Designing learning environments through the multidimensional lens of poverty

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Thank you for the opportunity!

Special Thanks

Tad Sears
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Survey Participants
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Conference Coordinators
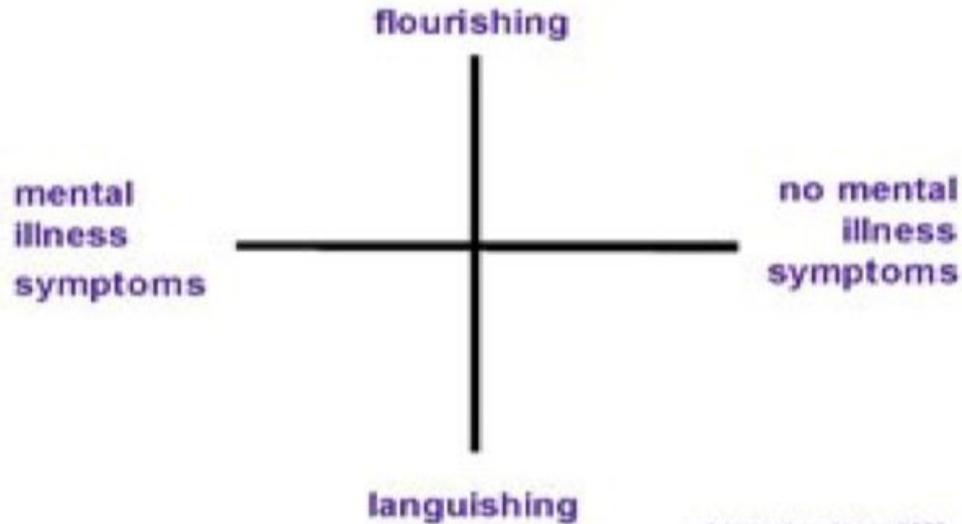
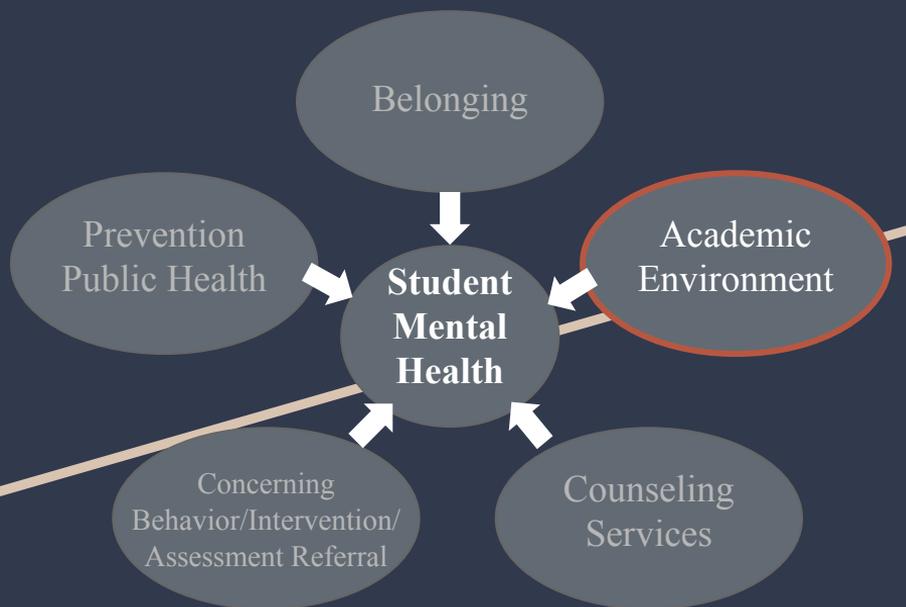# College Student Mental Health and Well–Being

Agenda

- Evaluate the strengths and challenges of an approach to student learning through the multiple lens of poverty
- Identity ways to collaborate across institutional silos to foster a culture of humility and well-being
- Gain an understanding of the College of St. Scholastica mental health and well-being initiatives

