WELL-BEING IN LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

- Positive Classroom Culture
- Civic Engagement
- Optimal Challenge
- Instructor Support
- Social Connection
- Services and Supports
- Flexibility
- Real Life Learning
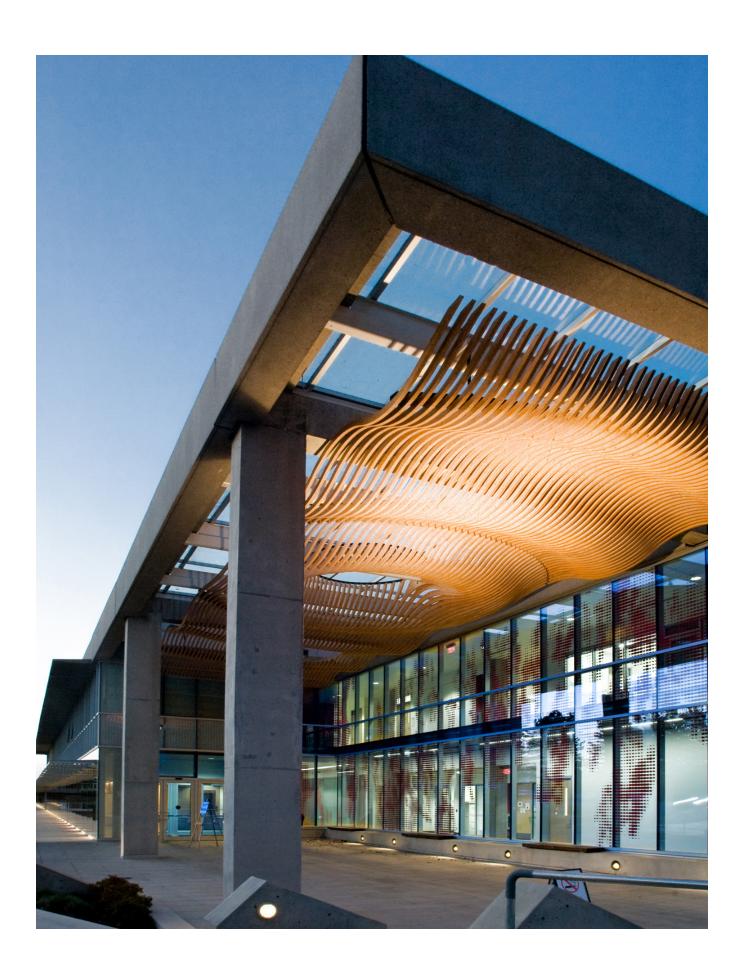- Personal Development
- Inclusivity

Creating Conditions for Well-being in Learning Environments

An initiative of SFU Health Promotion and The Centre for Educational Excellence

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge this document was developed on the Traditional Coast Salish Lands including the Tsleil-Waututh (səl̓ilw̓ətaʔɫ), Kwikwetlem (kʷikʷəƛ̓əm) , Squamish (Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw) and Musqueam (xʷməθkʷəy̓əm) Nations.

Background and Rationale

Positive well-being is a key predictor for learning and student success. Research indicates that well-being is associated with deep learning, and that teaching practices contribute to experiences of well-being (Harward, 2016; El Anasari & Stock, 2010; Stanton, Zandvliet, Dhaliwal & Black, 2016). In partnership with the SFU Centre for Educational Excellence, SFU Health Promotion is working with instructional staff to create conditions for well-being within learning environments. This print-friendly resource outlines some suggestions for creating these conditions, which are outlined in the above diagram.

Personal Development

Opportunities for personal and professional growth increase students' skills, resilience and preparedness for the future.

