

2025 Social Sciences Research Colloquium

Student Oral Presenters

Erika Savage

PhD, Child and Youth Studies

Cognitive Engagement Across Academic and Extracurricular Activities

As young people move from middle childhood through adolescence, school disengagement tends to increase, placing some adolescents at risk of drop out (Archambault et al., 2022; Widlund et al., 2021). Youth engagement involves active participation both inside and outside of school settings, including involvement in extracurricular activities (Fredricks et al., 2019; Vandell & Simpkins, 2024; Wong et al., 2024). Cognitive engagement is considered one element of engagement that involves an investment in learning and seeking to understand and apply the efforts necessary for success (Skinner & Raine, 2022). It is linked to positive outcomes for youth, such as learning and skill development (Skinner & Raine, 2022; Vandell & Simpkins, 2024). Despite apparent developmental benefits of cognitive engagement in school and extracurricular contexts, limited research examines how cognitive engagement in one context contributes to the other.

The purpose of this study was to explore high school aged youth's perceptions and experiences of their cognitive engagement in extracurricular and school contexts, what experiences may foster cognitive engagement within and across each context, and what differences may exist. Eleven youth (ages 14 to 17; 5 female, 6 male), recruited from community youth organizations across Canada, participated in interviews about their school and extracurricular engagement. Thematic analysis (Brooks et al., 2015; King & Brooks, 2017) and inductive coding were used to analyze data. Findings suggest that youth leaders and educators could foster youth's cognitive engagement by integrating youth goals, providing diverse types of guidance, allowing more choice and control, and opportunities for individual enjoyment.

Supervisor: Dr. Heather Ramey, Child and Youth Studies

Mackenzie Rockbrune

Master's, Social Justice and Equity Studies

The Experiences, Awareness and Impact of Generative AI on Ontario Post-Secondary Students

This study investigates first-year undergraduate students' awareness, experiences, and perceptions of generative AI deepfakes in the context of technology-facilitated sexual violence (TFSV) at Brock University, an Ontario post-secondary institution. Preliminary survey data (N=85) reveal a significant gap between terminology awareness and lived experience: while 81% of respondents were unfamiliar with the term TFSV, 71% reported personal or secondhand experience with it. Participants overwhelmingly found AI-generated deepfake scenarios emotionally distressing (95%), privacy-violating (89%), and disruptive to academic or professional life (68%). These findings underscore the urgent need for proactive policy and educational interventions addressing AI-enabled harms, particularly within digital consent frameworks. The data further suggest that early consent education may enhance digital literacy and awareness of online risks, especially as generative technologies evolve. This research contributes to the growing discourse on digital safety and gender-based violence in higher education, emphasizing the importance of equipping students with the tools to navigate emerging digital threats.

Supervisor: Karen L Smith, Communication, Popular Culture and Film

Temilade Adesina

Master's, MA Applied Disability Studies (Leadership, Diversity, Community, and Culture)

Exploration of Concerns Affecting the Mental Well-being of Disabled Students who withdrew from Post-secondary Education in Ontario

Disabled students are enrolling in post-secondary education in Canada at increased rates compared to the last decade. Despite this improvement in enrollment, only a smaller percentage of them graduated. Systematic and structural barriers affect the health and participation of disabled students in academic activities. Therefore, understanding the experiences of disabled students and the factors that led them to withdraw from post-secondary education is necessary. Informed by critical disability studies and academic ableism, I sought to understand the factors that affect the mental well-being of disabled students and how they lead them to withdraw from post-secondary education in Ontario. This research utilized an interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology to investigate their life experiences. Five (n = 5) disabled students who withdrew from post-secondary education were recruited for online interviews via social media. Five descriptive themes were developed from the data, capturing the experiences of the participants: (1) positive beginnings undermined by insurmountable endings, (2) disabled students' encounters with academic ableism, (3) retrogressive emotional experience of disabled students, (4) withdrawal as a slow unravelling of hope and belonging, and (5) envisioning change. Identifying that some began with good mental well-being, while others described challenges as they progress in their studies. This study described impending issues that impact well-being and identified potential areas for intervention in post-secondary education to avert the withdrawal of disabled students. Likewise, areas where ableism still exists in post-secondary institutions were identified. The results also provide recommendations for society, academic institutions, and policymakers to support disabled students in successfully navigating post-secondary education.

Supervisor: Dr. Laura Mullins, Applied Disability Studies