

Sacramento State's Wellness in the Classroom Toolkit



Introduction

A growing body of evidence related to worksite wellness and education (both K-12 and higher education) demonstrates the connections between creating environments that enhance wellbeing and enhanced productivity, learning, satisfaction, engagement, and retention. [Simon Fraser University, 2019. Rationale for well-being in learning environments.]

By taking small actions to support students' wellbeing and personal development, faculty can have a profound impact on students' ability to learn and succeed academically. The following areas and strategies have been identified as promising practices to support student wellness and learning.* While some of these strategies are most easily implemented in synchronous classes, many will work for asynchronous classes as well.

*Adapted from Simon Fraser University's "[Well-Being in Learning Environments](#)" program.

Positive Classroom Culture

A positive, welcoming classroom environment can support both student and faculty wellbeing. Inspiration, open-mindedness, and connection can help create a culture of positivity.

Strategies:

- Take time to introduce yourself during your first class and learn a little bit about your students' needs [[Get to Know Your Prof](#)]
- Develop a teaching philosophy and share it with your students [[Developing a Teaching Philosophy](#)]
- Take care of your own well-being so that you can be present and encouraging for your students [[Sac State Employee Wellness website](#)]
- Use a class check-in activity to connect with students; for example, ask students to write 1 – 2 words about how they're feeling that day in the chat box or a Poll Everywhere word cloud
- Provide an inspiring or funny quote within your slides to lighten the mood [[Sample inspirational slides](#)]
- Offer breaks in class where students can take a breather, or facilitate a quick stretch break [[Deskercise](#)]
- Use active learning techniques to create an engaging and dynamic learning environment [[Ohio State University](#)] [[University of Michigan](#)]

- Encourage discussion through facilitation activities such as think-pair-share
- Acknowledge that university can be intimidating and stressful for students within your course syllabus
- Share a bit about yourself, your career path or setbacks you've overcome
- Allow students space to be wrong and encourage alternate viewpoints
- Be intentional about setting a caring tone throughout the semester
- Create a friendlier syllabus that promotes student equity, belonging, and growth using tips from the [Student Experience Project](#) learning module

Personal Development

Creating opportunities for personal growth in course design can help increase students' skills, resilience, and career-readiness.

Strategies:

- Use journaling or other reflective activities to encourage personal growth
- Offer mindfulness or other skill building activities during class breaks or as part of the course [\[UCLA's Mindful Awareness Research Center\]](#)
- Encourage students to connect with campus departments or student organizations that offer connection/learning opportunities, including [Student Health & Counseling Services](#), the [PRIDE Center](#), the [Women's Resource Center](#), the [Parents and Families Program](#), the [Multicultural Center](#), the [Martin Luther King Jr. Center](#), [Student Organizations and Leadership](#), or [The WELL](#)
- Encourage students to seek co-curricular, volunteer, and internship opportunities (for example, [Leadership Initiative](#), the [Community Engagement Center](#), and the [Career Center](#))
- Consider what skills students will need to succeed in life and in their careers and try to find ways to foster these in class (for example teamwork, communication, problem solving, empathy, initiative)

Flexibility

The ability to have some flexibility and control in their learning experiences helps students to feel empowered and supported, thus enhancing their wellbeing.

Strategies:

- Offer students the option to choose their “best two out of three” for assignments or quizzes
- Offer students choice in assignments and opportunities to set their own deadlines or percentage of final grade for assignments [\[Deadline/Grade Worksheet\]](#)
- Seek feedback from students throughout the semester. This could be done through Zoom polls or set up in [Qualtrics](#). [\[Comment Card Example\]](#)
- Use interactive tools like Zoom polls, Poll Everywhere, or Kahoot to promote class input and participation
- In your syllabus, offer a variety of ways for students to contact you with questions or concerns
- Consider providing students with lecture notes or power point slides ahead of class, and providing lecture recordings (particularly helpful for ESL students whereby they have more opportunities to work through the rate of speech during lectures)

- Consider using free or low-cost education resources on [Affordable Learning Solutions](#)
- Allow students to retake tests if your discipline allows

Social Connection

Social connection fosters student resilience. Facilitating interaction in and out of class can help create a sense of community and help students build social networks.

Strategies:

- Have students introduce themselves during the first class or use a social connectedness start-up activity [[Icebreakers](#)]
- Make it clear that the quality of teamwork in group assignments is important by including marks for the group process in grading rubrics
- Encourage students to participate in study groups (or assign them)
- Design lecture assignments that require students to collectively work on study questions and participate in small group discussions
- Conduct a [social belonging intervention](#) during part of a class session
- Ask students to take down the name and contact information of at least one of their peers so that they can connect should they miss a lecture or want to form a study group
- Suggest opportunities for students to interact outside of class time (if you have time to join them that is even better)
- Offer mini breaks in class and encourage students to take this time to get to know one another
- If possible, move tables and chairs into small groups to facilitate discussion (just be sure to return them after class)

Inclusivity

An inclusive learning environment demonstrates an intentional consideration for all students and can enhance wellbeing.

