



# TEXAS WELL★BEING

Promoting Well-being in UT Learning Environments



# INTRODUCTION

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

In partnership with colleges, schools and departments, Well-being in Learning Environments helps faculty make small shifts in teaching that could make a major difference in students' mental health and well-being.

## WHAT ARE “CONDITIONS FOR WELL-BEING”?

Research in the field of positive psychology and flourishing indicate that conditions for well-being include concepts such as social connectedness, mindfulness, growth mindset, resilience, gratitude, inclusivity, self-compassion and life purpose.

## WHY?

Students with mental-health concerns are more likely to have a lower grade-point average and a higher probability of dropping out (Eisenberg, D. Golberstein, E. & Hunt, 2009). According to El Ansari and Stock, 2010: “It is widely accepted that health and well-being are essential elements for effective learning.” The demand for mental-health services at the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC) has increased 62 percent from academic year 2009–2010 to academic year 2016–17, while the total number of students at The University of Texas at Austin increased by less than 1 percent (CMHC Fact Sheet, 2017; The University of Texas at Austin, 2017).

Engaging students in practices that promote mental health is the responsibility of not just one department on campus, but of the entire campus community. Students at UT Austin indicate that faculty members are often seen as the “missing link” when it comes to their own well-being (Stuart & Lee, 2013). Additionally, the Okanagan Charter, an international charter for health-promoting universities and colleges, published a call to action for higher-education institutions: embed health into all aspects of campus culture, across the administration, operations and academic mandates (Okanagan Charter, 2015).

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK

Think of this guidebook as you would a menu. It provides a variety of strategies, tools and resources from which to pick and choose.

The strategies in this guidebook are based on research. They are also based on ideas and techniques that other University of Texas faculty have found to be effective in supporting student well-being. When considering the strategies or ideas you'd like to try, think about your personal interactions and teaching style. Not every strategy is the right fit, so pick one that feels comfortable and do it well. Some are easier than others to embed. According to students, some of the simplest ideas can have a huge impact when done authentically.

**I CAME WELL-EQUIPPED WITH A WHOLE TOOLBOX OF COPING SKILLS AND EXPERIENCES, BUT EVEN I STRUGGLE WITH SOME OF THE THINGS WE HAVE TO DO.**