Suggestions:

• Bring in guest speakers, local traditional knowledge keepers and Elders, or alumni to help students connect in class learning to their career development
• 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
• Ask students to brainstorm and reach consensus on ideas for creating an inclusive learning environment to help build your students' intercultural competence
• Link students to resources that support their personal resilience and well-being, such as the Bouncing Forward: Online Resilience Course
• Encourage students to seek co-curricular and volunteer opportunities (for example Passport to Leadership, Mentorship Programs, or Peer Education)
• Consider what skills students will need to succeed in life, in their communities, and in their careers and try to find ways to foster these in class (for example teamwork, communication, problem solving, empathy, initiative)

To explore additional links and tools related to personal development, please visit:
http://bit.ly/hccpersonaldevelopment

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Since learning is a complex activity of the whole person, advancing student success requires attention to students a whole people, and to their individual and collective well-being.

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- Keeling, 2014

Flexibility

Providing students with some flexibility and control over their learning experiences helps them feel empowered and supported, contributing to their well-being.

Suggestions:

• 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

• Seek feedback from students throughout the semester which can be done through web-survey or an anonymous in-class comment card

• Use interactive tools or other polling software (e.g. iClicker, Mentimeter, Poll Everywhere, Sli.do) to promote class input and participation

• Support students in being active participants during instruction. If students begin talking about an interesting or relevant topic and/or need further explanation than anticipated, see if this is an opportunity to be flexible by incorporating it as part of the lesson which may mean moving slightly away from the initial plan

• Consider providing students with lecture notes or power point slides ahead of class, and providing lecture recordings (particularly helpful for English as an Additional Language students whereby they have more opportunities to work through the rate of speech during lectures)

• Incorporate principles of Universal Design for Learning to help accommodate different learning styles.

• Consider arts-based and non-dominant forms of assessing learning outcomes, including re-storying, photo essays, performance, reflective writing, etc.

• Consider using Open Textbooks (online texts that are free, adaptable and a flexible alternative to traditional text books).

To explore additional links and tools related to flexibility and control, please visit:
http://bit.ly/hccflexibility

Social Connection

Facilitating interaction helps students build social networks which foster resilience and are an asset to well-being. Interaction in the class can help create a sense of community and positive classroom culture.

Suggestions:
- Have students introduce themselves during the first class, in an online discussion, or use a social connectedness start up activity in tutorials
- Make it clear that the quality of teamwork in group assignments is important by including marks for the groups process in grading rubrics
- Offer personality assessment or a Team Style Inventory (e.g. 16Personalities, DISC Personality Test, Team roles test, etc.), in forming groups and to help groups function smoothly
- Ask students to take down the name and phone number 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 (and consider joining them if possible)
- Design lecture assignments that require students to collectively work on study questions and participate in small group discussions
- Work with your teaching assistants to create opportunities for social connection and team work in tutorials or labs
- Offer a brief break in class and remind them to stand up and stretch, or post a non-course related question to encourage students to take this time to get to know one another
- If possible, move tables and chairs into small groups to facilitate discussion. You can request to have a classroom with moveable tables through your departmental manager.

