

CSA Z2003:20, Mental health and well-being for post-secondary students

Learning environment strategies



Mental Health
Commission
of Canada

Commission de
la santé mentale
du Canada

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CSA PLUS 2003.6:21

Learning environment strategies



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*Published in August 2021 by CSA Group
A not-for-profit private sector organization
178 Rexdale Boulevard, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M9W 1R3*

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Land Acknowledgements

CSA Group Technical Committee for Mental Health and Well-being for Post-Secondary Students

We the members of the CSA Group Technical Committee for Mental Health and Well-being for Post-Secondary Students would like to acknowledge the lands on which our meetings were held during the development of the CSA Z2003 standard. We were honoured to meet on these lands. The lives that we are privileged to lead today and the good fortunes we enjoy today would not be possible without the contributions of the original peoples of this territory.

October 2018, February 2019, December 2019 — Toronto, Ontario

This is the traditional territory of many nations including the Anishnabeg, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat Peoples, and specifically the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people.

November 2019, March 2020 — Mississauga, Ontario

For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples inhabited and cared for this land. In particular, we acknowledge the Anishinabek, Wendat, and Haudenosaunee Peoples as well as the Métis. The land is now the territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

December 2019 — Montreal, Quebec

This land is the traditional and unceded territory of the Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk) Nation, a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange among nations.

April 2019 — Whitehorse, Yukon

This is the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.

June 2019 — Calgary, Alberta

This is the traditional territory of the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) and the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Siksika, the Piikuni, the Kainai, the Tsuut'ina, and the Stoney Nakoda First Nations, including Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations. The City of Calgary is also home to Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III.

While we met in person as a Committee on eight different occasions, we continued this work in many varied locations where we live and work. We wish to recognize all of the Nations of Turtle Island.

Finally, the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) and CSA Group (as the standards development organization) supported the development of this Compendium, which accompanies CSA Z2003:20, *Mental health and well-being for post-secondary students*.

Mental Health Commission of Canada

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) would like to acknowledge that the land on which the main offices of the MHCC operate is the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg People, and these lands are now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. We would like to thank the Elders and caretakers of the land, both past and present, and acknowledge the strength and resiliency of Indigenous Peoples across Canada.

CSA Group

The CSA Group would like to acknowledge that the land on which its main offices operate is now the territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. We acknowledge those who live here, including the Anishinabek, Wendat, and Haudenosaunee Peoples as well as the Métis.

Preface

This is the first edition of CSA PLUS 2003.6, *Learning environment strategies*.

This Compendium is a supporting resource for CSA Z2003, *Mental health and well-being for post-secondary students*. Clauses quoted in this Compendium are from CSA Z2003 unless otherwise identified.

This Compendium was prepared by the Technical Committee for Mental Health and Well-being for Post-Secondary Students, under the jurisdiction of the Strategic Steering Committee on Health and Well-being. The Mental Health Commission of Canada provided in-kind contributions to support the development of this Compendium.

Notes:

- 1) *Use of the singular does not exclude the plural (and vice versa) when the sense allows.*
- 2) *Although the intended primary application of this Compendium is stated in its Purpose, it is important to note that it remains the responsibility of the users of the Compendium to judge its suitability for their particular purpose.*
- 3) *This Compendium was developed through a non-consensus process.*
- 4) *This Compendium is subject to review. Suggestions for its improvement will be referred to the appropriate committee. To submit a proposal for change, please send the following information to inquiries@csagroup.org and include "Proposal for change" in the subject line:*
 - a) *designation (number);*
 - b) *relevant page reference, table, and/or figure number;*
 - c) *wording of the proposed change; and*
 - d) *rationale for the change.*

CSA PLUS 2003.6:20

Learning environment strategies

Supportive, safe, and inclusive post-secondary environment (Clause 5.4.2) **General (Clause 5.4.2.1)**

A post-secondary institution shall establish a supportive, safe, and inclusive environment that contributes to an institutional culture that is conducive to student mental health and well-being. Creating a supportive post-secondary environment can include efforts directed at the physical, social, online, academic, and learning environments. Physical spaces that promote positive interactions between members of the post-secondary community help create a positive sense of community, minimize stressors or risk factors, and promote a healthy environment. Efforts directed at key transition times in the student life cycle (e.g., admission, orientation, transfers, graduation) are also essential to enhancing a flourishing and supportive learning environment.