Well–Being Continuum

flourishing

mental illness symptoms

no mental illness symptoms

languishing

Adapted from Keyes 2007

College Student Mental Health and Well-Being

Belonging

Prevention Public Health

Student Mental Health

Academic Environment

Concerning Behavior/Intervention/ Assessment Referral

Counseling Services

We as a campus community need to take every opportunity to create a supportive environment for our students

Campus Trends	National Trends
39.5% of CSS traditional students report a mental health diagnosis within their lifetime (Boynton Health Survey, 2017).	At any given time, **32%** of college and university students are dealing with a mental illness (Kognito, 2017).
➔ On average, **10-12%** of CSS traditional students utilize Counseling Services.	➔ Only **40%** of students with mental illness seek help.

There are many students who are struggling who are not accessing professional services

Mental Illness Prevention: Well–Being Focus

"It is not about some superficial or even transient experience of being happy or even about feeling happy, but rather it turns to that more important, sustainable quality of purpose that underlies our sense of self, our motivation to persist,our trust in agency, and our responsibility to act for the common good."
Jill N. Reich

Students without serious or life-altering mental illnesses need to know that when they need help there is a place for them in the wellness centers and/or therapist's offices of our institution.

By creating a holistically supportive academic environment, faculty members can help students before their problems become severe.
➔ Recognizing that students have lives outside of academics
➔ Openly discussing topics related to well-being
➔ ***Creating a safe academic environment*** (Kognito, 2017)

What this means...
➔ Academic rigor should contribute to student stress.
➔ **Academic environments should not be the cause of student stress.**

Multidimensional Lens of Poverty and Academic Performance

How academic performance is impacted by poverty in other areas

Student-reported data

For food insecure students, 14.3% reported that it impacted their academics
For those that reported the issue of homelessness, 25% reported that it impacted their academics
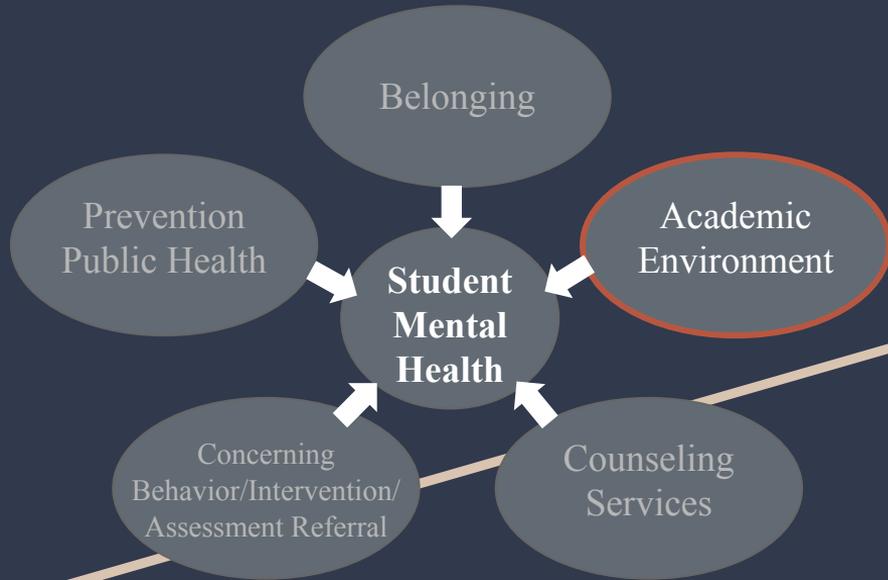Financial difficulties, 21.4%
For those who reported any disability, 46% impacted their academics
For those that reported issue of stress, 48.8%
For those that reported issue of mental health, 58.3%

Project Objectives

Goal: To create academic environments that promote student mental health and well-being.