—Student



# THE WHOLE STUDENT

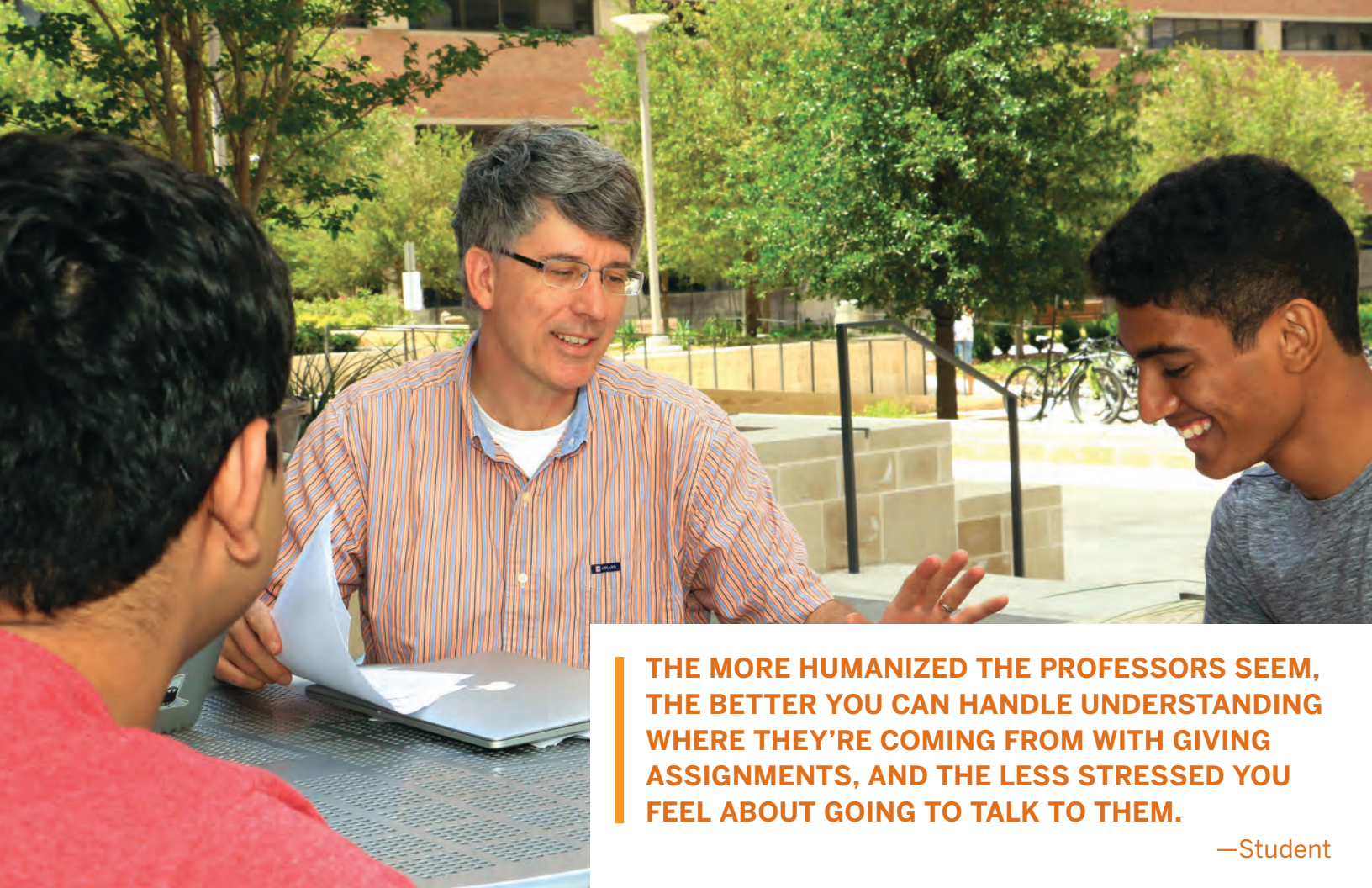
## GENERAL WELL-BEING PRACTICES

Students who reported poor mental health but did not qualify for a diagnosis were three times more likely to experience academic impairment than students who reported a flourishing mental health state (Keyes et al., 2013). This research suggests that the mere absence of a mental-health disorder does not indicate flourishing mental health, and that positive factors such as social connection, emotional well-being and psychological health can help to protect students from academic impairment.

- ❑ Remember your students are human, and so are you.
- ❑ Be passionate about what you teach.
- ❑ Use humor if possible.
- ❑ Be happy about teaching.
- ❑ Try to reduce the power dynamic between you and students.
- ❑ Allow students to see your authentic self, including your mistakes and vulnerabilities.
- ❑ Talk about mental health openly to destigmatize it.
- ❑ Share ways that you practice self-care, and have students share how they practice it as well.
- ❑ Include information in your syllabus about mental health (but avoid copying and pasting this information from somewhere else).
- ❑ Let students know you are open to talking with them individually about their states of well-being. (Refer to “Supporting Students in Distress” at the end of the guidebook.)

- ❑ **SHOW STUDENTS THE “THRIVE AT UT AUSTIN” APP** developed by the Counseling and Mental Health Center, and model how to use it. [cmhc.utexas.edu/thrive](http://cmhc.utexas.edu/thrive)





**THE MORE HUMANIZED THE PROFESSORS SEEM, THE BETTER YOU CAN HANDLE UNDERSTANDING WHERE THEY'RE COMING FROM WITH GIVING ASSIGNMENTS, AND THE LESS STRESSED YOU FEEL ABOUT GOING TO TALK TO THEM.**

—Student



**I try to be honest with students that although I'm a professor, and I went to grad school and got a job at UT Austin, I have been in their seats and their space. I have been overwhelmed, anxious and depressed. So I guess I try to humanize myself and our roles a little bit.**

—Mary Rose  
College of Liberal Arts



# CONDITIONS FOR WELL-BEING

## SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Social connectedness has a direct effect on college student retention, according to Allen, Robbins, Casillas, and Oh, 2008. Evidence also suggests that it has a positive correlation with achievement motivation (Walton, Cohen, Cwir, & Spencer, 2012), which may impact academic achievement. Social connectedness has also proved to be an important factor in maintaining student retention rates (Allen et al., 2008). Research suggests that supportive faculty members can have a significant positive impact on a student's intention to persist after the first year (Shelton, 2003). You can help your students by connecting with them or by helping them connect with each other!

- ❑ On the first day of class, use a survey to get to know students. Ask about their backgrounds, interests, strengths, needs and other topics.
- ❑ Use the survey information to make adjustments to teaching course content.
- ❑ Learn the names of your students.
- ❑ Get out from behind the podium or desk and move among the students. If you use a tablet that connects to the projector, you can allow students to write on the tablet themselves to show how they would solve a problem or answer a question.
- ❑ Incorporate welcoming rituals at the start of class. (See sidebar.)
- ❑ Share personal anecdotes.
- ❑ Share personal connections to content—areas where you struggled, concepts you were surprised to learn, etc.
- ❑ Close each class with something positive. For example, have students share something they learned or something they're interested in learning more about.
- ❑ Use various forms of cooperative or collaborative learning.

