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## Creating Conditions for Well-being in Learning Environments

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An initiative of SFU Health Promotion and  
the Teaching and Learning Centre

“ *It is widely accepted that health and well-being are essential elements for effective learning.* ”

El Ansari & Stock, 2010



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 Teaching and Learning Centre, SFU Health Promotion is working with instructional staff to create conditions for well-being within learning environments.

Learn more at [www.sfu.ca/tlc/resources-and-tools/well-being.html](http://www.sfu.ca/tlc/resources-and-tools/well-being.html)

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

Keeling, 2014

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

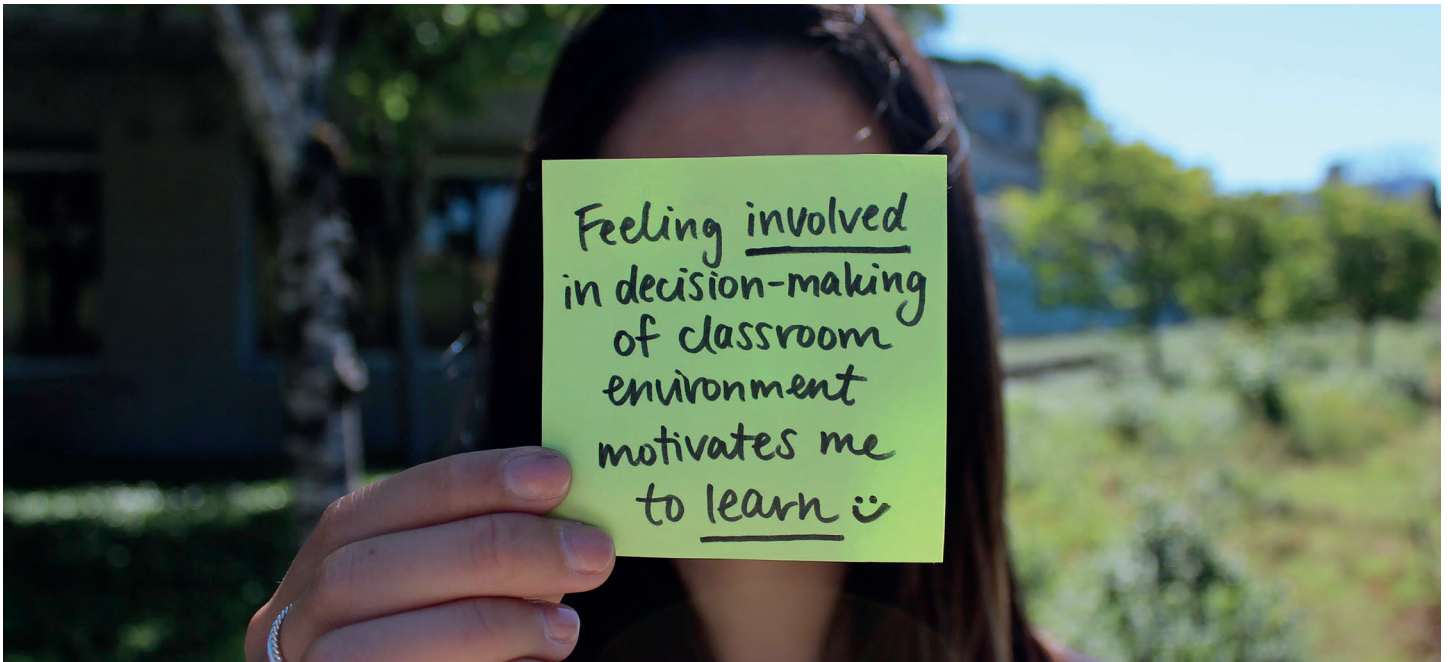
### SUGGESTIONS

- Bring in guest speakers 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
- Use activities and practices in class to help build you and your students' intercultural competence
- Link students to resources that support their personal resilience and well-being
- 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 and in their careers and try to find ways to foster these in class (for example teamwork, communication, problem solving, empathy, initiative)

### LINKS & TOOLS

To explore links and tools related to personal development, please visit:

[www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/personal\\_development.html](http://www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/personal_development.html)