Strategies:

- Create class guidelines as a group to respect difference and create a safe place for discussion. You can develop this by getting student feedback on what would help them to feel safe in the classroom, and/or contributing ideas such as these [classroom guidelines](#)
- Accommodate different learning styles by providing a variety of ways students can engage and participate in the lecture and learning, such as discussion boards, written reflections, oral presentations, among others
- Use activities and practices in class to help build your and your students' intercultural competence
- Use inclusive language and gender neutral pronouns
- Offer a values clarification exercise [[Carnegie Mellon University](#)] [[Simon Fraser University](#)]
- Encourage students to speak to you about any accessibility concerns they may have; the [Disability Access Center](#) can provide consultation and resources if needed
- Break final paper into a series of smaller assignments
- Make expectations clear and remind students what resources are available to them

- Provide visual support (text and/or graphic)
- Pause and summarize or ask students to summarize in the chat (“I want you to summarize my example and add another” or “take a minute to prepare a question about this”)
- Incorporate principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to help accommodate diverse learners [\[udlcenter.org\]](#). Sac State IRT offers [UDL learning resources](#) and consultation. University of Waterloo offers a helpful list of [UDL instructional strategies](#).
- Assess your class climate using a [free online tool](#) that can help you identify equity gaps and address them using evidence-based strategies
- When presenting visual aids, give a verbal explanation so that students who have difficulty seeing or processing what they see can follow along
- Chunk large amounts of content into small sections (or short videos if your class is asynchronous) and take small breaks between sections so that students don’t become cognitively overloaded

Optimal Challenge

Being challenged, but having sufficient resources to meet that challenge, creates an environment where students perform and feel their best.

Strategies:

- Consider the timing of exams and assignments to alleviate undue stress
- Provide feedback on each stage of assignments and help students progress to the next stage of larger projects
- Avoid very heavily weighted components, such as an exam worth 50% of the final grade
- Recognize that more tasks do not always equate to more learning
- Set clear course goals, and ensure assignments and expectations are clear from the start
- Provide activities where students design mock test/study questions
- Give specific, targeted, and timely feedback about strengths and weaknesses
- Publish grading rubrics in advance [\[Grading Rubric Examples\]](#)
- Remind students that challenges, failure, and difficulty are all part of the learning process, and that the best and most lasting learning is always challenging
- Provide examples of exemplary work to communicate expectations and facilitate student understanding of the assignment and how it will be assessed
- Vary your teaching methods. In addition to lecturing, include discussions, peer learning activities, problem-solving activities, and other strategies that fit your lesson. See [Nine Alternatives to Lecturing](#) and [Active Learning Activities](#).

Civic Engagement and Real-Life Learning

Having the opportunity to contribute to real-life settings through their coursework helps students build their personal skills and confidence, supporting their intellectual and emotional wellness.

Strategies:

- Lead discussions or activities that help students develop a sense of civic responsibility
- Recognize that universities play a role in developing the leaders of tomorrow and encourage students to explore their own values and goals

- Utilize examples from the real world in class (for example news clips, career advice, guest speakers from the workforce students hope to enter)
- Bring in guest speakers or program alumni who can help relate the course material to career development, real life issues, and work skills
- Create assignments in which the results can be utilized by a community group or campus initiative
- Where possible, incorporate experiential or service learning components into your course
- Encourage students to get involved in extracurricular volunteer work

Instructor Support

Sacramento State students say faculty play a key role in their experience of being supported on campus. Setting a caring tone can go a long way toward helping students feel they belong.

Strategies:

- Share your own story of a prior struggle and how you overcame it
- Whenever possible, let students know you care about them and their success
- Demystify your role by sharing an anecdote, joke, or sharing something about yourself
- Be learner centered: “be interested in learners instead of trying to be an interesting teacher”
- Provide constructive feedback and outline specific actions students can take to improve
- Consider the “whole student” and the pressures and challenges the students may face outside your class
- Provide students with multiple ways to get in touch with you
- Check in on students regularly – this can be done through class check-in activities or individually
- Call your office hours “student drop-in hours”, and encourage students to drop in for help with the course or just to connect

Services and Supports

The classroom provides an important venue for faculty to connect students with resources that can support their wellbeing, resilience, and effective learning.