## INCORPORATE “WELCOMING RITUALS” AT THE START OF CLASS

- ❑ Smile and greet students.
- ❑ Carry on informal conversations before class.
- ❑ Play music before class. Allow students to choose the tunes.
- ❑ Ask students how they are doing.
- ❑ Start class by letting students share one WOW, POW or CHOW:
  - ❑ WOW: Something great that happened in the past week.
  - ❑ POW: Something disappointing that happened recently.
  - ❑ CHOW: A great new restaurant experience.
- ❑ Start with a brief writing assignment and/or peer conversations.
- ❑ Allow students to go over homework in pairs or cooperative groups.

**I THINK LEARNING WOULD IMPROVE... IF EVERYBODY WORKED TOGETHER... IF EVERYBODY'S COMPETING AGAINST EACH OTHER, THEN EVERYONE WANTS TO KEEP EVERYTHING TO THEMSELVES. BEING ABLE TO STUDY IN GROUPS WOULD HELP WITH WELL-BEING AND BEING SOCIALLY CONNECTED.**

—Student



**I like to go in early and talk with students before class starts. We don't talk about class content. We just talk about life stuff. It makes you more human in their eyes. I also like to stand outside the classroom door and say hi to students or tease and joke with them as they're walking by to other classes. These small things build connections between me and students.**

—Sharon Rush  
College of Pharmacy





## MINDFULNESS AND STRESS REDUCTION

Mindfulness has been shown to improve memory and testing performance, reduce stress levels, and foster better physical health (Bonamo, Legerski & Thomas, 2015; Kerrigan et al., 2017). Mindfulness practice has also been shown to improve mental-health outcomes for students who are struggling in an academic setting (Dvořáková et al., 2017). While the goal of mindfulness is not to help people achieve more, it has remarkably reliable effects on well-being, academic performance, stress reduction and general health for its practitioners.

- ❑ Engage in “brain breaks” that allow students to take their minds off the learning content.
  - ❑ Allow for collaborative discussions or other interactions during instruction.
  - ❑ Allow for short periods of movement (e.g., get up and find one person with whom to share a thought, story or question).
- ❑ Provide a “mindfulness minute” at the beginning of class, before exams, etc., in which you encourage or allow students to sit quietly and use deep breathing techniques.
- ❑ Practice techniques for focusing attention.
- ❑ Teach students how to use effective self-talk and stress-reduction approaches to manage their emotions.
- ❑ Incorporate mindfulness activities at highly stressful times (e.g., before an exam).
- ❑ Organize mindfulness activities outside of the classroom. Examples include:
  - ❑ Visiting the Blanton Museum, where museum staff will collaborate with faculty to teach students mindfulness techniques.
  - ❑ Encouraging students to participate in a yoga, meditation or exercise class.
  - ❑ Encouraging students to participate in mindfulness classes or activities for extra credit.
- ❑ Let students know about resources for mindfulness on campus (e.g., the MindBody Labs at the Counseling and Mental Health Center and the Student Activity Center).

**I LOVED IT WHEN OUR PROFESSOR TAUGHT US A MINI MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUE TO USE BEFORE EACH CLASS STARTED. IT WAS A REALLY RIGOROUS CLASS AND IMPORTANT FOR ME TO DO WELL IN. HER TECHNIQUE HELPED ME NOT FREAK OUT BEFORE TESTS. NOW I AM USING IT IN OTHER CLASSES TOO!**

—Student





**I use mindfulness techniques within my class to teach self-care, and I haven't thrown any content away. For example, we went to the Blanton on the first day of class, and students found different pieces of artwork to consider things like the message and how the piece made them feel. They also focused on relaxing and breathing as they looked at the artwork. It took their minds off anything scientific.**

—Renee' Acosta  
College of Pharmacy



## GROWTH MINDSET

Growth mindset, or the belief that intelligence is not a fixed trait but one that can improve, is shown to be positively correlated with student achievement scores (Bostwick, Collie, Martin, & Durksen, 2017; Dweck, 2006). Students' mindsets can influence how they react to stressful situations, failures and challenges. Having a growth mindset is associated with more adaptive coping and learning strategies after failure. Alternately, a fixed mindset leads students to disengage from their challenges and feel helpless (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Fortunately, a student's mindset is malleable. Here are some strategies to help your students change the way they see themselves in relation to challenging coursework.