To explore additional links and tools related to social connection, please visit:
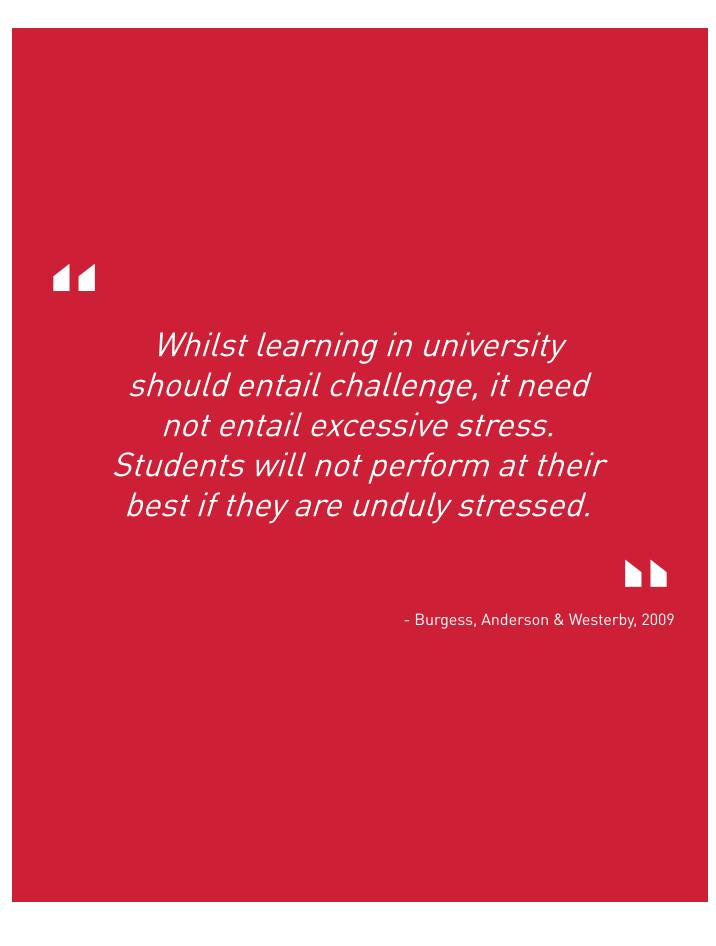http://bit.ly/hccsocialconnection

Optimal Challenge

Students perform and feel their best when they are challenged while having adequate resources to meet the challenge.

Suggestions:

- 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
- Acknowledge that students have lives outside their academic pursuits and support them to find balance
- Set clear course goals and ensure assignments and expectations are clear from the start of the term or course
- Provide activities where students design mock test/study questions
- Give specific targeted and timely feedback about strengths and opportunities for growth and improvement
- Publish grading rubrics in well in advance of deadlines
- Incorporate principles of Universal Design for Learning to help accommodate diverse learners
- Remind students about the resources and supports available to them (e.g. Student Learning Commons, Health and Counselling Services, etc.)

To explore additional links and tools related to optimal challenge, please visit:
http://bit.ly/hccoptimalchange

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Whilst learning in university should entail challenge, it need not entail excessive stress. Students will not perform at their best if they are unduly stressed.

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- Burgess, Anderson & Westerby, 2009

Positive Classroom Culture

Creating an enjoyable and welcoming classroom culture can enhance positive well-being for students and instructors. This can be accomplished through humor, inspiration, open-mindedness, connecting with students and deeply engaging them in their learning.

Suggestions:

• Share your teaching philosophy with students

• Acknowledge that university can be intimidating and stressful for students within your course syllabus

• Share a bit about yourself, your career path or how you've overcome relatable setbacks

• Allow students space to be wrong and encourage alternate viewpoints

• Take care of your own well-being so that you can be present and encouraging for your students

• Share your own well-being practices with your students as an opportunity to model the way and invite them to think about what practices would work for them

• Use a class or online check-in activity to connect with students

• Use appropriate humour or provide an inspiring quote within your slides to lighten the mood

• Offer breaks in class where students can take a moment of reflection or connect with one another

• When possible, ensure a pleasant and inviting space through use of colour, art, music and well maintained facilities

• Use active learning techniques to create an engaging and dynamic learning environment

• Encourage discussion through facilitation activities such as think-pair-share or visual speak cards

• Seek feedback from students throughout the semester. This could be done through web-survey or an anonymous in class comment card

• Be intentional about setting a welcoming tone throughout the semester

To explore additional links and tools related to positive classroom culture, please visit:
http://bit.ly/hccpositiveclassroomculture

Civic Engagement

Providing students with opportunities to make a valued contribution through their coursework can give them a boost to their emotional well-being.