Purpose

Strategies for the **academic environment** (see definitions in CSA Z2003) are primarily the responsibility of the educator: individuals (e.g., instructors, research/thesis supervisors) accountable for the design/delivery of educational content (e.g., courses, programs) and faculty leadership. Many approaches and practices that affect the academic environment are also relevant to other professionals in teaching roles, including, but not limited to, the coaches, student services staff, teaching and learning institute staff, and peer mentors who are considered within the broader learning environment.

The **learning environment** (see definitions in CSA Z2003), an essential source of information for students, is not limited to course content. It should be seen and used as a window to the culture, policies, resources, and services of the institution. The learning environment needs to be a respectful space in which all can learn, engage, and share (Simon Fraser University, 2019). An effective learning environment is a place where students exercise curiosity, explore diverse concepts and thoughts, build meaningful peer relationships, challenge uncertainties and inconsistencies, perceive and realize value in their education, and develop skills to serve themselves and society. The educator should ensure that students can learn without undue

obstacles or stress in an environment that promotes balance and well-being, cultural safety, intellectual stimulation, personal growth, and a fair opportunity to thrive. Additionally, student experiences within learning environments can greatly impact current and future well-being.

Faculty members need to play an active role in promoting well-being in the learning environment and be equipped and supported to ensure effective teaching strategies are employed. These goals align with the first call to action outlined in the Okanagan Charter (2015), which calls on higher education institutions to “embed health into all aspects of campus culture, across the administration, operations and academic mandates” (p. 3).

Learning environments reach their full potential when diverse participants contribute to the learning process in an equitable and meaningful way. This requires identifying opportunities to share power in the learning environment. Acknowledging human-centred design principles can further enable a culture of well-being (International Standards Organization, 2019).

While evidence-based practices are crucial for integrating mental well-being in the learning environment, cultural safety and the colonial implications of these practices must be carefully considered. Although this document is being released in the midst of a pandemic, the practices it highlights are intended to be flexible (given specific contexts) and inclusive of both face-to-face and online environments.

The creation of this document was informed and guided in part by principles modified from the *Well-being in Learning Environments* resources created by the Simon Fraser University Health Promotion Team. The ten keys in Figure 1 serve as guiding factors when designing and delivering post-secondary courses (Simon Fraser University, 2020).

Figure 1
Ten keys to promoting well-being in learning environments

1	Social connection	Facilitate interaction, foster resilience, and create a sense of community and positive classroom culture.
2	Optimal challenge	Challenge students and provide adequate resources to thrive.
3	Civic engagement	Give students opportunities to make valued contributions to their community through coursework.
4	Student-faculty interaction	Adopt a learner-centred focus to make students feel welcome and at ease.
5	Inclusivity	Intentionally consider all students. Acknowledge their diversity of experience and identity, and their preferences and capabilities.
6	Personal development	Promote personal and professional growth.
7	Services and support	Increase awareness, and connect students with available resources (an important opportunity to break down stigma).
8	Positive learning culture	Create an enjoyable and welcoming learning culture and strive to incorporate humour, inspiration, open-mindedness, connection, and deep engagement, and a safer space to be vulnerable.
9	Flexibility	Expand the locus of control and help students feel empowered, supported, and confident.
10	Real-life learning	Connect learning to real life.

A socio-ecological approach: Institutional-level activities

CSA Z2003 was informed by a socio-ecological approach. The items in Figure 2, corresponding to the sections in this Compendium, address three such levels: students, staff/support/faculty, and the institution.

Figure 2
Influencing the learning environment

Students	Staff/Support/Faculty	Institution
1 Building and maintaining supportive relationships with students • A sense of community • Considering the whole student	2 Pedagogy through a well-being lens • Changing expectations • Components of a learning environment that fosters well-being	4 Universal Design for Learning
	3 Healthy educator, healthy classroom	5 Faculty leadership as influencers

This Compendium has five sections:

1. Building and maintaining supportive relationships with students
2. Pedagogy through a well-being lens
3. Healthy educator, healthy classroom
4. Universal Design for Learning
5. Faculty leadership as influencers



Building and maintaining supportive relationships with students

A sense of community

Context

Creating and sustaining a sense of community has tremendous benefits for students. It is associated with deep learning, engagement, and retention (Chapman et al., 2005; University of Waterloo, n.d.). Therefore, the role of the educator extends beyond delivering course content. It includes creating and fostering an environment that supports learning and generates a sense of community, contribution, equity, and well-being.