Strategies:

- Provide health tips or health resources in your Canvas course, in class, or during breaks
- Remind your students about the importance of sleep and discourage all-nighters
- Use mindfulness or relaxation recordings for a break [[UCLA's Mindful Awareness Research Center](#)]
- Link students to the resources at [The WELL](#) (including medical services, group and individual counseling, wellness education, and fitness services) to support their resilience and well-being
- Students can't concentrate if they're hungry, and close to half of Sac State students experience some level of food insecurity. Link students to campus resources for food, housing, and financial assistance at [the CARES Office](#) and the [ASI Food Pantry](#)

- Familiarize yourself with the various student support services and co-curricular learning supports across campus
- Invite guest speakers from various campus services to present on their services
- Familiarize yourself with the [Red Folder](#) for information on supporting students in distress (installed on your desktop, available online, and available for mobile devices on Google Play or App Store)
- Remind students about the resources available to them through the [Peer and Academic Resource Center \(PARC\)](#) or [Student Health & Counseling Services](#)
- Include information about campus support services in your syllabus

Document Links

- [Well-Being in Learning Environments](#)
<http://www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE.html>
- [Get to Know Your Prof](#)
<https://www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/resource-library/resources/get-to-know-your-prof.html>
- [Developing a Teaching Philosophy](#) <https://drakeinstitute.osu.edu/instructor-support/teaching-portfolio-development/philosophy-teaching-statement>
- [Sac State Employee Wellness website](#) <https://www.csus.edu/wellness/employee-wellness/>
- [Sample inspirational slides](#)
<http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/healthycampuscommunity/teachingpractices/Inspirational%20Quotes.pptx>
- [Deskercise](#) <https://www.healthline.com/health/deskercise>
- [Ohio State University](#) <https://www.oaa.osu.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/nfo/2019/Active-Learning-article.pdf>
- [University of Michigan](#)
https://crlt.umich.edu/sites/default/files/resource_files/Active%20Learning%20Continuum.pdf
- [Student Experience Project](#) <https://library.studentexperienceproject.org/courses/syllabus>
- [UCLA's Mindful Awareness Research Center](#) <http://marc.ucla.edu/mindful-meditations>
- [Student Health & Counseling Services](#) <https://www.csus.edu/student-life/health-counseling/>
- [PRIDE Center](#) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/pride-center/>
- [Women's Resource Center](#) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/women-resource-center/>
- [Parents and Families Program](#) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/parents-families/>
- [Multicultural Center](#) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/multi-cultural-center/>
- [Martin Luther King Jr. Center](#) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/mlk-scholars/>
- [Student Organizations and Leadership](#) <https://www.csus.edu/student-life/student-organizations/>
- [The WELL](#) <https://thewellatsacstate.com/>

- [Deadline/Grade Worksheet](#)
<http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/healthycampuscommunity/teachingpractices/Dr.%20Didicher%27s%20Sample%20Evaluation%20Agreement.pdf>
- [Qualtrics](#) <https://www.csus.edu/information-resources-technology/data-research/academic-research-technologies.html>
- [Comment Card Example](#)
<https://www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/resource-library/resources/comment-card.html>
- [Affordable Learning Solutions](#) <https://www.csus.edu/academic-affairs/center-teaching-learning/affordable-learning-solutions.html>
- [Icebreakers](#) <https://teach.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Classroom-Icebreakers.pdf>
- [Social belonging intervention](#) <https://fdc.fullerton.edu/teaching/equity-minded-teaching/social-belonging.html>
- [Classroom Guidelines](#) <https://learninginnovation.duke.edu/blog/2018/01/guidelines-interaction-better-class-discussions/>
- [Carnegie Mellon University](#) <https://www.cmu.edu/career/documents/my-career-path/values-exercise.pdf>
- [Simon Fraser University](#)
<https://www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/resource-library/resources/reality-check.html>
- [Services to Students with Disabilities](#) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/testing-center/service-accommodations.html>
- [udlcenter.org](#) <http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/whatisudl>
- [UDL learning resources](#) <https://www.csus.edu/information-resources-technology/universal-design-for-learning/>
- [UDL instructional strategies](#) <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/planning-courses-and-assignments/universal-design-instructional-strategies>
- [Free online tool](#) <https://www.perts.net/orientation/ascend>
- [Grading Rubric Examples](#)
<https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/assesslearning/rubrics.html>
- [Nine Alternatives to Lecturing](#) <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/alternatives-lecturing/active-learning/varying-your-teaching-activities>
- [Active Learning Activities](#) <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/developing-assignments/assignment-design/active-learning-activities>
- [The CARES Office](#) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/crisis-assistance-resource-education-support/>
- [ASI Food Pantry](#) <https://asi.csus.edu/asi-food-pantry>
- [Red Folder](#) <http://calstate.edu/red-folder/?campusSel=Sacramento>
- [Peer and Academic Resource Center \(PARC\)](#) <https://www.csus.edu/center/peer-academic-resource/>

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