Suggestions:

• Create assignments in which the results can be utilized by a community group or campus initiative

• Incorporate community service or service learning components into your course, if possible

• Encourage students to get involved in extracurricular volunteer work

• Lead discussions or activities that help students develop a sense of civic responsibility

• Encourage students to vote in provincial and federal elections if they are eligible to

• Recognize that universities play a role in developing the leaders of tomorrow and encourage students to explore their own values and goals

• Celebrate Random Acts of Kindness Day (first Friday of November) and encourage students to consider holding the door for someone, reconnecting with an old friend, complimenting someone, telling someone you appreciate them, or buying someone a coffee/treat

• Consider what skills students will need to succeed in life, in their communities and in their careers and try to find ways to foster these in class (for example teamwork, communication, problem solving, empathy, initiative)

To explore additional links and tools related to civic engagement, please visit:
http://bit.ly/hcccivicengagement

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You really need to be able to enjoy the class to gain as much as you can out of it.

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- SFU Student, 2016

Instructor Support

As an instructor, you play an important role in setting a positive and supportive tone that can help students feel welcome and at ease.

Suggestions:

• Let students know you care about them and their success
• Demystify your role by sharing an anecdote, joke, or something about yourself
• Be learner-centered: engage students in the work of learning through reflection, provide autonomy over learning processes, and facilitate opportunities to have students learn from and with each other.
• Provide constructive feedback and outline specific actions students can take to improve
• Consider the many roles of a student and the pressures and challenges the students may face outside your class
• Consider alternative forms of office hours (for example skype, webconferencing, group office hours or canvas chat), and let students know what to expect from office hours
• Invite small groups of students to attend office hours
• Seek feedback from students throughout the semester which can be done through web-survey or an anonymous in class comment card

To explore additional links and tools related to instructor support, please visit:
http://bit.ly/hccinstructorsupport
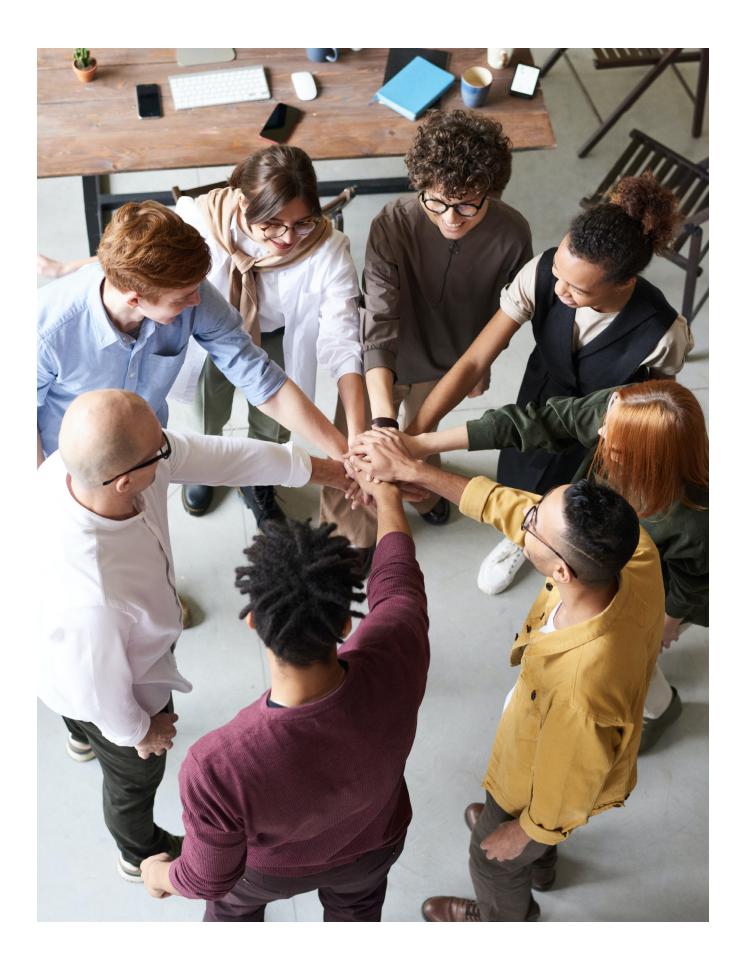
Services & Supports

The in-class and online experience provides an important opportunity to connect students with resources that can support their personal well-being, resilience and readiness to learn.

