

On the Record

Fri, Oct 11, 2024 2:55PM 10:13

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

unaffordable housing, tuition woes, safety concerns, reading week, hustle culture, mental health, burnout, digital work, engineering students, midterms, winter reading week, student support, workload stress, personal well-being, student surveys

SPEAKERS

Streeter 3, S. Saadeq Ahmed, Roger McIntyre, Streeter 1, Streeter 6, Streeter 5, Jade Cruz, Streeter 2, Streeter 4, Abbie North

- A** Abbie North 00:07
Welcome back to the OTR Podcast. I'm Abbie North,
- S** S. Saadeq Ahmed 00:11
and I'm S. Saadeq Ahmed, this semester, we're doing things a bit differently for our podcast.
- A** Abbie North 00:17
We're going to focus on some of the big questions students have about their experiences at Tmu, from
- S** S. Saadeq Ahmed 00:23
unaffordable housing in the GTA to tuition woes to the safety around young and Dundas to
- A** Abbie North 00:30
anything you want us to talk about. Email us at ontherecordnews@torontomu.ca
- S** S. Saadeq Ahmed 00:37
today's big question is, is reading week a break?

A

Abbie North 00:41

Are you good at taking breaks? Do you feel like they're a waste of time? Many of us skip breaks, whether it's 30 minutes or a weekend, and indulge in so called hustle culture,

S

S. Saadeq Ahmed 00:53

most university students would agree. And with fall reading week creeping up, we want to know if students really take reading week as a chance to kick back and relax.

A

Abbie North 01:04

According to a 2013 article in the Toronto Star, University started offering a fall break to allow students to de stress and get caught up with their studies.

S

S. Saadeq Ahmed 01:15

Well, Abbie looking at the poll right outside our OTR newsroom, most students, more than 85% of those who voted lean towards reading week not being a break,

A

Abbie North 01:28

and with some students mentioning assignments due on Thanksgiving or asking the university to acknowledge students' mental health, there is no clocking in or clocking out for university students.

R

Roger McIntyre 01:39

We know from many lines of research that many people are feeling burned out. They feel like they're on duty. 24/7, especially with the digital work from home, home life that we all have now, or that's very common in society now, people are always feeling that they're always on duty, and this is too much. And people are feeling, you know, feeling stretched.

S

S. Saadeq Ahmed 02:00

That was Roger McIntyre, a professor in the University of Toronto's psychiatry department, and I can relate to feeling stretched. How about you Abbie?

A

Abbie North 02:01

Well, Sadeeq, I plan on spending my reading week, worrying about my midterms and catching up on homework. What are your plans?

S

S. Saadeq Ahmed 02:17

As a graduate student in journalism, I no longer have to worry about midterms, but I do have plenty of assignments that are due immediately after reading week.

A

Abbie North 02:27

Okay, so now that we have our plans out of the way, let's take a closer look at when some universities started offering a break.

S

S. Saadeq Ahmed 02:35

Although Trent University has had a fall reading week since 1964 many universities in Ontario didn't start offering the break until 2011

A

Abbie North 02:45

A Queen's University survey in 2013 showed that 10% of students said they had seriously considered self harm, 6.8% self harmed, And 1.3% attempted suicide. With more universities becoming increasingly sensitive to the pressure placed on students, the recognition that students need to have some rest time, started to become the norm. from then on.

R

Roger McIntyre 03:11

I think that everyone is different. I don't think there's a one size fits all approach here, and there's no doubt about it that we as human beings need to have not only the opportunity to work, which is very healthy, but also the opportunity to so called Play, in other words, to relax and do things that are maybe not so task oriented, that work involves. And

A

Abbie North 03:32

I don't know about you, but I'm feeling stressed just thinking about a so called break, knowing things will only ramp up from here.

S

S. Saadeq Ahmed 03:41

What does this mean for TMU? According to our student Union's website, and I'm quoting here, "following lobbying from the Students Union, TMU was one of the first Canadian universities to implement a fall reading week for most students." End Quote,



A

Abbie North 03:59

And while most students are able to close their textbooks or enjoy a staycation of sorts. Engineering students aren't so lucky. These students don't have a fall reading week due to the requirements engineering programs need to meet in order to stay accredited.

S

S. Saadeq Ahmed 04:15

To understand more about the engineering scheduling process, we spoke to Jade Cruz, a first year academic services and success facilitator.

J

Jade Cruz 04:25

From my understanding, for engineering program, it's a very intense program. Students normally have a full heavy course load, especially on their first year, they would have five courses, five to six courses. That's if they take a liberal and then same thing for their winter term.

A

Abbie North 04:41

We actually learned that engineering students only get a winter reading week. They don't have one in the fall.

S

S. Saadeq Ahmed 04:48

So what you're saying is they have too much work to actually be able to take a break. Yep,

A

Abbie North 04:53

you got it right. And I know it's crazy.

S

S. Saadeq Ahmed 04:57

Well, for students across TMU the fall Reading Week has only really been around since 2011 when students advocated that a week off would result in better mental health.