## FLEXIBILITY

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

### SUGGESTIONS

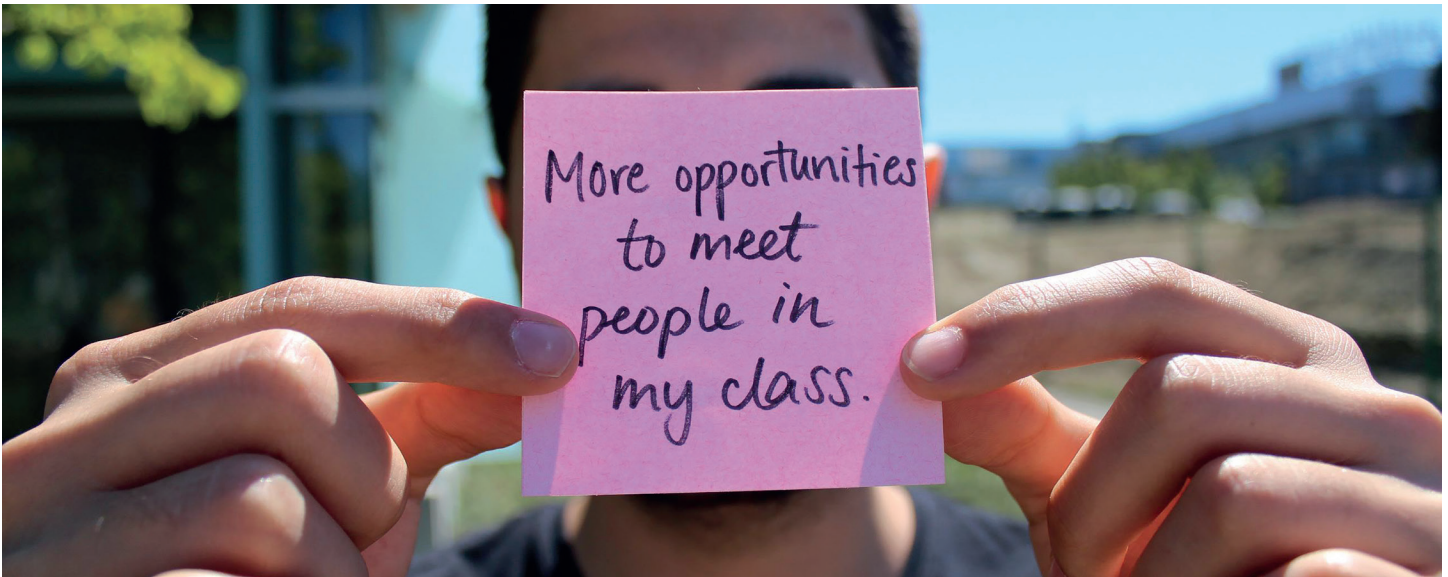
- Offer students the option to choose their “best two out of three” for assignments or quizzes
- Offer students choice in assignments and opportunities to set their own deadlines or percentage of final grade for assignments
- Seek feedback from students throughout the semester. This could be done through web-survey or an anonymous in class comment card
- Use interactive tools like iclicker 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 EAL students whereby they have more opportunities to work through the rate of speech during lectures)
- Consider alternative forms of office hours (for example skype, webconferencing, group office hours or canvas chat)
- Incorporate principles of Universal Design for Learning to help accommodate diverse learners
- Consider using Open Textbooks (online texts that are free, adaptable and a flexible alternative to traditional text books)

### LINKS & TOOLS

To explore links and tools related to flexibility and control, please visit:

[www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/flexibility\\_and\\_control.html](http://www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/flexibility_and_control.html)





## 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 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 group process in grading rubrics
- Encourage students to participate in study groups
- Offer personality assessment or a Team Style Inventory in forming groups and to help groups function smoothly
- Design lecture assignments that require students to collectively work on study questions and participate in small group discussions
- Ask students to take down the name and 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 (if you have time to join them that is even better)
- Work with your teaching assistants to create opportunities for social connection and teamwork in tutorials or labs
- 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)

### LINKS & TOOLS

To explore links and tools related to social connection, please visit:

[www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/social\\_interaction.html](http://www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/social_interaction.html)

“ “ *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.* ” ”

Burgess, Anderson & Westerby, 2009

## OPTIMAL CHALLENGE

Students perform and feel their best when they are challenged, but have 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
- Provide activities where students design mock test/study questions
- Give specific targeted and timely feedback about strengths and weaknesses
- Publish grading rubrics in advance
- Incorporate principles of Universal Design for Learning to help accommodate diverse learners.
- Remind students about the resources available to them through the Student Learning Commons or Health and Counselling Services.