- ❑ Teach students how to use mistakes/failures to their advantage.
- ❑ Let students see you make mistakes, then show them how you use those mistakes to learn.
- ❑ Struggle with concepts in front of students and allow them to help you work through the process.
- ❑ Explicitly talk with students about learning and deliberate practice.
- ❑ Discuss and model self-regulation strategies for learning and applying content. (See below.)

## DISCUSS AND MODEL SELF-REGULATION STRATEGIES FOR LEARNING AND APPLYING CONTENT. EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

- ❑ Setting goals and monitoring progress toward those goals.
- ❑ Using self-talk effectively to motivate and support active learning.
- ❑ Creating time management plans to accomplish goals.
- ❑ Thinking about your approach, identifying misconceptions, and doing something to fix those misconceptions.
- ❑ Becoming aware of your emotions, such as anxiety and using techniques to address them.





**Mistakes are very important to encourage creativity and exploration when students can learn. Gladly, I make numerous mistakes during my lectures and frequently my students catch them. I prefer a class style where we are all trying to figure out interesting things together.**

—Alex Dimakis

Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering

- ❑ Focus less on competition and performance and more on learning and mastery. Examples include:
  - ❑ Not grading exams or other assignments based on a normal distribution.
  - ❑ Allowing students to retake exams or parts of exams to learn from mistakes.
  - ❑ Allowing students to rewrite papers or redo projects based on feedback provided.
  - ❑ Having students take exams both individually and in groups.
  - ❑ Giving students choices in how they demonstrate knowledge and mastery of content.
- ❑ Build in different ways for students to demonstrate learning and mastery of content. Examples include:
  - ❑ Using a variety of assignment types—exams, papers, presentations, videos, etc.
  - ❑ Letting students choose how they demonstrate their learning within individual assignments (e.g., creating a video, writing a paper, giving a presentation).
  - ❑ Allowing students to choose whether they work on assignments individually, in groups or with partners.
- ❑ Allow for students to fix mistakes and work through problems they've encountered so they can see the progress being made.
- ❑ Let students know you don't want perfection. Do this by using words like "learning" and "growing," rather than "achievement" or "performance."

## RESILIENCE

Resilience is the ability to recover from stress despite challenging life events that otherwise would overwhelm a person's normal ability to cope with that stress (Smith et al., 2008). Students with more resilience tend to have better mental health and wellness and academic outcomes (Johnson, Taasobshirazi, Kestler, & Cordova, 2015). Being able to bounce back from difficult experiences can mean coping after a bad grade or recovering from a stressful life event like the loss of a loved one. Fortunately, resilience seems to be a malleable psychological factor that, with work and time, can be strengthened. Studies have shown resilience is linked to mindfulness, a sense of purpose in life, an optimistic outlook and active coping styles (Smith, Epstein, Ortiz, Christopher, & Tooley, 2013).

- ❑ Talk about times that you've failed and how you worked through those failures.
- ❑ Teach students how to use mistakes/failures to their advantage.
- ❑ Use exams and other assignments as teaching tools, rather than the end of learning. Examples include:
  - ❑ Instead of simply giving students their grades, go over the exam or assignment and discuss areas of common struggle, what these mistakes mean for thinking and learning, and how they connect to new learning.
  - ❑ Allow students to correct mistakes and redo assignments to demonstrate continued mastery and learning.
  - ❑ Provide students with individual feedback on assignments, and model how to use this feedback to improve on future assignments.
- ❑ Explicitly teach strategies you use to overcome failure.
- ❑ Teach students how to self-assess accurately by modeling your own self-assessing behavior.
- ❑ Focus less on competition and performance and more on learning and mastery.
- ❑ Be optimistic about how students are doing in your class.





**In Fall 2017, I had taught a required second-year undergraduate course for the eighth time, and I took a very different approach. I mentioned to the students that I had struggled with specific topics in that same course when I was an undergraduate student. I told them that I had reordered the traditional presentation of the topics in the class to make it easier to grasp the more difficult concepts. I received several thank-yous during the semester from students who were repeating the course and had been overwhelmed by one of the more difficult topics due to the traditional order of topics.**

—Brian Evans  
Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering



## GRATITUDE

In simple terms, researchers define gratitude as “a felt sense of wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation for life” (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Lyuboirsky, 2007). Emmons, McCullough, and their peers have demonstrated the beneficial impacts of expressing gratitude on physical and mental health (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Neff, 2011). This research also shows that through consistent practice, gratitude can be developed over time, leading to higher levels of happiness and self-worth and stronger relationships (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Lyuboirsky, 2007; McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).