R

Roger McIntyre 05:08

So I think that people should keep healthy, get some sleep, eat well, get some exercise. I think people should always do that, especially during reading week.

S

S. Saadeq Ahmed 05:16

So basically, the advice I get from my parents will actually help me feel better.

A Abbie North 05:21

I mean, I've never felt bad after eight hours of sleep and a morning run.

S S. Saadeq Ahmed 05:26

So if we actually take reading week as a break and prioritize our well being, does that mean we will come back being more refreshed and willing to learn?

A Abbie North 05:36

Well, not in all cases, according to the published article, student time usage during fall Reading Week, a reading week can prove to be more harmful than helpful.

S S. Saadeq Ahmed 05:48

In fact, a week without classes outside one's familiar routine may actually be harmful, since a busy schedule can serve as a distraction from personal problems, and the removal of a student support network on campus may even put them at risk.

A Abbie North 06:04

In addition, some argue a week long break is unfair, since tuition is not suitably deducted to accommodate the reduced class time,

S S. Saadeq Ahmed 06:13

many universities offer support and services that promote both academic and personal well being and reading week could be the perfect break to reach out to these services.

A Abbie North 06:24

For example, Jade Cruz explains how the engineering department has services available to students who could be struggling with a heavy workload.

J Jade Cruz 06:33

One thing we always tell students is, if they ever encounter any issue, always drop by for support. Because a lot of students, what we notice is they are terrified from reaching out for support, because they think that it makes them less of a student, but really that's just

support, because they think that it makes them less as a student, but really that's just hindering you from completing, you know, being successful into the program.

S

S. Saadeq Ahmed 06:50

So Hmm, now that I think about it, it makes sense why so many students struggle, especially around midterm season. Yeah.

A

Abbie North 06:58

I mean, on one hand, it makes sense to want to implement a period of rest and recharge. But from personal experience, once a routine is disrupted, it's hard to get back on track, especially during this crisp weather.

S

S. Saadeq Ahmed 07:12

So now that you've heard a little bit more about why we have a reading week and the benefits or disadvantages it has on students. We wanted to know more,

A

Abbie North 07:22

so we sent our reporters out to find out what you think about whether reading week really is a break. Here's what you said.

S

Streeter 1 07:31

I think reading week the intention of it was supposed to be for catching up on schoolwork, but I consider it a break because I don't do schoolwork during it, and it's also taking place during Thanksgiving, I think, which I think is also Yeah. So I would say, yes, it's a break, but the intention of it is, like trying to take advantage of, like, already a break, which is Thanksgiving. So I just feel like for my program, at least it's not like I never need to catch up on anything, like my program's not as like reading as heavy as other programs. So I feel like it's pretty easy to catch up with, especially for like, a week.

S

Streeter 2 08:03

Yeah, no, I don't think it's a break. I mean, I don't think it's necessarily meant to be a break, like it's called a reading week. I think it's a study week. So I don't necessarily think that it's a break, because I think most people have midterms and assignments, a lot of them surrounding reading week. But I'm not sure that it's necessarily meant to be a break.

S

Streeter 3 08:22

Yes, I do believe that reading week is actually a break, but it also depends on what program

res, I do believe that reading week is actually a break, but it also depends on what program you're in, because it depends on your times of midterm. But for engineers like us, we don't have the first reading week. We have a reading week in February.

S Streeter 4 08:33

I'd say Reading Week is 100% a break. Personally, I'm going back to my hometown and I'm not opening my laptop for a week. I'm gonna get everything done before the break and just enjoy, enjoy my time with my family, play some video games, play some basketball

S Streeter 5 08:48

Reading Week is definitely a break. Look, you know, a lot of people go on vacation for it. I mean, it's great way to just, you know, relax, take some time to yourself, because during the week, you know, we get busy with assignments, and especially if you're a commuter, you know, you get busy finding out what train you have to take, and, you know, getting from the train station back home, that can also be, you know, an issue, just with traffic jams and whatnot. So, yeah, I mean, you know, reading week is definitely, I would consider a break, for sure.

S Streeter 6 09:16

I think it is like I'm in Media Productions. We don't have a lot of midterms, so there's not a lot to do, like to study for. But I do think it's not too because when I think, when we think of reading week, it sounds like a huge vacation. It's only a week. That's not a long time. It's like, even though we don't have midterms, you are still studying and stuff for exams, doing readings and stuff. So I feel like by the time I'm done all that, I'm only gonna have, like, three days left, and that's not a long time. So yes and no, I feel like,

A Abbie North 09:43

Thanks for stepping up to the mic. TMU, we appreciate you going on the record.

S S. Saadeq Ahmed 09:49

Remember, if you have a big question for us, email us at ontherecordnews@torontomu.ca. I'm as S. Saadeq Ahmed

A Abbie North 09:57

And I'm Abbie North, take some time to relax, catch up on some work and spend time with your loved ones. We'll talk to you after reading week.