

WELLNESS IN THE CLASSROOM

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PURPOSE

Outline the connection between classroom practices and student wellness. Describe strategies to promote student wellness and resiliency. Discuss how to support wellness through course planning, facilitation, and assessment.

BACKGROUND

When students come to your classroom, they bring with them their previous experiences and outside lives, some of which may hinder their ability to fully engage and learn. If learning is to happen, students must feel safe in the classroom environment and be given the opportunity to step aside from the external barriers that may impact their learning to allow for open communication and visibility (Brown, 2018).

HOW TO

Foster social inclusion and belonging

A classroom with an established community supports student learning, resiliency, and retention. By encouraging students' relationships with the instructor and their peers, instructors can support student well-being.

Supporting Instructor-Student Connection

Building relationships with your students will encourage them to work harder and reach out for help more easily when needed (University of British Columbia, n.d.). Simple actions to foster connection include:

1. Introducing yourself to the class
2. Learning and using students' names
3. Having short, informal conversations
4. Sharing appropriate personal anecdotes and using humour
5. Encouraging attendance at office hours by describing their purpose to students
6. Displaying your passion for the subject

Supporting Student - Student Connections

While students' relationship with faculty is important, it is also important for students to develop reciprocal relationships with their peers. Quality relationships with peers can positively impact students' resiliency (Miksza et al., 2021). Instructors can support peer-to-peer relationships by:

1. Maintaining consistent groups throughout the term
2. Encouraging group work and in-class discussions
3. Building learning communities (e.g., use [icebreakers](#))
4. Engaging students by using interactive teaching methodology (e.g., think – pair – share, jigsaw activity, and group problem solving, etc.)
5. Using Office 365 tools for engagement including Microsoft Whiteboard, Forms, shared word documents, etc.
6. Creating opportunities for students to authentically work together; ensure understanding of why group work is the best method for completing the task.

Holistic Supports

Student well-being is enhanced when students are holistically supported. Students are whole people, not just students in your class. You can do this by:

1. Recognizing students have lives outside of academics. Students are more than their midterm mark.
2. Engaging in conversation not related to course work. Get to know your students and their hobbies.
3. Setting deadlines to encourage work-life balance.
4. Offering deadline extensions; flexibility reduces anxiety.
5. Reducing cost of course materials (e.g., open access textbooks, readings available online, etc.)
6. Making it clear that marks do not determine worth. Grades do not define a student's ability to learn or succeed.

Structure the Course for Wellness

Students are able to learn more successfully in the classroom and also feel supported outside of the classroom when a course is structured to support student wellness (University of British Columbia, n.d.).

1. Showing value in the subject matter; connect content to course outcomes, the broader program, and career pathways. Showing value in the learning process not just the final result.
2. Indicating what is expected on assessments using clear rubrics, checklists, or criteria.
3. Sharing the format of quizzes, tests, and exams ahead of time (e.g., portion of the assessment is multiple choice, short answer, essay, etc.).
4. Assigning low-weight to group marks. High-stakes group work can cause conflict and stress in group assignments; keeping group work low-stakes allows students to work collaboratively without some of the pressure that comes from higher stakes assessments.
5. Adding opportunities for meta-cognition (e.g., [assignment and exam wrappers](#))

Facilitating the Course

By facilitating the course in a supportive manner, student well-being and motivation will be maintained. Some things that you could do to ensure a supportive learning environment include:

1. Communicating reliably with students (e.g., send class announcements on the same day and at the same time every week).
2. Explaining things from multiple perspectives. Students may need to hear something a second time, and differently. You can build community in your classroom by having students explain things to each other.
3. Communicating grading and assessment policies clearly. Students want to know where their marks are coming from; clear assessment criteria will help them to meet your expectations.
4. Using clear examples and simple language; this supports all students in their understanding.
5. Giving students a lesson plan or an agenda for their class sessions.
6. Re-capping at the end of the lesson.
7. Including [active learning methods](#).

Promote a Culture of Wellness in the Classroom

When wellness and mental health are openly discussed in a classroom environment, on a regular basis, those topics become less stigmatized and more readily accepted as normal conversation. Students are more likely to discuss their own wellness and mental health and feel more comfortable asking for help when they need it.

1. Sharing a “Wellness Slideshow” with students during lulls in class (e.g., before class, during breaks, after dismissal) showing wellness resources and information.
2. Informing students about campus resources such as the [Assiniboine Wellness Hub](#) and [I.M. Well](#).
3. Talking about your own mental health.
4. Checking in on students who seem unwell.
5. Addressing campus and community issues which may affect multiple students.
6. Sharing general information about mental health.
7. Modeling healthy behaviors and self-care practices.
8. Integrating Wellness into Curriculum
9. Encouraging Participation in Wellness Activities
10. Recognizing and responding to students needs

For more information on Student Success Services and Supports check out the [Faculty Handbook](#).

REFERENCES

Brown, B. (2018). *Building Brave Spaces for Students*. Brené Brown.

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