- ❑ Show students how to express gratitude. Examples include:
  - ❑ Share things in your life for which you are grateful.
  - ❑ In class, share student actions that have inspired gratitude.
  - ❑ Give individual students written notes describing something they've done that you appreciate.
  - ❑ Send emails to individual students listing things they've done that you appreciate.
- ❑ Have students think about or list things for which they're grateful. Examples include:
  - ❑ Before an exam, give students two minutes to write about one object of gratitude.
  - ❑ During a break in class, have students contemplate a relationship for which they are grateful.
  - ❑ For homework, ask students to write a letter to someone who has made them feel grateful.
  - ❑ Have students keep a gratitude journal and write in it once a week.
- ❑ Be optimistic. Focus on the positive more than the negative. Examples include:
  - ❑ At the beginning of the semester, focus on the benefits of being in your class.
  - ❑ When going over an exam or assignment, focus on what students did correctly before addressing their mistakes.
  - ❑ At the end of the semester, share how teaching the class benefited you, and have students share how the class benefited them.



## INCLUSIVITY

Think of inclusive education as an ongoing effort with three distinct but related goals (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013): to more equitably distribute learning opportunities; to recognize and honor the differences among students; and to provide opportunities for marginalized groups “to represent themselves in decision-making processes.”

As a conclusion to their meta-analysis of inclusive education research, Waitoller and Artiles (2013) argue that inclusivity should be treated more broadly. Rather than focusing on a unitary identity like “disabled” or “female,” for example, treat the question of inclusion in the classroom through a lens of intersectionality, considering all relevant identities and groups that have been historically marginalized in educational settings.

- ❑ Consider student needs when it comes to seating, visual/audio equipment, note taking, test taking, response opportunities, etc.
- ❑ Use inclusive language and gender-neutral pronouns.
- ❑ Consider providing your pronouns and having students share their pronouns on the first day of class.
- ❑ Provide resource information in your syllabus or elsewhere. (See the “Resources” section.)
- ❑ Be prepared to allow for and respond to different student responses within the content.
- ❑ Explicitly talk about mental health and well-being to normalize difficulties.



**I've had students screaming, fighting in class, but I guess from my perspective, I don't really mind. I see that as I've created a safe space where everyone feels that they can be themselves...**

—UT faculty member





## INCLUSIVITY

### FACULTY RESOURCES:

- ❑ Faculty Innovation Center: [facultyinnovate.utexas.edu/inclusive](https://facultyinnovate.utexas.edu/inclusive)
- ❑ Division of Diversity and Community Engagement: [diversity.utexas.edu](https://diversity.utexas.edu)
- ❑ Services for Students with Disabilities: [diversity.utexas.edu/disability](https://diversity.utexas.edu/disability)
- ❑ Gender and Sexuality Center: [utgsc.org](https://utgsc.org)
- ❑ Multicultural Engagement Center: [diversity.utexas.edu/multiculturalengagement](https://diversity.utexas.edu/multiculturalengagement)
- ❑ Office for Inclusion and Equity: [equity.utexas.edu](https://equity.utexas.edu)
- ❑ Title IX: [titleix.utexas.edu](https://titleix.utexas.edu)
- ❑ BeVocal: The Bystander Intervention Initiative of the University of Texas at Austin: [wellnessnetwork.utexas.edu/BeVocal](https://wellnessnetwork.utexas.edu/BeVocal)
- ❑ Humanities Institute Difficult Dialogues Program: [liberalarts.utexas.edu/humanitiesinstitute/courses/About.php](https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/humanitiesinstitute/courses/About.php)
- ❑ Race and Curriculum Revision Project: Keffrelyn Brown, [keffrelyn@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:keffrelyn@austin.utexas.edu)
- ❑ Texas Center for Disability Studies: [disabilitystudies.utexas.edu/institute-person-centered-practices](https://disabilitystudies.utexas.edu/institute-person-centered-practices)

This is not a comprehensive list of diversity and inclusion resources on campus. For information about a specific topic, please contact the Faculty Innovation Center ([facultyinnovate.utexas.edu](https://facultyinnovate.utexas.edu)).

## SELF-COMPASSION AND EMPATHY

Self-compassion is not the same thing as self-esteem; it is a practice of treating yourself like you would a close friend by accepting your shortcomings but also holding yourself accountable to grow and learn from failure (Neff, 2003, 2011). Research on this topic conducted here at UT Austin suggests that “self-compassionate individuals may be better able to see failure as a learning opportunity and to focus on accomplishing tasks at hand” (Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005).

