UCI® University of California, Irvine
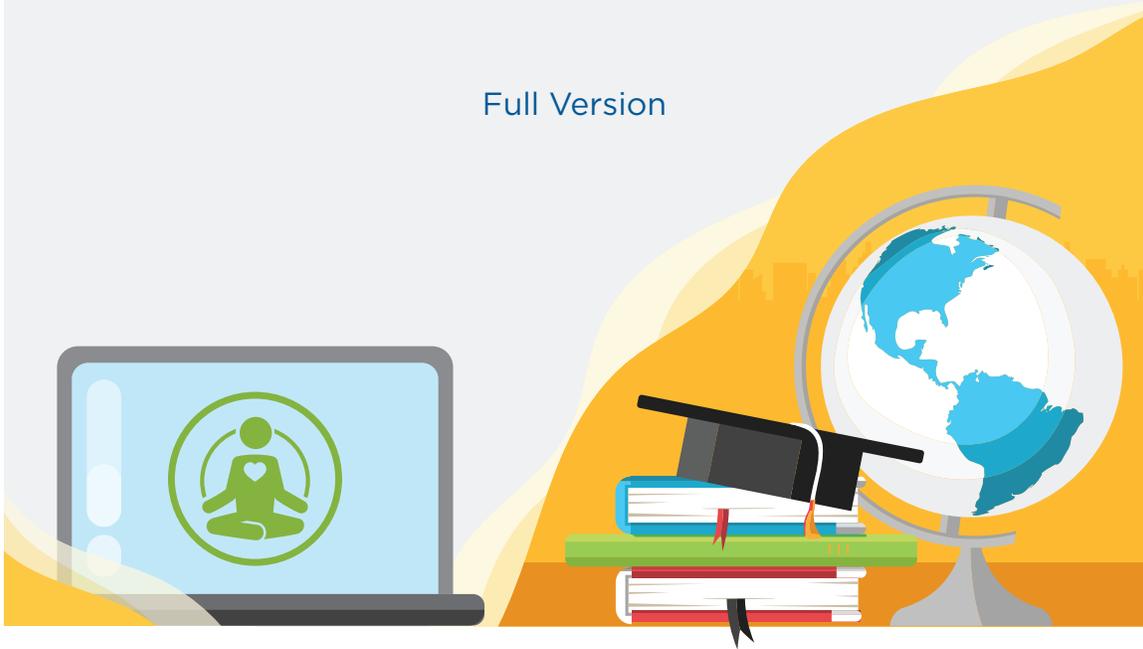
INTEGRATING WELL-BEING CONCEPTS INTO LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Full Version

Positive well-being is a key predictor for learning and student success. Studies indicate that mental health and well-being are connected to a student's ability to learn (Eisenberg, Hunt, & Speer, 2013; Keyes et al., 2012; Martin, 2010). Positive mental health and well-being enhance a student's ability to learn with evidence showing that different teaching practices affect student learning outcomes.

Faculty (including TA's, instructors) play a role in creating and fostering positive learning environments. In accordance with The UCI Strategic Plan, the efforts of this guide align with the Pillar 2: First in Class. In order to "foster excellence in teaching and learning" and "integrate student life with educational experiences", this guide is being made available for you to integrate holistic wellness into the learning environment for the students of UCI. Integrating well-being concepts into classroom/learning environments results in healthy classroom practices that ultimately lead to student/academic success, a healthy culture and positive environment, student retention, and effective learning outcomes.

How to Use This Guide

This document provides suggested strategies to incorporate and integrate health and well-being concepts into your classrooms and student activities. Support your students' success by implementing one or more of these practices in your courses.

Suggestion #1: Be Mindful about Deadlines and Workload

Being mindful about the workload and the deadline set for assignments in the classroom is one way to ensure that students are not extremely overwhelmed, which can ultimately offer more time dedicated for their well-being. (Boucher, 2016). For example, you could consider doing one or more of the following:

- Adjust deadlines for assignments to discourage all-nighters (i.e., don't make assignments due at 8am)
- Consider the timing of exams and assignments to alleviate undue stress and anxiety (be aware of major religious holidays throughout the quarter)
- Set deadlines that offer work/life balance for yourself and for your students
- Ensure the workload is reasonable and communicate grading and deadlines clearly.
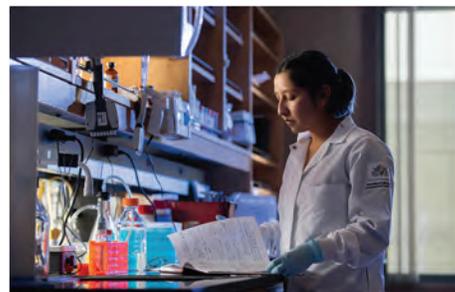
Suggestion #2: Be Flexible and Offer Options

Offering alternative options that are flexible to the students and their learning style will help generate success in the classroom through various aspects. Providing students with some flexibility and control over their learning experiences helps them to feel empowered and supported, contributing to their well-being. For example, you could consider doing one or more of the following:

- Give students options for their grade. For example, best assignment grade out of the two
- Offer choices in assignments so that students can pick what works best for their learning.

Encouraging physical activity breaks in the classroom has shown to have a positive impact on students' academic performance by increasing their desire to learn. Implementing this standard in classrooms can overall stimulate physical activity levels and increase engagement (Ferrer & Laughlin, 2017). For example, you could consider doing one or more of the following:

- Offer short breaks during class for students to stretch, do a mindfulness activity or do get-to-know-each other activities
- Conduct a portion of your discussion group standing and/or standing for group exercises, prefacing with "If you are able, stand…"
- Welcome students to stand in long lectures or seminars
- Incorporate brief meditation or self-reflection activities into classes lasting more than an hour.

College can be an extremely stressful environment for students, so it has the ability to affect their health and well-being. The importance of sharing resources and wellness information is to ensure that students feel supported by their campus community and have the opportunity to succeed. Feeling supported by the campus can start in the classroom. For example, you could consider doing one or more of the following:

- Include sample health and well-being messages and resources on syllabi
- Share general information about mental health and well-being with students
- In your syllabus acknowledge that university can be stressful; provide resources and offer a variety of ways that your students may contact you with questions or concerns
- Familiarize yourself with the student resources on campus and refer students to mental health resources or disability services for accommodations when necessary
- Familiarize yourself with various student support services and co-curricular learning supports across campus
- Link students to resources that support their well-being, include it on the syllabus or go over it during lecture
- Be aware of the signs that a student is in distress (academic indicators like missing class or behavioral, emotional or physical indicators), and take timely and appropriate action. Learn more in the UC Promoting Student Mental Health Guide.

Suggestion #5: Help Students Connect With You

Connecting with students on a personal level will help create a more productive environment that allows for students to feel comfortable and supported, which can be beneficial for improving their ability to learn (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, n.d.) For example, you could consider doing one or more of the following:

- Share your teaching philosophy with students
- Make yourself available in different forms: email, Skype, Zoom, etc.
- Seek feedback from students throughout the course (this could be done through web survey or an anonymous in class comment card)
- Encourage students to attend office hours
- If you feel comfortable and safe to do so, talk about yourself and your experiences and provide students the opportunity to do the same.

Suggestion #6: Be Welcoming, Enthusiastic, and Caring

Setting a welcoming tone is one of the many ways that you can cultivate a more friendly and positive learning and working space for students. Creating a safe space in the class environment is important for students. (Holley & Steiner, 2013) For example, you could consider doing one or more of the following:

- Be intentional about setting a welcoming tone
- Show enthusiasm for the subject, including your own professional path
- Be positive, supportive, and personable.
- Let students know that you care about them and are invested in their success
- Take care of your own well-being so that you can be present and encouraging for your students.

Getting students connected with their local and individual communities gives them the opportunity to make a difference, and can be beneficial for their overall well-being (Bandy, n.d.). For example, you could consider doing one or more of the following:

- Bring in other subject matter experts as guest speakers
- 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
- Recognize that universities play a role in developing the leaders of tomorrow and encourage students to explore their own values and goals
- Lead discussions or activities that help students develop a sense of civic responsibility
- Encourage students to seek out extracurricular volunteer opportunities
- Offer extra credit for students to attend course-related community events
- Connect course concepts to the "real world" and give students the opportunity to do the same
- Offer site visits, trips or other informal learning environments.

