Student Experience - Supporting Student Mental Health in the Virtual Classroom

Checklist & Considerations

Acknowledgements & Further Resources

The practical tips and framework shared in this guide have been compiled using best-practices:

- researched by Lane et al. (2018) and outlined in UBC Wellbeing's [Teaching Practices that Promote Student Wellbeing: A Tool for Educators](#).

- offered by the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (2020) in their [Well-Being in the Online Environment](#) info sheet.

- and, shared during past workshops on *Supporting Student Mental Health in the Virtual Classroom* facilitated by Melissa Fernandes and Cori Hanson with audiences from the Faculty of Applied Science & Engineering and the Engineering Collaboration for Online and Remote Education (E-CORE).

These slides are a subset of slides from a previous webinar. [To view the full slide deck and the audio that goes along with them, click here](#).

3 FACTORS TO ENHANCE STUDENT WELL-BEING IN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

1. **BELONGING & SOCIAL INCLUSION: Students' well-being is supported when they feel connected to their instructors and peers.**

2. **LEARNING WELL: Students' well-being is supported when they are motivated to learn and when they feel that they are learning effectively**

3. **WHOLE STUDENT: Students' well-being is supported when instructors recognize that students have lives outside academics**

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TEACHING PRACTICES THAT PROMOTE STUDENT WELLBEING: A Tool for Educators

BELONGING & SOCIAL INCLUSION
Practical Tips from the Experts & Your Colleagues

FOSTERING INSTRUCTOR-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

- Having short, informal conversations with students
- Introducing yourself
- Smiling
- Being hopeful & optimistic when possible
- Encouraging students to address you by first name
- Making time after class to be available
- Recognizing when students are experiencing a mental health challenge and connecting them into the appropriate supports
- Surveying class at the beginning of the year to understand who they are, preferred learning styles and hopes/aspirations for the course
- Hosting virtual office hours and encouraging students to attend
- Sharing how you are doing/coping with the pandemic
- Addressing the current working from home context, sharing tips
- Displaying your passion for the subject (& in general)
- Sharing personal anecdotes
- Sharing experiences of personal failure
- Using humour as appropriate
- Learning and using student names
- Creating discussion boards (non-course related topics, general introductions to classmate) & participating in them

FOSTERING PEER-TO-PEER RELATIONSHIPS

- Maintaining the same groups throughout the term
- Opening the class 15 minutes early to allow students to enter at their own pace and engage in conversations with their peers
- Teaching 15-minute "lecturettes" followed by a collaborative learning activity and/or opportunities for instant feedback.
- Encouraging group work and in-class discussions (especially when it is not for marks)
- Building learning communities (i.e. using icebreakers, using active learning)
- Offering bonus marks for students to attend course-related community events
- Using breakout room features to support student engagement (e.g., small group discussion or problem solving, pre-class informal discussions, in labs)
- Having a BB Collaborate Room open at all times in your Course Shell for use by students to meet in whenever they want
- Fostering a safe(r) classroom environment (e.g., create a classroom charter outline shared values as a class)
- Incorporating a lab, discussion group or tutorial
- Offering informal learning environments and engagement sessions
- Creating a peer mentoring program within your course

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- Light blue: Practice that may be easier to implement
- Medium blue: Practice that may require some preparation from the instructor
- Dark blue: Practice that may require thoughtful preparation by the instructor

Practical Tips from the Experts & Your Colleagues

UBC Wellness Researchers

Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health

At U of T & E-CORE

HELPING STUDENTS FIND VALUE IN THE SUBJECT MATTER

- ❑ Sharing your passion and enthusiasm for the subject
- ❑ Explaining why a topic is important
- ❑ Connecting course concepts to the "real world"
- ❑ Explaining how this course connects with the other course they take/will take.
- ❑ Telling students how the course content related to your own research or experience in industry
- ❑ Showing students where to learn more about a topic
- ❑ Using hands-on or applied learning
- ❑ Allowing students choice in their assignments
- ❑ Connecting students to community
- ❑ Beginning semester with goal setting to understand what students are hoping to learn

HELPING STUDENTS FIND VALUE IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

- ❑ Hand-writing class notes on the whiteboard (or including a copy of class notes with your online slides)
- ❑ Encouraging students to ask questions (providing multiple ways to do so—chat, mic, polling, discussion boards, surveys etc.)
- ❑ Asking students questions by calling for volunteers rather than cold-calling
- ❑ Speaking in an engaging tone of voice
- ❑ Choosing interesting examples
- ❑ Incorporating multi-media
- ❑ In-class discussions
- ❑ Clicker & polling questions
- ❑ In-class practice
- ❑ Field trips and attending community events (virtual or in-person)