Project Objectives Overview

- ➔ Needs assessment
- ➔ Develop survey
- ➔ Develop partnerships
- ➔ IRB approval
- ➔ Distribute survey
- ➔ Consult with the Academic Council
- ➔ Facilitate focus group
- ➔ Develop a plan for implementation
  - ◆ Using survey, focus group and other assessment results
  - ◆ Collaborations with appropriate stakeholders (i.e. Center for Teaching and Learning, Academic Advising, Dignitas, etc.)
- ➔ Develop evaluation tools

The Survey

What are the
existing attitudes
*of faculty in regards to <u>their role</u> in student **mental health** and*
well-being*?*

Survey Goals

To assess faculty attitudes regarding their role in supporting student mental health and well-being

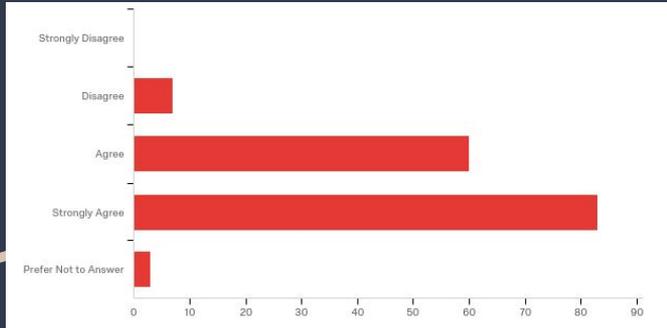Distribute to all CSS full-time (212) and adjunct (402) faculty members
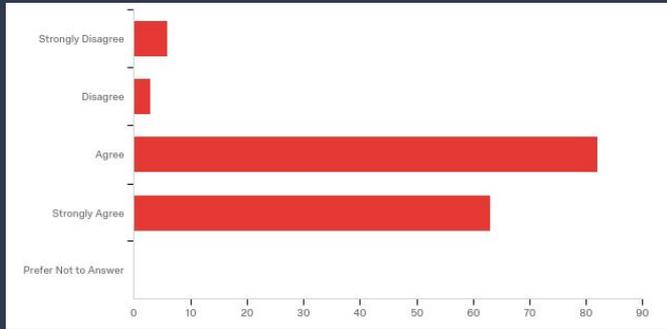
Questionnaire Characteristics
➔ 12 questions
➔ 5 minutes
➔ Multiple choice, single answer

Response
➔ *164 participants*
  ◆ *115 full-time*
  ◆ *41 adjunct*
  ◆ *8 unknown*
➔ ***54% response rate*** *of full-time faculty*
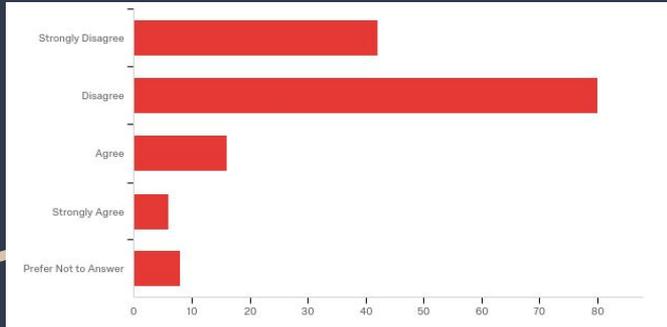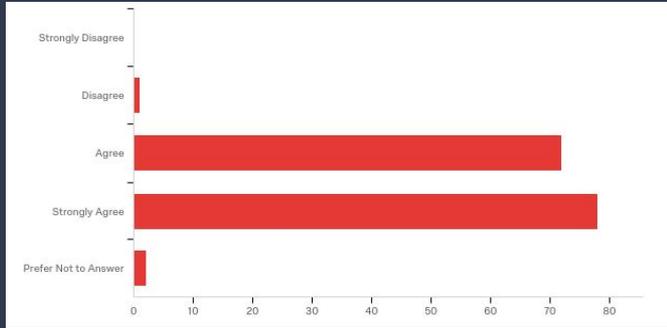
Survey Results

Q1 - In my role as faculty or advisor to students, *I can have an impact on a student's mental health* and well-being.