- ❑ Model how you have compassion for yourself and others.
  - ❑ When you make a mistake or struggle with something, share it with students and talk about strategies you use to be compassionate with yourself (e.g., self-talk).
  - ❑ When a student comes to you with a question or need, show that you are listening and understand where they’re coming from (e.g., smile, shake your head, repeat what they say to clarify).
- ❑ Discuss common humanity among you and students. Examples include:
  - ❑ When students struggle or fail, talk about a time when you had a similar experience.
  - ❑ Share your own positive and negative experiences at specific times (e.g., before or after giving an exam, when going over an assignment).
- ❑ Try seeing things from a student’s perspective, and help him or her see things from your perspective.
- ❑ Give students the benefit of the doubt. Don’t assume they’re lazy or trying to get out of work.
- ❑ Be flexible. Take into consideration students’ lives outside of class. These lives may include:
  - ❑ Families, including their own children
  - ❑ Jobs
  - ❑ Chronic illnesses
  - ❑ Other classes



## LIFE PURPOSE

Life purpose, or meaning in life, is a core component of positive psychology and refers to the belief that one lives a meaningful existence. This belief is associated with higher life satisfaction (Chamberlain & Zika, 1988), happiness (Debats, van der Lunne, & Wezeman, 1993), and hope (Mascaro & Rosen, 2005). Having a sense of life purpose has multiple positive associations with coping, health, well-being and adaptive coping strategies (Thompson, Coker, Krause, & Henry, 2003). It's also related to a lower incidence of psychological disorders (Owens, Steger, Whitesell, & Herrera, 2009). Helping students understand how classroom happenings are linked to their sense of purpose in life may help them maintain motivation, hope and engagement with the course.

- ❑ Have students set goals for what they want to accomplish in the course.
- ❑ Share how content relates to your own life and goals.
- ❑ While teaching, explicitly connect content to students' goals.
- ❑ Set up times to talk informally with students about their goals and life plans.



**In all likelihood, someone has taken advantage of me in terms of asking for and getting extensions or make-ups. But I have to balance that risk against one in which I must scrupulously interrogate students' lives and put myself in the position to say, 'Well, I don't believe your word. Show me proof that your grandmother died.' Kindness to students who are struggling is important to me, and if I am going to err, I tend to err on the side of assuming that students are following the honor code and being truthful.**

—Mary Rose  
College of Liberal Arts

# NOTES

# EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

## IN-CLASS INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

The kinds of instructional practices used in a classroom will vary according to any number of factors, including the material taught, size of the classroom and learning objectives. One instructional practice that all students can benefit from is knowing what is expected of them by being given a clear framework they can use to anchor their knowledge and progress (Balgopal, Casper, Atadero, & Rambo-Hernandez, 2017). Finding ways to provide structured, intentional and transparent assessment practices can limit anxiety and improve a student's learning, retention and testing performance (Chiou, Wang, & Lee, 2014; Cross & Angelo, 1988). Encourage them to ask questions and seek help.

### SIMPLE IDEAS:

- Review previously learned content before introducing new information.
- Connect course content to the real world.
- Be explicit about objectives related to abstract learning such as thinking processes and problem-solving, and explicitly show students how these types of learning relate to content, activities, exams, etc.
- Plan instruction, including any activities or discussion, effectively.
- Incorporate “think, turn, talk” during lessons.
  - Think: Have students think about their responses to a question or idea.
  - Turn: Ask students to turn to a partner.
  - Talk: Have students share their thinking about the question or idea with their partners.
- Incorporate writing-to-learn activities such as admit or exit tickets, non-stop writes, silent conversations and write-arounds.
  - Admit ticket: A brief writing activity at the beginning of class to review previous learning.





- ❑ Exit ticket: A brief writing activity to review what was learned in class or preview what will be learned in the next class.
- ❑ Non-stop write: Timed writing activity in which students take two to four minutes to write about their thinking, questions or ideas related to what they've learned.
- ❑ Silent conversation: An activity similar to “think, turn, talk” but instead of talking about their thinking, partners write about their thinking, read what one another has written, and respond to it in writing. Each written response is usually timed for one to two minutes.
- ❑ Write-around: An activity similar to a silent conversation, but instead of partnering with one person, students pass their written responses around in a group of four to five.
- ❑ To check for understanding, ask students to give you a thumbs-up, thumbs-sideways or thumbs-down to represent how they're feeling about the content. If there are very few thumbs-ups, then you can probe further to learn the specific causes of difficulty.
- ❑ Incorporate quick, informal assessments to gauge student mastery of concepts and provide immediate feedback.