Approaches

1. Educators can create community within their learning environments by encouraging student interaction at three levels: learner-learner, learner-educator, and learner-content (Moore, 1989).
 - a. **Learner-learner.** Social cohesion inspires students to feel confident when expressing themselves. Students who feel supported by their peers report fewer depressive symptoms, lower psychological distress, less burnout, and diminished suicidal behaviour (Fédération des associations étudiantes du campus de l'Université de Montréal, 2016).
 - b. **Learner-educator.** Initiating and maintaining supportive and empathetic rapport with students can facilitate co-creation of the learning experience, give students a sense of control, and provide vital feedback for the educator.
 - c. **Learner-content.** Students can better connect with course content when it reflects real life and encourages deep learning.
2. Many pedagogical practices can be used to promote social connection in the learning environment. Checking in with students can build such connections and help educators address the well-being of the learning environment. For example, flexible and responsive adviser-student relationships can support graduate students in setting clear and feasible expectations/timelines and receiving timely feedback on progress, thereby reducing distress and uncertainty related to completing their thesis and program.
3. Academic programs can enhance connection and community through cohort programs, mentorship, experiential learning, and other ways of encouraging learner-learner, learner-educator, and learner-content interaction.

4. Office hours should be accessible and student-friendly (which could foster informal mentorship opportunities). Educators should be equipped to appropriately encourage and support students in finding helpful resources.

Sample practices

Learner-learner,
learner-educator,
learner-content
interaction, checking
in

- *U-Courses: Learning by Design* ([California State University–Chico](#))
- *Well-being in Learning Environments* ([Simon Fraser University](#))
- *Building Community in Large Classes* ([Waterloo](#))
- *Building Inclusive Classrooms* ([Cornell](#))
- *Checklist for Inclusive Teaching* ([Plymouth](#))
- *A Holistic Approach to Supporting Students* ([Magna](#))
- Study plan and collaboration agreement between grad students and supervisors (FR) ([Université de Montréal](#))
- *L'activité brise-glace en formation à distance* ([U de M](#))
- One-pagers on [remote](#) and [graduate](#) student supervision/support (FR) ([U de M](#))

Office hours and
mentorship

- *Well-being in Learning Environments: Instructor Support* ([SFU](#))
- *Tips for Effective Office Hours* ([Duquesne](#))
- *Mentoring Programs* ([Dartmouth](#))
- *Harry G. Schaefer Mentorship Program* ([Mount Royal University](#))
- *Connection through Office Hours* ([University of British Columbia](#))
- Sentinels network (FR) ([U de M](#))

Considering the whole student

Context

The post-secondary demographic landscape is constantly evolving. For example, a growing number of students are working, enrolled part time, living at a distance from the institution, and supporting families. Having these and other individual realities (e.g., living with chronic health issues or disabilities; changes in their immigration, employment or family status or financial situation) extend beyond the formal learning environment can significantly influence students' mental well-being and academic success. When institutions modify the learning environment to support students as whole persons with unique psychosocial needs, they can reduce such undue stress (Robotham & Julian, 2006). Academic institutions must ensure that demands placed on students are reasonable and that learning experiences are designed to enhance students' overall growth as individuals.

Approaches

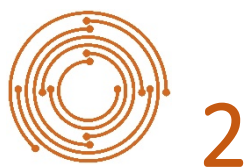
1. Take an **intersectional approach** to the learning environment (Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.). This means being aware of the ways privilege and oppression intersect and shape students' learning experience. Such ongoing reflection and awareness can help educators (1) understand how their authoritative position impacts the learning environment and (2) identify how instructional materials and practices can be modified to shift their role from leading to facilitating. With this intersectional approach, students are given opportunities to contribute to and have agency over their educational experience. For example, educators would then need to take an active anti-racism position in designing learning materials, facilitating the learning environment, and supporting students.
2. Learning environments and academic programs should be designed in ways to minimize undue stress, prevent burnout, create healthy/positive challenges, and support holistic (e.g., emotional, environmental, financial, intellectual, physical, occupational, social, spiritual) development and well-being. For example, educators should consider facilitating a flipped classroom; using open source resources (where possible) to reduce the financial burden on students; advocating for co-curricular involvement/credit, which may enable broad learning and growth opportunities (Vetter et al., 2019); and offering online asynchronous learning (in addition to scheduled classes) to allow for flexibility in delivery.
3. Use **human-centred design** principles to assess challenges facing specific student populations (e.g., graduate students), engage students in identifying and addressing their needs, and respond with appropriate supports (International Standards Organization, 2019). This could include connecting students to online/in-person well-being supports such as financial aid, elders, immigration consultants, or tutors and learning strategists.