➔ 53% **agree**
➔ 41% **strongly agree**

Q3 - *The mental health and well-being of students has become an issue* of increased challenge/concern in the academic environment.

➔ 54% **strongly agree**
➔ 39% **agree**

Survey Results

Q4 - *I am open to developing/learning new techniques/ideas* in supporting a student's mental health and well-being in the academic environment.

➔ 51% **strongly agree**
➔ 47% **agree**

Q6 - While important, *I do not feel like I have the time to do interventions* that might impact student mental health and well-being in the academic environment (i.e. learn and use student names, set all key course dates early, provide timely and constructive feedback on assignments, provide lecture outlines, etc.).

➔ 53% **disagree**
➔ 28% **strongly disagree**

Survey Results
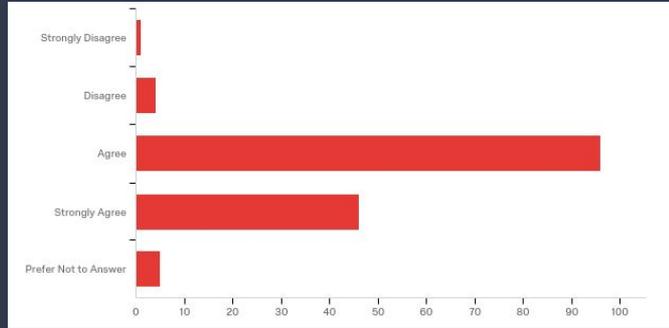
Q8 - *I would be open to making changes* in my academic environment with increased support and training.

➜ 63% **agree**
➜ 30% **strongly agree**

The Survey

What are the
existing attitudes
*of faculty in regards to <u>their role</u> in
student **mental health** and
well-being?*

Survey results show a need, interest, and willingness

➔ Issues related to student mental health and well-being in the academic environment are a growing concern among faculty

➔ Faculty believe they have an impact on student's mental health and well-being

➔ Faculty are open to developing new techniques and ideas for supporting student mental health and well-being

➔ Faculty are open to making changes in their academic environment, with increased support and training

➔ Faculty report that having enough time is not an issue in regards to doing interventions that support student mental health and well-being

Related Research

"There is an **expectation** that staff will be _understanding_ and provide _pastoral care_ effectively."

(McAllister et al., 2014)

"Staff experiences of providing support to students who are managing mental health challenges: A qualitative study from two Australian universities."

Research Goal: To describe the interactions between university staff engaging with students who are managing a mental health challenge

➔ Research Objective: To produce practical strategies to inform staff, thus optimising the academic potential and well-being of students.

Implications:
● Interaction with this group of students is common
● Pastoral care is a significant, but not formally recognized aspect of their role, causing stress
● Dilemmas about when to uphold student's right to privacy versus when to reveal their needs for their own safety
● Ambiguity when academic decisions conflict with values within a pastoral care framework.

Conversation Starter #1

"So the provocation proposes that now, when market and social forces clamor for the commercialization of higher education, is a most appropriate time to move a shared conviction, to make the changes we know to be effective to the very center of the enterprise—and to rest that conviction broadly, because it is rooted in a shared conceptual understanding of the meaning of higher learning, the use of multiple forms of engagement, and their basic connection to the wholeness of those who participate."
Jill N. Reich

➔ Which departments would you identify as having a similar mission/similar goals in order to break down silos

➔ How would you approach other departments in order to collaborate?

➔ A student asked for a mental health day, how do you respond?

Conversation Starter #2

Where and How to Focus

Bundled Concept of Higher Learning:

Learning that: disciplinary and interdisciplinary; acquisition of basics of a field and seeing connections

Learning to: applying knowledge in practice

Discovery: finding what is new or acquiring a level of expertise

Learning for: the satisfaction of doing so or for the valueof learning independent of its utility

Bundled Concept of Well-being:

Agency: capacity to discern possible consequences; freely choose and recognize responsibilities

Positive dispositions: such as resiliency and persistence

Seeing community: as required for self-identity and realization

Experiencing wholeness: as having rational, emotive, and physical dimensions

Conversation Starter #3

Questions

1.   What role do faculty play in the mental health and well-being of students in the academic environment?

2.   What are you currently doing in the academic environments you facilitate to positively impact student mental health and well-being?

    a.   What of these techniques have worked well for you?

    b.   What of these techniques have not worked well for you?