### **MORE COMPLEX IDEAS:**

- ❑ Allow students to apply knowledge and not only memorize information.
- ❑ Create cooperative learning activities to engage students in application, analysis and synthesis. Establish norms with students for how to work collaboratively.
- ❑ As students work in pairs or small groups, listen to their ideas and questions, and make note of what specific students say. During the whole-group discussion, ask different students if you can share their comments during the paired/small-group work. This technique is especially helpful for engaging students who are reticent about talking in front of the whole class.
- ❑ Use worked examples and non-examples. Non-examples are problems that have been done incorrectly. Have students find the mistakes and work in partners or groups to resolve them.
- ❑ Allow students to begin work on a homework, lab or other assignment in class to get support from you and their fellow students before completing the assignment on their own.
- ❑ Offer choices in assignments and tasks, including exam structure (e.g., multiple-choice vs. short-answer vs. oral response).
- ❑ Create assignments in which the results can be utilized by a community or campus initiative.
- ❑ Invite outside speakers who can connect learning to civic engagement.

**My course pairs students with elders residing in assisted-living/healthcare facilities to provide companionship and social support. By building long-term relationships, students develop the soft skills of empathy, respect and caring attitudes which are important in their future careers.**

—Holli Temple  
College of Pharmacy

## OUTSIDE OF CLASS ACTIVITIES

Office hours are often underutilized by students, but when a single check-in and reflection meeting is made mandatory students tend to improve their learning outcomes (McGrath, 2014). These findings suggest that personal recognition and engagement have an important augmentative effect above and beyond additional exposure to the material students were tasked with learning—statistics, in this case. See McGrath (2014) for a sample reflection exercise to conduct with students during office hours. In addition to office hours, consider conducting informal activities outside of class to get to know students on a personal level and help them make connections to other resources (e.g., museums, libraries).

- ❑ Provide informal opportunities such as Q&A sessions and study groups for students to discuss course content.
- ❑ Invite small groups of students to attend office hours.
- ❑ Create informal activities/get-togethers for faculty and students to get to know one another. Examples include:
  - ❑ Coffee chats
  - ❑ Cookies, donuts or ice cream with different faculty
  - ❑ Lunch with students
  - ❑ Informal weekly meetings to talk with students about their life goals, plans, etc.
- ❑ Visit different locations on campus with students. Examples include:
  - ❑ Blanton Museum of Art
  - ❑ Harry Ransom Center
  - ❑ Dolph Briscoe Center for American History
  - ❑ Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum
  - ❑ Texas Performing Arts
  - ❑ Texas Memorial Museum
  - ❑ Department of Astronomy's Star Parties
- ❑ Respond to student emails or other forms of communication in a respectful and timely way.
- ❑ Mentor teaching assistants whom you're supervising in well-being practices.




**Our department had an ice-cream social where administrators gave out ice cream to students and faculty. It gave us a chance to come together as a department and get to know one another on a personal level. Many students told us they enjoyed getting to relax and not having to think about the next exam or lab. It was just about getting to know each other.**

—Bryson Duhon  
College of Pharmacy

## DEPARTMENTAL ACTIVITIES

In addition to the role of individual faculty members in supporting student well-being, administrators within colleges and departments can work to coordinate these efforts. Such coordination can help faculty more easily support students. Administrators may also consider embedding conditions for well-being into various departmental activities to positively impact the well-being of both students and faculty.

- ❑ Communicate the importance of faculty members taking care of their own states of well-being.
- ❑ Create a student-led wellness group that makes recommendations for improvements in departmental policies and practices.
- ❑ Provide training for faculty in recognizing and responding to students in distress. Contact the Counseling and Mental Health Center or Student Emergency Services to learn more.
- ❑ Create consistent systems for gathering and implementing faculty and student feedback within the department.
- ❑ Create a first-year (or longer) informal course that combines mentoring from both a faculty member and a peer mentor (e.g., third-year student) with well-being lessons/activities.
- ❑ Provide training and support to teaching assistants in well-being practices (e.g., through Faculty Innovation Center courses).
- ❑ Create informal activities/events for faculty and students to get to know one another.
- ❑ Allow time for faculty to share well-being practices they are incorporating into their classes.
- ❑ Plan wellness activities. Examples include:
  - ❑ A wellness week with different activities like a petting zoo, mindfulness group or self-care class.
  - ❑ Ongoing classes such as yoga, Zumba, or meditation.
- ❑ Support faculty well-being.
  - ❑ Within a professional development series, build in classes related to mindfulness, self-compassion, and self-care.
  - ❑ Set up ongoing classes for faculty in yoga or meditation.
  - ❑ Plan book studies related to wellness topics (e.g., using the book *The How of Happiness* by Sonja Lyubomirsky).