### LINKS & TOOLS

To explore links and tools related to optimal challenge, please visit:

[www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/optimal\\_challenge.html](http://www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/optimal_challenge.html)

*“ You really need to be able to  
enjoy the class to gain as much  
as you can out of [it]. ”*

SFU Student, 2016

## 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 or deeply engaging them in their learning.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Share your teaching philosophy with students
- Take care of your own well-being so that you can be present and encouraging for your students
- Use a class check-in activity to connect with students
- Tell a joke or provide an inspiring quote within your slides to lighten the mood
- Offer breaks in class where students can take a breather or connect to 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
- 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
- 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

### LINKS & TOOLS

To explore links and tools related to positive classroom culture, please visit

[www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/positive\\_classroom\\_culture.html](http://www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/positive_classroom_culture.html)





## 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
- Where possible incorporate community service or service learning components into your course
- Encourage students to get involved in extracurricular volunteer work
- 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
- Use a Giving Game in your class to give students an opportunity to contribute
- 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)

### LINKS & TOOLS

To explore links and tools related to civic engagement, please visit:

[www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/civic\\_engagement.html](http://www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/civic_engagement.html)



## INSTRUCTOR SUPPORT

As an instructor you play an important role in setting a positive and supportive tone that can go a long way in helping students to feel welcome and at ease.

### SUGGESTIONS

- 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
- 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
- Personally invite small groups of students to attend office hours
- Seek feedback from students throughout the semester. This could be done through web-survey or an anonymous in class comment card

### LINKS & TOOLS

To explore links and tools related to instructor support, please visit

[www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/instructor\\_support.html](http://www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/instructor_support.html)





## SERVICES & SUPPORTS

The in class 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
- Use mindfulness or relaxation videos through SFU Health and Counselling for a break
- Suggest opportunities for students to engage in activities together outside the classroom (for example suggest they participate in the Terry Fox run or Philosophers café)
- Link students to resources that support their resilience and well-being (for example the *Bouncing Back* resilience course on canvas and the Wellness Wheel)
- 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 SFU's Response Guide for Faculty and Staff on supporting students in distress

### LINKS & TOOLS

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

[www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/services\\_supports.html](http://www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/services_supports.html)



## 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 (ie. “appreciate perspectives and differences” or “remember that people are talking from personal experiences — be empathetic”)
- Use activities and practices in class to help build intercultural competence
- Familiarize yourself with the intercultural awareness resources available through SFU’s online learning community and share these with students
- Incorporate principles of Universal Design for Learning to help accommodate diverse learners
- Use inclusive language and gender neutral pronouns
- Take an indigenous cultural competency course
- Offer a values clarification exercise
- Encourage students to speak to you about any accessibility concerns they may have
- 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 (“I want you to summarize my example and add another” or “take a minute to prepare a question about this”)

### LINKS & TOOLS

To explore links and tools related to inclusivity, please visit:

[www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/inclusivity.html](http://www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/inclusivity.html)

“*I am going to university because I want to learn how to apply what I’ve learned to the real world setting.*”

SFU Student, 2016

## 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)
- Consider what skills students will need to succeed in life and in their careers and try to foster these in class (for example teamwork, problem solving, empathy, initiative)
- Bring in guest speakers or program alumni who can help relate the course material to real life issues and work skills
- Where possible, 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
- Encourage students to get involved in extracurricular volunteer work

### LINKS & TOOLS

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

[www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/real-life\\_learning.html](http://www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/WLE/real-life_learning.html)





## JOIN THE FACULTY NETWORK

A network of over 100 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:

- Invite Health Promotion to share Well-being in Learning Environments resources at a faculty meeting
- Try an idea from this resource in your class and let us know how it goes
- 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
- Come to the annual [\*Building Connections: Well-being in Teaching and Learning\*](#) event, or submit a proposal to present at the event
- Start a teaching circle related to Well-being in Learning Environments in your department
- Connect with your department's Educational Consultant to explore how well-being can be embedded in existing departmental activities
- Share with us what you are currently doing that you find works well in enhancing student well-being.
- Explore the relationships between teaching and well-being through a [Teaching and Learning Development Grant](#)
- Share feedback with us about the project and associated resources
- Learn more about the research that supports the Well-being in Learning Environments project

To connect further with SFU Health Promotion regarding these ideas email [health\\_promo@sfu.ca](mailto:health_promo@sfu.ca)

To join the network or learn more about how faculty members are contributing to well-being in learning environments visit: [www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/network.html](http://www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments/network.html)



“ “ 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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