3.   What challenges have you faced in this arena?

4.   What support do you feel like you need in creating that environment for students?

The Focus Group

To gather **qualitative information** from faculty on their _experiences_ navigating issues surrounding _student mental health_ and _well-being_ in the academic environment.

Focus Group Characteristics
- 7 participants
- 90 minutes
- 4 questions
- Free response in small group discussion

Focus Group Themes
- Faculty are often the first to identify concerns regarding student mental health and well-being
- Helpful techniques:
  - Creating structure in academic environment and setting clear expectations initially
  - Beginning class with brief meditation
  - Giving feedback on assignments immediately
  - Initiating check-ins with students who are falling behind
- Challenges faced by faculty in this arena:
  - Students not utilizing opportunities like submitting multiple drafts of an assignment
  - Supporting students results in being "too soft"
  - Providing accommodations sometimes leads to being taken advantage of by students
- Support needed by faculty:
  - Training in mental health
  - Counseling support for faculty
  - Consistency in platform and method of providing grading feedback to students

Dialogues: Confirming the Connection of Engaged Learning to Well–being

First Dialogue

Faculty #1: "There is no (nor should there be a) connection! I have spent a career fighting the pressure to entertain my students. Learning is not necessarily pleasurable. Are you arguing that the object of my teaching is to make my students happy? There's too much emphasis on that in our culture already. My job is to teach and do scholarship; making my students happy, or offering therapy to my students, are not my responsibilities."

Faculty #2: "You miss the point. The Well-being of students, the eudeamonic, is not pleasure or a superficial sense of happiness. Well-being is the profound core objective of why education is essential to being a whole person. It is captured in why the student is transformed by education—it is the transformation in self-realization, identity formation, purposefulness, and fulfillment. It is captured in flourishing and agency; realized in moving beyond self-interest to the common good. These deeper and broader dimensions of student Well-being, of happiness in its eudeamonic meaning, are among the core objectives, the basic purposes, of our teaching and of students choosing to learn. It is what we meant when we considered "making a difference" by becoming educators! We direct attention to student Well-being in our curricula, in our choice of pedagogies, and in the structural relations we establish within the institution and to the world beyond the institution.

I agree that as Faculty we have an obligation to eschew entertainment and to focus on creating opportunities that expect students to be challenged, demands made, real work to be offered. This isn't nostalgic! It is taking students seriously as whole persons! In the grasp of their own transforming moments, we ask them to counter convention, to seek alternative perspectives, to suspend judgment, to defend contrarian views.... All of these and more are what it means to engage in higher learning and with that engagement, encourage the Well-being of our students."

Dialogues: Confirming the Connection of Engaged Learning to Well-being

Second Dialogue

Person #1: "All that may be true, but it is going to happen only on small private liberal arts and sciences campuses—not here. The scope of change that would be required is far too great. Most on this campus would see pursuit of student happiness as clearly beyond the mission of this place."

Person #2: "Rather than pronounce, take a look at what is happening. Community colleges through Research I's are involved in finding ways to affect change and raise the attention given to multiple aspects of Well-being in the curriculum.

Campuses of all types can explore multiple pedagogies that require engagement and then chart the dimensions of purposefulness or self-expression of the students and their willingness to pursue even more demanding experiences. Off-campus engagement in community-based experiences, well beyond volunteerism or participatory action research, link civic learning to more profound forms of action. These practices are documented to affect a student's understanding of their own identity and the interdependence of the identity and aspirations of others—to being in relation to and valuing the integrity of others.