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Suggestion #8: Provide Timely Feedback and Helpful Advice

Providing timely feedback and helpful advice allows for students to discover their challenges early on and work to improve themselves throughout the course (Wiggins, 2012). For example, you could consider doing one or more of the following:

• Provide timely and specific feedback and outline ways that students can improve
• Ask students to identify concepts they want to learn more about and what was challenging and address at the beginning of the next class.

Suggestion #9: Provide Opportunities that Promote Professional and Personal Skills

Providing students opportunities to engage with the real world will help promote their professional and personal skills that are necessary for after graduating college (Roulston & McCrindle, 2018). For example, you could consider doing one or more of the following:

• Provide opportunities for personal development
• Incorporate mindfulness, journaling, and other forms of personal development into class activities and assignments
• Incorporate skill-building activities in class and find ways to build this throughout the course.

Positive group experiences have been shown to contribute to student learning and overall college success. Students are able to develop communication and teamwork skills that are increasingly important for the professional world (Carnegie Mellon University, n.d.) Allowing students to connect with their own peers is crucial in their development in the classroom. For example, you could consider doing one or more of the following:

- Encourage connection in your classes by having students introduce themselves to one another and work together in teams
- Include teamwork as a component of grading for group projects
- Encourage students to participate in study groups and in social activities outside of class
- Provide opportunities during class time and breaks for students to work together and get to know one another
- Work with your teaching assistants to create opportunities for social connection and teamwork in labs and discussion sections
- Suggest opportunities for students to interact outside of class time and join them if possible
- Start class by asking students to turn to someone next to them and ask any of the following: how they are doing, what they are grateful for, what made them smile today, etc.

Consider promoting health and well-being resources to support student health and learning. Healthy Campus partners would like to encourage all faculty, TA's, and instructors to include one or more of the following suggested examples. Feel free to modify, tailor, or create your own and share with us. Thank you for your involvement in creating a culture of health in your classrooms.

Tobacco Free Policy: There is no smoking, tobacco use, or vaping allowed on UCI property.
Smoking, use of smokeless tobacco products, use of nicotine products not regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to help individuals who use tobacco to quit, use of electronic smoking devices (e.g., electronic cigarettes), and smoking or vaping of cannabis/marijuana are prohibited on UCI property including parking lots. For more information about the policy or cessation resources, please visit **https://www.ehs.uci.edu/programs/smoke-free/**.

Mental Health
As a student, you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, alcohol/drug problems, anxiety, depression, difficulty concentrating, and lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce the ability to participate in daily activities, and UCI has resources to help! If you or a friend are in distress or experiencing any of these symptoms, please contact (949) 824-6457 to speak to a mental health professional at the UCI Counseling Center, or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK that is available 24/7. Please refer to **https://counseling.uci.edu/** for additional resources.

Basic Needs
If you or someone you know is in need of economic, food or housing support, you can find help at **http://basicneeds.uci.edu/**. You may be eligible for money to buy groceries via **http://basicneeds.uci.edu/get-calfresh/calfresh-home.php**. If you are in need of immediate assistance, see the Basic Needs Coordinator Andrea Gutierrez at **andrea.g@uci.edu** or (949) 824-7529. Visit the on-campus food pantry at 4079 Mesa Rd. Irvine, CA, 92617.

Disability Services
UCI is committed to providing equal access to students with documented disabilities. To ensure your access to this course and to the program, students with disabilities may contact Disability Services Center (DSC). There you can engage in a confidential conversation about the process for requesting reasonable accommodations in the classroom and clinical settings. Accommodations are not provided retroactively. Students are encouraged to register with DSC as soon as they begin the program. More information can be found online at **https://dsc.uci.edu/**, by e-mailing **dsc@uci.edu**, or by contacting (949)-824-7494.

Student Wellness
The UCI Center for Student Wellness and Health Promotion (CSWHP) strives for collegiate health promotion by focusing on the unique and relevant health needs and concerns of UCI students to support your academic success. The CSWHP empowers you to make informed decisions to support your individual health and a healthy campus environment by providing comprehensive programs and coordinated services to build awareness about health issues. They can help with assessment and goal setting, allowing you to create balance by taking a wellness-based approach to health. Develop healthy and sustainable habits. Take pride in achieving your personal best and inspire community by leading fellow Anteaters to be healthy. More information can be found online at **https://studentwellness.uci.edu/**.

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