4. Mental health literacy programs or early alert systems can equip educators with the necessary resources to **recognize, respond, and refer distressed or languishing students** to specific psychosocial supports. Such an approach requires that course outlines provide details on available mental well-being supports and policies.

Sample practices

Intersectionality in the classroom	• Extensive resources for instructors to learn how and why to support this (Mount Holyoke) • #ShutDownStem and #ShutDownAcademia emphasize education, action, and healing. (ShutDownStem) • Decolonizing the learning environment (Canadian Journal of Higher Education) • Equity, diversity, and inclusion tool kit (Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health)
Recognizing and dealing with power disparities	• <i>Sharing Power in the Classroom</i> (Utah)
Teaching “whole” students	• Instructional videos, on topics such as supporting racialized students and using inclusive language (George Brown)
Open source resources	• <i>Creating Open Educational Resources</i> (University of British Columbia) • OER Commons (ISKME) • OpenStax (Rice University) • LibreTexts (LibreTexts)
Supporting holistic development and wellness	Activities educators and institutions could use to modify programming: • Wellness wheel (Simon Fraser University) • <i>A Holistic Approach to Supporting Students</i> (Magna) • <i>Co-Curricular Record</i> (transcript) (Windsor)
Making the learning environment flexible	• <i>Flexible Learning</i> (framework) (UBC) • <i>Flexible Learning Resource</i> (Ryerson) • <i>Innovative Teaching Development</i> (SFU) • <i>10 Ways to Embed Well-Being into Remote Learning Environments</i> (SFU)

Supporting graduate and professional student mental health	• Self-reported statistics and recommendations (Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario)
Building TA mental health competencies	• TA/TM Well-being Project (SFU) • TA self-advocacy (UBC)
Helping students navigate support programs	• Early Alert provides educators with the capacity to support struggling students in connecting with appropriate internal resources/services (UBC; Early Support, Mount Royal University) • Sentinels network (FR) (Université de Montréal)
Mental health and suicide prevention training programs	• Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (Centre for Suicide Prevention) • safeTALK (Centre for Suicide Prevention) • <i>The Working Mind</i> (Mental Health Commission of Canada) • <i>More Feet on the Ground</i> (CICMH)



Pedagogy through a well-being lens

Changing expectations

Context

It is critical to appreciate the reciprocal relationship between learning and well-being. Just as academic success facilitates a sense of well-being, well-being facilitates academic success. Fostering learner well-being is essential to pedagogy in higher education. Institutional policies and practices must also demonstrate a commitment to student mental health (Clause 5.2.3).

Approaches

1. Discuss well-being as a key element to academic success at the start and throughout the course, to highlight its importance. For example, create and maintain safer spaces dedicated for students to talk about well-being.
2. Shift from grade-motivated to competency-building approaches for teaching and learning. For example, instructors and students can work together to create competency-based evaluations and grading rubrics (particularly applicable in graduate or professional programs).
3. Use multiple strategies to allow flexible evaluation of competencies. For example:
 - a. giving students a choice between different evaluation formats or assignment deliverables; and
 - b. having students maintain reflection journals to enable thoughtful self-evaluation.
4. Discuss learning strategies with students early in the course to support them in meeting desired competencies.
5. Identify student-friendly, flexible office hours so students can discuss concerns in a safe and confidential environment.
6. Present knowledge and information in ways that are comprehensible to students and are challenging enough to create a sense of achievement (Sweller et al., 1998).