Suggestions:

• Provide health tips or health resources in class or during breaks

• Incorporate mindfulness or relaxation videos provided by SFU Health & Counselling Services

• Suggest opportunities for students to engage in activities together outside the in-person or online classroom (e.g. participating in the Terry Fox run or Philosophers café)

• Link students to resources that support their resilience and well-being (for example Health Promotion's or Health & Counselling Services' Bouncing Forward resilience course on Canvas and the Wellness Wheel)

• Familiarize yourself with the various student support services and co-curricular learning supports across campuses and online

• Invite guest speakers from various campus services to present on their services

• Familiarize yourself with SFU's Response Guide for Faculty and Staff on Supporting Students in Distress

• Incorporate the activities and presentations from the Resource Library to provide students more information about services and supports available through SFU Health & Counselling Services and how to improve their well-being

To explore additional links and tools related to services and supports, please visit:

http://bit.ly/hccservicessupports

Inclusivity

An inclusive learning environment demonstrates an intentional consideration for all students and in doing so, can enhance positive well-being.

Suggestions:
- Create class guidelines as a group to respect difference and create a safe place for discussion (i.e. "Appreciate perspectives and differences", "Remember that people are talking from personal experiences - be empathetic")
- Familiarize yourself with the intercultural awareness resources available at SFU and share these with students
- Incorporate principles of Universal Design for Learning to help accommodate diverse learners
- Use inclusive language and gender neutral pronouns in the course syllabus, lecture content, and during class.
- Take an Indigenous cultural competency course
- Acknowledge Indigenous people and their traditional lands in your opening remarks to students, course outline and other resources.
- Explore Decolonizing and Indigenizing Curricula through the Faculty Inquiry Grants
- Consider moving away from lecture style course delivery to classroom design that encourages dialogue (circle format; small table groupings; and other approaches)
- Offer a values clarification exercise by asking students to choose one or two beliefs that are most important to them and provide a feeling of purpose. Encourage students to reflect on these when responding to certain situations.
- Encourage students to come forward and speak to you about any accessibility, religious, or cultural concerns
- Break up final projects into a series of smaller assignments
- Make expectations clear; remind students of available resources
- Provide visual support (text and/or graphic)
- Pause and summarize or ask students to summarize ("I want you to summarize my example and add another" or "take a minute to prepare a question about this")

To explore additional links and tools related to inclusivity, please visit:
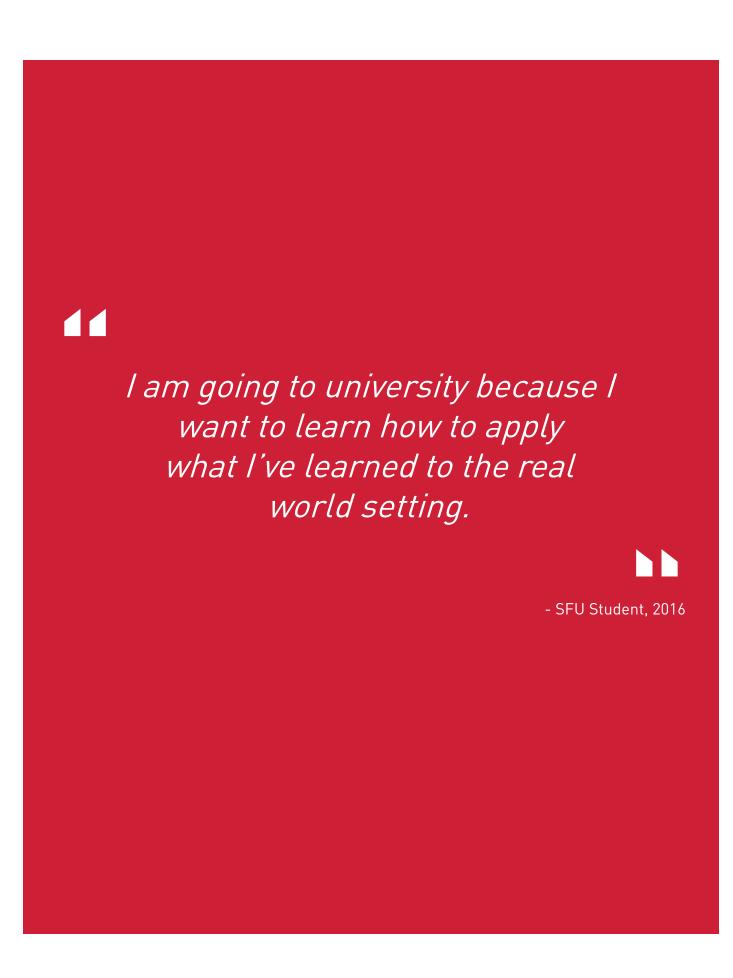http://bit.ly/hccinclusivity