These opportunities can and do happen at state universities and at local community colleges, as well as in the context of campuses that have populations exclusively of residential students—campuses where structural barriers are diminished and where students have multiple opportunities for interaction with faculty, staff, and with each other—in the classroom, on the playing field, or in social interactions. These are clearly advantages, but they are not necessary conditions! And their absence or diminution are not an excuse for failing to use our own ingenuity and commitment as educators to establish greater volume and frequency of the learning opportunities to which students have access and expect to have access. We affect the campus learning culture, and in doing so make manifest the realization of student flourishing. Again, it is why we are educators—regardless of our institutional type or magnitude of resources.

We can begin by asking how to be mindful of the Well-being of our students. Intentional steps can then be designed and structured as opportunities in engagement. As educators, we move from [our own] values, and those of the institution; we move from within to begin change."

College Student Mental Health and Well–Being

- Evaluate the strengths and challenges of an approach to student learning through the multiple lens of poverty
  - Multidimensional poverty
    - Poor physical health
    - Poor mental health
    - Poor nutrition
    - Lack of education

Benedictine Values

Hospitality

Stewardship

Respect

Community

Love of Learning

Mission of St. Scholastica

'This college, like all in higher education, has the responsibility of providing for all of its students more than access, more than a credential, more than training; it has, and has always had, the transformative responsibility of providing and sustaining both challenging and supportive opportunities for intensive engagement and learning that are essential to beginning a life of "becoming whole"—what classically has been understood as "the good life"—even the purpose of life. Higher education has the opportunity and the responsibility to champion this core value of "being fully whole"—a core human right.' Jill N. Reich

Mission Statement

Shaped by the Catholic Benedictine heritage, The College of St. Scholastica provides intellectual and moral preparation for responsible living and meaningful work.

The Vision of St. Scholastica

Well-being: The human capacity to develop, function effectively, and **flourish**

--The Encyclopedia of Counseling (2008)

"The College of St. Scholastica aspires to be a diverse and inclusive academic community of excellence grounded in the rich Catholic Benedictine heritage, sending forth thoughtful leaders sharpened and sensitized by the liberal arts, who are prepared and committed to serve and transform the world."

➔ Students are increasingly stressed, anxious and distressed, impacting their ability to achieve academic success.

➔ Faculty create academic environments that impact student mental health and well-being (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005).

Examples of Campus Projects

Simon Fraser University

California State University-Chico

Dartmouth College

Oregon State University

Pitzer College

Wellesley College

Conclusions and Questions

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The Survey

What are the
existing attitudes
of faculty in regards to their role in student **mental health** *and* **well-being***?*

Survey Goals

To assess faculty attitudes regarding their role in supporting student mental health and well-being

Distribute to all CSS full-time (212) and adjunct (402) faculty members

Questionnaire Characteristics
➔ 12 questions
➔ 5 minutes
➔ Multiple choice, single answer

Response
➔ *164 participants*
    ◆ *115 full-time*
    ◆ *41 adjunct*
➔ **54% response rate** *of full-time faculty*

Survey Results

What are the
existing attitudes
of faculty in regards to <u>*their role*</u> *in student* **mental health** *and* **well-being***?*

Participant Demographics

Consenting Participants (n=153)

Faculty Member Classification
- Full-Time (n=112)
- Adjunct (n=37)

Academic School
- Arts and Letters (n=30)
- Business and Technology (n=17)
- Education (n=20)
- Health Sciences (n=34)
- Nursing (n=22)
- Sciences (n=28)

Length of Time Working in Higher Education
- Less than 5 years (n=27)
- 5-15 years (n=68)
- 15-25 years (n=32)
- More than 25 years (n=23)

Mental Health vs. Mental Illness

Optimal mental well-being

Example: a person who experiences a high level of mental well-being despite being diagnosed with a mental illness

Example: a person who has a high level of mental well-being and who has no mental illness

Maximum mental illness

Minimum mental illness

Example: a person experiencing mental illness who has a low level of mental well-being

Example: a person who has no diagnosable mental illness who has a low level of mental well-being

Minimal mental well-being