/policy:** healthy university program, union initiative
- **Health-related services:** counseling, health insurance plan, health and safety committee
- **Occupational/social conditions:** improve interpersonal relationships, workplace inspection
- **Physical environment:** campus stewardship committee, ergonomic furniture
- **Others:** safety audit, user's survey



### The goals of the initiative

- **Education:** raise awareness of available health services, act as a resource centre
- **Administrative:** improve wages, report concerns/findings to university administration
- **Health-related issues:** improve quality of life, evaluate health of UofT community
- **Campus/workplace/social environment:** create friendly and safe work and study atmosphere, advocate on minority issue

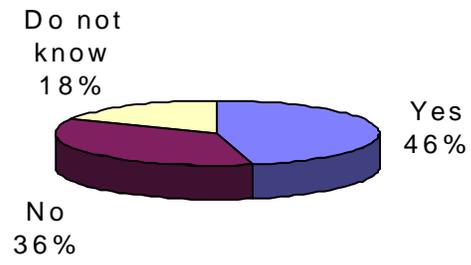
- **Personal/professional relationships:** create healthy UofT network, provide discussion opportunities of personal/professional concerns
- **Other:** compile database of health resources and activities



**Sources of funding for initiatives**

- student fees, grants, membership fees

**Question 15: Is a coordinator necessary?**



## **Acknowledgements**

### **Work-Study Students**

David Kim  
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### **Project Supervisors**

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