Real-life Learning

By connecting learning to life you offer students opportunities to build their personal skills and confidence in their future.

Suggestions:

- Utilize examples from the real world in class (for example news clips, career advice, guest speakers from the workforce students hope to enter)
- Facilitate a reflective Privilege Exercise that allows students to identify their varying positions in a concrete way, and identify inequalities in our social systems
- Bring in guest speakers, local traditional knowledge keepers and Elders, or program alumni who can help relate the course material to real life issues and work skills
- Incorporate experiential or service learning components into your course
- Create assignments in which the results can be utilized by a community group or campus initiative
- Consider the role that volunteering and community service can play in building cultural competency with your learners
- Encourage students to get involved in extracurricular volunteer work.

To explore additional links and tools related to real-life learning, please visit:

http://bit.ly/hccreallifelearning

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I am going to university because I want to learn how to apply what I've learned to the real world setting.

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- SFU Student, 2016

Join the Faculty Network

A network of over 200 SFU faculty members along with SFU students and staff has been engaged in creating conditions for well-being in learning environments.

The following are ideas for how you might advance Well-being in Learning Environments within your own faculty or department:

Quick ways to get involved

- Join the network mailing list to receive updates and a semesterly newsletter
- Share with us what you are currently doing that you find works well in enhancing student well-being
- Learn more about the research that supports the Well-being in Learning Environments project
- Explore the Well-being in Learning Environments Resource Library
- Invite someone from the Health Promotion team to present before your lecture
- Attend a Well-being in Learning Environments event

Make an impact

- Identify and implement at least one Well-being in Learning Environments activity in any of the conditions, and share with us how you're doing
- Meet with someone from Health Promotion to discuss ideas for embedding Well-being in Learning Environments within a class you teach, or refer a colleague to connect with us

- Connect with an Educational Consultant at the Centre for Educational Excellence to explore how well-being can be embedded in existing departmental activities
- Invite Health Promotion to share Well-being in Learning Environments resources at a faculty meeting

Lead and inspire others

- Present at a Well-being in Learning Environments event or at a Teaching Matters session on well-being
- Collaborate with us to explore and evaluate the impacts of your teaching practices on student well-being by participating in the Exploring Well-being in Learning Environments: An Integrated Seminar Series and Grants Program or by using the following well-being related questions as part of your SETC or other course evaluation tools
- Start a teaching circle or brown bag lunch related to Well-being in Learning Environments in your department
- Develop and initiate a communication channel with ideas and strategies related to well-being among your colleagues

To connect further with SFU Health Promotion regarding these ideas please email **health_promo@sfu.ca**

To join the network or learn more about how faculty members are contributing to well-being in learning environments visit: http://bit.ly/hccjoinnetwork

Giving instructors the tools to create a positive learning environment for all students has been very significant.

- Robbie Donald, Senior Lecturer, SFU Department of Earth Sciences

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