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STRUCTURING THE COURSE EFFECTIVELY

- ❑ Indicating what is expected on an assignment
- ❑ Offer transparency around your approach to the course
- ❑ Ensuring that all information is correct before posting
- ❑ Sharing the exam format
- ❑ Avoid or minimize the weight of group marks
- ❑ Share the grade distribution
- ❑ Setting all key course dates early
- ❑ Providing a detailed course syllabus
- ❑ Include your institution's mental health, equity and accommodations syllabus statements
- ❑ Sharing all course-related information in one place
- ❑ Indicating what will be covered on an exam
- ❑ Designing assessment questions that allow students to demonstrate learning/understanding
- ❑ Allow sufficient time to complete assessments
- ❑ Providing practice problems (with solutions)
- ❑ Smaller frequent assessments (w/o increasing total work)
- ❑ Provide timely & constructive feedback
- ❑ Seeking student feedback throughout course and adapt

DELIVERING THE MATERIAL EFFECTIVELY

- ❑ Providing lecture outlines
- ❑ Using simple language
- ❑ Using clear examples
- ❑ Explain things from multiple perspectives
- ❑ Conveying the materials in a clear logical manner
- ❑ Provide learning objectives
- ❑ Encouraging students to engage in the discussion, while balancing this with an understanding that not all students will be able to attend synchronous lectures (due to time zone, illness, family commitments etc., and offering non-penalizing alternatives. .
- ❑ Recapping at the end of lecture
- ❑ Moving at a pace that is appropriate to the student
- ❑ Using active teaching methods
- ❑ Live Introduction, followed by recorded lecture, followed by active learning exercise with recording available after.

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SUPPORTING LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

- ❑ Inviting students to attend office hours (host virtual office hours)
- ❑ Connect students to resources
- ❑ Being accessible outside of class
- ❑ Suggesting effective study methods for the course
- ❑ Soliciting feedback from your students
- ❑ Sharing your class notes online
- ❑ Incorporate how to's into the course
- ❑ Providing thorough notes
- ❑ Offering review sessions
- ❑ Partnering with Engineering student societies and clubs to create opportunities to apply their learning in projects that are not graded, and allow for students to get to know you and their peers

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WHOLE STUDENT

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RECOGNIZING THAT STUDENTS HAVE LIVES OUTSIDE ACADEMICS

- ❑ Engaging in conversation not directly related to the course
- ❑ Reminding students that their marks do not determine their worth
- ❑ Setting office hours that accommodate student's schedules (consider time zone differences)
- ❑ Ensuing that the workload is reasonable
- ❑ Reducing cost of course materials
- ❑ Clearly communicating grading and assessment policies
- ❑ Not requiring proof from students experiencing a crisis
- ❑ Offering deadline extensions
- ❑ Incorporating flexibility into the grading scheme
- ❑ Setting deadlines to encourage work-life balance

OPENLY DISCUSS WELL-BEING RELATED TOPICS

- ❑ Letting students now about campus resources
- ❑ Asking students how they are doing (specify the current context, and be ready to listen to their answer)
- ❑ Discussing your own mental health and well-being
- ❑ Checking in with students who appear to be struggling
- ❑ Addressing campus issues that affect multiple students (closures, student deaths, tragedies felt by specific communities)
- ❑ Sharing general information about mental health and wellbeing with the students

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WHOLE STUDENT

Practical Tips from the Experts & Your Colleagues

CREATING A SAFE(R) CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

- ❏ Treating student input as valuable
- ❏ Taking breaks as necessary (esp. during challenging discussions/topics)
- ❏ Respecting student autonomy
- ❏ Asking for volunteers (vs. cold-calling)
- ❏ Acknowledging that university can be scary and intimidating to new students
- ❏ Establishing a relationship based on trust with students
- ❏ Allowing students space to be wrong, and gently redirecting students as appropriate
- ❏ Ensuring that discussions allow space for different perspectives and opinions
- ❏ Using inclusive language
- ❏ Addressing safety and support early in the term
- ❏ Allowing students to participate in multiple ways, if participation marks are deemed necessary (offer low stakes engagement opportunities)
- ❏ Offering content warnings when necessary.

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References

Lane, K., Teng, M. Y., Barnes, S. J., Moore, K., Smith, K., & Lee, M. (2018). Using Appreciative Inquiry to Understand the Role of Teaching Practices in Student Well-being at a Research-Intensive University. *The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching   and Learning, 9* (2). Retrieved from https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cjsotl_rcacea/vol9/iss2/10

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