



EMBEDDING WELLNESS IN COURSES

MAY 2022

Purpose

To provide easy-to-incorporate wellness strategies that require minimal time and effort but can have significantly positive impact on the wellbeing of both students and faculty. Embedding mental health and wellness throughout your course will help to normalize these topics, reduce stigma, and encourage everyone to take care of themselves in a good way.

Background

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) released *The National Standard of Canada for Mental Health and Wellbeing for Post-Secondary Students* in October of 2020 as “a set of guidelines to help post-secondary institutions support the mental-health [sic] and well-being of their students” (MHCC, 2022). By including mental health and wellness information in course curricula, post-secondary institutions can generate a campus-wide culture of wellbeing that impacts students, faculty, and the entire college community (Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, 2019).

How To

There are many simple actions that instructors can take to support the wellness of themselves and the students in their classes. The following, while not exhaustive, is a list of strategies for instructors to support wellness in the classroom.

One Free Pass

Create a mechanism that allows students one “free pass” for situations which normally have negative consequences such as missing a day of class or turning in an assignment late without having to provide an explanation. This is a strategy that saves instructors time as well as reduces stress and anxiety for students.

Drop Lowest Mark

On a set of quizzes, reflections, journals, etc. add an extra assignment and give students the option to drop the lowest mark of that set. The option to drop a low mark takes the anxiety away from students who happen to miss an assessment or not do as well on an assessment as they hoped.

Music

A few minutes prior to class starting, play some [popular music](#) to set an upbeat tone as students enter in person or virtually. Use the music as reference to begin the class on a more casual note. You may also consider conducting small contests or using high grades on assignments, quizzes, etc. to give the students an opportunity to choose the music you play. Have students submit their favourite “feel good” song(s) and create a playlist to distribute to the entire class.

Talk about Mental Health

Bring the conversation of wellness into your classroom:

- Create a brave classroom by consistently putting forth the message that struggles with mental health are normal and accepted.
- Make reference to college, community, and global issues that may have an impact on your students and express an understanding of vicarious trauma.
- Include a pedagogical statement about mental health on your course outline and include crisis service contact information. Encourage your students to take a few minutes to add these numbers to their cell phone contacts leading with the word “Crisis” for easy searchability in an event that they or someone they know needs them.
- Choose readings, discussion prompts, assignment topics, etc. that include a mental health and/or wellness component. Need help finding material? Contact the Wellness Student Success Advisor (wellness@assiniboine.net) to assist with resource gathering.
- Only share your personal information as you feel comfortable and see fit. If you have experience with mental illness and your own comfort level allows, share aspects of your journey.

Help for Students

If a student reaches out with mental health concerns or you observe behaviour that is worrisome, contact your School’s Student Success Advisor. Contact Brandy Robertson, Wellness Student Success Advisor (wellness@assiniboine.net) if you need a copy of ACC’s Suicide Prevention Pocket Guide and Safety Plan Template and Guide. CLI also has job aids for [Supporting a Student in Crisis](#). If you are able, educate yourself with [Mental Health First Aid](#) and [LivingWorks Start](#).

Normalize the Mental Health Continuum

Students are introduced to the Mental Health Continuum in Module 8 of College Foundations. With so much stigma still surrounding mental illness, understanding that we all have mental health and that it functions on a continuum is important for the creation of a well student body. The Mental Health Commission of Canada provides a simple [Mental Health Continuum self-check](#) that you might make students aware of at key stress points in the year. Ensure that students know to contact their School Student Success Advisor with any concerns they may have. Making even brief mention of issues such as [test anxiety](#), [procrastination](#), and [imposter](#)

[syndrome](#) that are common for most students will help to normalize these feelings and encourage help-seeking behaviour.

Classroom Guidelines

Co-create respectful classroom guidelines with students so that everyone develops a clear understanding of expected etiquette; do not assume that students will know how to interact with their peers. Create a sharable guidelines document to distribute to students and consider a brief reference to this document at the start of every class. You may even ask students if they feel that anything should be added to or removed from the list each class.

Build a Positive Learning Community

Students want to feel like they belong in their classroom. Building a positive student environment helps students feel like they belong and that they are part of a learning community. Greet students in a friendly manner and uphold classroom expectations to maintain a space where students feel supported in their learning.

Discuss Accessibility & Disability Services

As part of the introduction to your classes, include information on ACC's [Accessibility and Disability Services](#). Take a few moments to explain that accommodations to aid student academic success can be put in place for a variety of long term and chronic medical conditions, physical differences, learning differences, mental illness, hearing or vision impairment. ACC will also accommodate temporary injury, situational conditions, and short term illnesses wherever reasonably possible. Inform students that their first point of contact for any accessibility needs is their School Student Success Advisor.

Wellness Breaks

The wealth of research on adult attention spans mentions time frames anywhere from a mere eight seconds to 20 minutes (McCall, 2014). Allowing the brain to un-focus periodically allows for a resurgence of energy, more impulse control, emotion regulation, resilience development, better decision making, and greater creativity (Pillay, 2017). ACC's Learning Curve has a number of short (under 5 minutes) guided [wellness activity videos](#) that could be easily incorporated at any point during class.

References

- Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health. (17 Sep, 2019). Embedding Wellness in Post-Secondary Learning and Experience. <https://bp-net.ca/program/embedding-wellness-in-post-secondary-learning-and-experience-for-credit-wellness-courses/>
- McCall, K. (18 April, 2014). *8-Second Attention Span?*. Linked In. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20140418171300-15742110-writing-for-goldfish/>
- Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2022). *What is the Standard?* <https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/studentstandard/>

Pillay, S. (12 May, 2017). *Your Brain Can Only Take So Much Focus*. Harvard Business Review.
<https://hbr.org/2017/05/your-brain-can-only-take-so-much-focus>

For further learning and resources

[Power Poses](#) for confidence building.

[Virtual Calming Room](#)

[Neck Pain Relief Stretches](#) (5 mins)

[Seated Back Pain Relief Stretches](#) (5 mins)