7. Acknowledge that a variety of factors can motivate students to learn, including experiential learning (Kolb, 2014); gamification (Lister, 2015); and value expectancy, goal orientation, and self-determination (Svinicki, 2016).
8. Identify and address sources of undue stress or barriers to knowledge acquisition, such as policies relating to accessibility, course withdrawal, exam hardship, and timing/scheduling of major projects/papers. Institutions should encourage policies that encourage deep, real-life, and applied learning (e.g., internships, capstones, co-op terms).
9. Co-design course content delivery (learning activity format/deadlines, accommodating different learner types) by involving diverse student voices. Educators need to be supported in engaging students (Bryson & Hand, 2007).

Sample practices

Emphasis on building competency	- Shadow grading policy for first-semester, first-year students: official grades do not appear on their transcript (Wellesley College) <i>Implementing Competency-Based Education</i> (Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education) <i>Student Support Certificate</i> (Trent) <i>Best Practices: Alternative Assessments</i> (Ryerson) <i>High-Impact Educational Practices</i> (Association of American Colleges and Universities)
Motivation	<i>Gamification and the Future of Education</i> (World Government Summit) <i>Motivating Our Students</i> (Centre for Teaching Excellence, Waterloo) <i>Experiential Learning</i> (University of British Columbia)
Flexible learning	Addressing individual learning needs, improving student learning outcomes, and increasing access to education (Ryerson, UBC)
Fostering well-being through learning	<i>Teaching Practices That Promote Wellbeing</i> (UBC) <i>Embedding Mental Health Literacy</i> (UBC) <i>Taking Learning Outdoors in Nature</i> (UBC) - Exploring self-compassion in an undergraduate course (UBC)

Components of a learning environment that fosters well-being

Context

Learning environments that foster well-being allow students to feel valued and have a sense of control. Well-being in the learning environment embodies

- educators using their power to create agency for students;
- learning through engagement;
- relationship-building;
- the promotion of deep and real-life learning; and
- using the best-known strategies to provide a meaningful educational experience that includes Indigenous ways of learning.

Specifically recognizing that a higher workload does not necessarily translate into increased learning and growth is also important. The brain does not perform optimally under conditions of prolonged stress (Vogel & Schwabe, 2016).

An online learning environment is inherently different from a face-to-face learning environment. The approaches and practices identified here are applicable to both contexts (though slight modifications may be warranted).

Approaches

1. Early on, establish the relevance of the course material in students' lives to inspire passion and engagement.
2. Map course contents onto broader course objectives and the ways individual courses relate to students' development.
3. Foster passion and excitement in learners by sharing relevant life stories and experiences around the course material. Storytelling can effectively promote learners' motivation and help them apply classroom knowledge.
4. Support students in building a sense of citizenship, efficacy, and control through service-based learning opportunities (e.g., integrating learning through serving the community) or adapting course assignments to deliverables that can benefit the community (e.g., class, institution, city).
5. Foster learners' sense of control by encouraging them to uncover new knowledge, venture out of their comfort zones, and create without the worry of failure (e.g., introduce competency-based evaluation; see [Changing Expectations](#)).
6. Allow students to submit coursework in multiple iterations to positively value mistake-making.

7. Integrate well-being practices, such as mindfulness or journaling, into courses (Gortner et al., 2006).
8. Infuse mental health and well-being into the course curriculum.
9. Allow students to evaluate how the learning environment impacts their mental well-being.
10. Consider the configuration of face-to-face and virtual learning spaces:
 - The physical room setup can increase the sense of community (e.g., movable tables enabling group work) and support relationship-building. Mental well-being can be enhanced through natural light, colour, and space that is optimized to serve student needs (Kurt & Osueke, 2014; Shishegar & Boubekri, 2016).
 - Virtual learning experiences can allow personal growth, connection, reflection, and inclusion; however, educators must ensure that learning environments create these opportunities.
11. Offer credit opportunities for students to study and gain competency in mental health and well-being.