**We really need to make a cultural change. We need to ask ourselves how we can build relationships and connections with students not only in our classrooms but across our college. How can we get more folks on board with thinking about and supporting student well-being?**

—Renee' Acosta  
College of Pharmacy



# RESOURCES

## UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

Faculty Innovation Center: [facultyinnovate.utexas.edu](http://facultyinnovate.utexas.edu)

Office of the Provost: [provost.utexas.edu](http://provost.utexas.edu)

Sanger Learning Center: [ugs.utexas.edu/slc](http://ugs.utexas.edu/slc)

University Writing Center: [uwc.utexas.edu](http://uwc.utexas.edu)

Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL): (512) 232-5050  
[besafe.utexas.edu/behavior-concerns-advice-line](http://besafe.utexas.edu/behavior-concerns-advice-line)

University Health Services: [healthyhorns.utexas.edu](http://healthyhorns.utexas.edu)

Counseling and Mental Health Center: [cmhc.utexas.edu](http://cmhc.utexas.edu)

Counselors in Academic Residence (CARE): [cmhc.utexas.edu/CARE.html](http://cmhc.utexas.edu/CARE.html)

Center for Students in Recovery (CSR): [recovery.utexas.edu](http://recovery.utexas.edu)

Wellness Network: [www.wellnessnetwork.utexas.edu](http://www.wellnessnetwork.utexas.edu)

BeVocal: [www.wellnessnetwork.utexas.edu/BeVocal](http://www.wellnessnetwork.utexas.edu/BeVocal)

Voices Against Violence (VAV): [cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/index.html](http://cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/index.html)

Division of Diversity and Community Engagement: [diversity.utexas.edu](http://diversity.utexas.edu)

Services for Students with Disabilities: [diversity.utexas.edu/disability](http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability)

Gender and Sexuality Center: [diversity.utexas.edu/genderandsexuality](http://diversity.utexas.edu/genderandsexuality)

Multicultural Engagement Center: [diversity.utexas.edu/multiculturalengagement](http://diversity.utexas.edu/multiculturalengagement)

Office for Inclusion and Equity: [equity.utexas.edu](http://equity.utexas.edu)

Title IX: [titleix.utexas.edu](http://titleix.utexas.edu)

Student Emergency Services (includes food pantry and career closet):  
[deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency)

Student/Staff Ombuds Services: [ombuds.utexas.edu/student](http://ombuds.utexas.edu/student)

Faculty Ombuds Services: [ombuds.utexas.edu/faculty](http://ombuds.utexas.edu/faculty)

Employee Assistance Program: [hr.utexas.edu/current/eap](http://hr.utexas.edu/current/eap)

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# SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

## CHECK IN. “HOW ARE YOU DOING?”

- ❑ **Talk to the student.** Talk in private when you are able to give the student your undivided attention. It is possible that just a few minutes of effective listening on your part may be enough to help the student feel comfortable about what to do next.
- ❑ **Be direct and nonjudgmental.** Express your concern in behavioral, nonjudgmental terms. Be direct and specific. For example, say something like “I’ve noticed you’ve been absent from class lately, and I’m concerned,” rather than “Why have you missed so much class lately?”
- ❑ **Listen sensitively.** Listen to thoughts and feelings in a sensitive, non-threatening way. Communicate understanding by repeating back the essence of what the student has told you. Try to include both content and feelings. For example, “It sounds like you’re not accustomed to such a big campus, and you’re feeling left out of things.” Remember to let the student talk.

## MENTION RESOURCES. “HAVE YOU TRIED CMHC’S MINDBODY LAB?”

- ❑ **Refer.** Point out that help is available, and that seeking help is a sign of strength. Make some suggestions about places to go for help. (See the list in the “Resources” section for ideas.) Tell the student what you know about the recommended person or service.
- ❑ **Take a walk.** Consider walking the student to the CMHC yourself if needed. You can also contact the Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL) at (512) 232-5050 or make an online report at the Dean of Students website.

## ENCOURAGE SELF-CARE. “WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF?”

- ❑ **Follow up.** This is an important part of the process. Check with the student later to find out how he or she is doing. Provide support as appropriate.
- ❑ **Be flexible.** Be willing to consider flexible arrangements, such as extensions on assignments, exams or deadlines.

## AVOID...

- ❑ Minimizing the student's concerns (e.g., “Your grades are so good.”).
- ❑ Providing so much information that it overwhelms the student.
- ❑ Suggesting that students do not need treatment, or that their symptoms will stop without it.
- ❑ Denying or ignoring your observations of the student's academic or behavioral changes.
- ❑ Assuming students are fully aware of the sources of their stress.

# NOTES

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