Sample practices

Engagement	• <i>Engaging and Empowering First-Year Students Through Curriculum Design</i> (Bovill et al., 2011) • Flourish (University of Toronto)
Real-life learning	• Community Engagement Center (Pitzer) • Community Service Learning (Mount Royal University, University of British Columbia) • Centre for Community Engaged Learning (UBC) • The La Verne Experience (University of La Verne)
Well-being in the learning environment	• Mindfulness before class (Brock) • <i>Mental Wellbeing in the Classroom</i> (Ryerson) • <i>Student and Teacher Wellbeing: Simple Strategies for Positive Impact</i> (UBC) • Indigenous principles in classroom learning (BCCampus, UBC) • <i>Mental Health and Wellness Blog</i> (University of Calgary) • Faculty toolkit — find or ask your institution to develop one (MRU) • <i>10 Ways to Embed Well-being into Remote Learning Environments</i> (Simon Fraser University)

- Teaching practices and curriculum infusion
- *Teaching Practices that Promote Wellbeing* ([UBC](#))
 - Educators Summer Wellness Series workshops ([U of C](#))
 - The Englehard Project for Connecting Life and Learning ([Georgetown](#))
 - International Positive Education Network ([IPEN](#))
 - *Embedding Conditions for Well-being in Academic Settings* ([SFU](#))
 - Resource Library ([SFU](#))
 - Establishing course relevance to daily life through
 - o interactive class activities (e.g., think-pair-share on expectations of the learning outcomes) ([U of T](#));
 - o promoting participation in activities to foster academic tenacity ([UBC](#)).

- Environment
- *Well-being Through Physical Spaces* ([SFU](#))
 - *Ten Ways to Overcome Barriers to Student Engagement Online* ([Briggs, 2015](#))
 - *Fostering Academic Tenacity: Online Connection* ([UBC](#))
 - LEED certified buildings ([Canada Green Building Council](#))
 - WELL building standard ([International WELL Building Institute](#))
 - *Taking Learning Outdoors in Nature* ([UBC](#))

- For-credit opportunities
- Embedded Certificate in Mental Wellbeing and Resilience ([U of C](#))
 - Sociology of Happiness ([Emory](#))
 - Enhancing Workplace Resiliency ([University of Fredericton](#))
 - The Science of Well-Being ([Yale via Coursera](#))



Healthy educator, healthy classroom

Context

Healthy learning environments consider and support the mental well-being of educators and staff. While post-secondary institutions are workplaces, they have unique contexts that deserve special consideration when designing policies, processes, and programs for educator and staff well-being.

Approaches

1. Adopt [CAN/CSA-Z1003-13/BNQ 9700-803/2013, Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#). (See CSA PLUS 2003.1.)
2. Implement strategies to facilitate self-care and support for staff and educators as well as for graduate students and postgraduate fellows, who may have dual roles as instructors (e.g., teaching assistants, mentors) and students.
3. Create a community of practice (CoP) (Wenger, 1998) for educators to discuss and collaborate on well-being, and consider integrating these into broader CoPs pertaining to the well-being of students. Any CoP that gives educators and students an opportunity to work as partners should be encouraged.
4. Actively support champions of well-being in each faculty, within teaching and learning centres, and among researchers investigating educational design. Leadership must enable champions and provide them with necessary resources.
5. Support, recognize, and reward educators for their contributions to well-being in learning environments.

Sample practices

Building awareness and resiliency and reducing stigma among educators/staff

- The Working Mind training ([Mental Health Commission of Canada](#))
- Student and Teacher Wellbeing: Simple Strategies for Positive Impact ([University of British Columbia](#))
- *Mental Health Support for Faculty* ([Waterloo](#))
- Webinars on the importance of self-care ([Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#))

Building support, education, and collaboration among educators/staff

- Wellbeing Liaison Program ([UBC](#))
- Mental health and wellness in teaching and learning ([University of Calgary](#))
- *How Teaching Practices Influence Student Mental Health and Wellbeing* ([UBC](#))
- Teaching and Wellbeing CoP ([UBC](#))
- Healthy Minds, Healthy Campuses ([Canadian Mental Health Association-BC, University of Victoria](#))
- Faculty and instructor profiles ([Simon Fraser University](#))
- *Champions for a Healthy Campus Community* ([SFU](#))
- Conferences and forums ([CICMH](#))
- Mental Health Works ([CMHA-Ontario](#))



Universal Design for Learning

Context

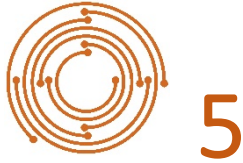
The methods and strategies used to educate students should reflect their diversity. To achieve this goal, the implementation of an accessible learning framework, for example, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), yields positive learning outcomes (Al-Azawei et al., 2016). Accessible learning aligns with student well-being by offering equitable access to the broadest range of students. It considers how students learn, provides opportunities for expression and the demonstration of knowledge, and offers appropriate levels of challenge and motivation. It also minimizes the need to have students ask for modifications on course requirements. Students who seek accommodations and flexibility should be able to openly and comfortably communicate these needs and feel supported. Requiring proof of casual illness or stress (e.g., sick notes) for absences or missed deadlines places a burden on students, strains (already stretched) clinical resources, and may be an unreliable indicator of students' needs (Woolley, 2017). Refer to CSA PLUS 2003.2 and CSA PLUS 2003.3 for details on integrating accessibility into institutional policies and other privacy/confidentiality-related concerns.

Approaches

1. Adopt accessible and culturally safe learning strategies in the design of courses or programs, and continuously consult students on how these strategies are experienced. Provide educators with opportunities to improve and further develop skills in teaching and delivering course material.
2. Ensure that educators are aware of accommodation processes and recognize them as human rights that should be actively supported when students seek flexibility in their academic program (Barnett et al., 2012).
3. Institutionally shift toward student-centred honour systems and away from traditional "burden of proof" approaches (e.g., sick notes) when assessing flexibility requests.

Sample practices

Accessible learning	• <i>Universal Design for Learning in Higher Education</i> (University of Calgary) • <i>Using Universal Design in the University Classroom</i> (Ryerson) • <i>Universal Design for Learning</i> — providing multiple means of engagement, representation, action, and expression (University of British Columbia) • Ongoing faculty development opportunities on teaching and well-being (UBC)
Flexibility and accommodation	• Students no longer required to present a medical note (U of C) • <i>Self-Declaration of Brief Absence</i> (Queen's)



Faculty leadership as influencers

Context

Educators in leadership roles (e.g., deans, program coordinators) influence change, shift culture, model good citizenship, and enable healthy learning environments. Department- and institution-level support are crucial for enabling educators to promote well-being in the learning environment.

Approaches

1. Bring together educators to share and celebrate innovative practices.
2. Create conversations about well-being in academic settings. Encourage and elevate the voices of those students, educators, and administrators who demonstrate leadership and interest in improving student well-being.
3. Provide and promote training for educators in health and well-being.
4. Equip educators with relevant skills to support students, including mental health literacy, identifying and supporting students in distress (e.g., suicidal disclosure, early alert), and referring students to mental health resources.
5. Incentivize well-being in learning environments through tenure and promotion processes.
6. Make well-being a standing item in departmental meeting agendas.
7. Co-create a well-being strategy with students and faculty at the departmental level that aligns with university-wide plans and protocols.
8. Advocate for a rigorous academic support model, such as the [Cliff of Good Health analogy](#) proposed by Dr. Camara Jones, which specifically addresses race and able-ism.
9. Seek diverse student input and involvement in decision-making — a key principle of the Okanagan Charter.

10. Support innovative/best practices and knowledge translation (Hurvitz et al., 2016):
- Advocate for the adoption and maintenance of reading breaks in both full-time semesters of the academic year.
 - At a program level, ensure that deadlines do not overlap with other courses, and advocate for spacing between final exams so that no more than two occur within a 24-hour period.
 - For program review committees, include student representation and consider the impact of current and proposed curriculums, policies, and institutional practices on student well-being. For example, assess the impact that overly large class sizes have on community-building and capacity for well-being.
11. Measure the impacts of program design, policies, environments, curriculums, and processes on student stress, connection, inclusion, thriving, and mental health.

Sample practices

Creating and/or maintaining a healthy post-secondary environment

- CoP for supporting faculty in fostering student well-being ([University of British Columbia](#))
- *Guide to a Systemic Approach* ([Canadian Association of College and University Student Services](#), [Canadian Mental Health Association](#))
- *Champions for a Healthy Campus Community* ([Simon Fraser University](#))
- *Responding to Students in Distress* ([SFU](#))
- [Government of Saskatchewan](#) funds support for mental health training

Training programs for educators

- See [Considering the Whole Student](#) for recommended programs

Measuring impact

- Healthy Environments and Learning Practices Survey ([Zandvliet et al., 2019](#))

Acknowledgements

We would like to specifically thank and recognize the Simon Fraser University Health Promotion Team, including Alisa Stanton, Yuna Chen, and Lehoa Mak, for reviewing and providing essential feedback on this Compendium.

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