

Wellbeing in the Learning Environment

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Wellbeing in the Learning Environment

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(Right: components of wellbeing image)

Wellness Services includes:

- Student Counselling
- Optimal Therapies (MRU Injury and Prevention Clinic)
- Health Services
- Healthy Campus Team (this unit reviews stats and reports to external bodies, leads the peer to peer health educators, and collaborates on naloxone training).

Stats on Wellness Services:

- There are over 900 Health Services visits each month
- 75% are student visits and 20% are employee visits
- 40% of what they see is mental health visits (both students and employees). This rate is fairly consistent over the years, but it has risen on the employee side.

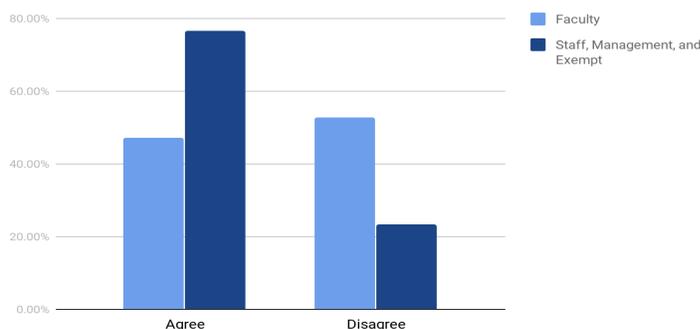


Faculty Wellbeing at MRU

104 faculty responded to the wellness survey in 2018 and there were several faculty wellbeing consultations. Survey respondents indicated that the following variables are the main contributors to employee wellness:

1. Flexible work hours and work-life balance
2. Supportive leadership
3. Collegiality and a sense of community
4. Access to wellness-related resources and services
5. Access to relevant PD opportunities

My workload expectations are manageable



Barriers to Wellbeing at MRU

Regarding potential barriers to wellness on campus, employees concerns have been disseminated to the University Leadership Group (ULG) and relevant departments to ensure that barriers are reduced wherever possible. One of the biggest barriers for faculty is workload expectations. There is a statistically different response from faculty on workload expectations: faculty generally agree that their workload expectations are not manageable

¹ These notes are provided with the permission of presenters and draw directly from their presentations and discussions which took place at the event. Members seeking further information or who wish to reuse this content must cite the speakers/resources indicated in the notes.

Faculty Stress

What causes stress:

1. Lack of time
2. Workload
3. Co-workers

Stress Coping Techniques:²

1. Physical activity
2. Talking with family/friends
This can be beneficial for faculty.
However, if you need to constantly talk to everyone about your stressors this does not help. It is good to have a specific amount of time and specific people to speak to and then move on. Don't dwell on stressful situations and do not vent continuously.
3. Spending time alone

THE EISENHOWER BOX

	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT	DO <i>Do it now.</i> Write article for today.	DECIDE <i>Schedule a time to do it.</i> Exercising. Calling family and friends. Researching articles. Long-term biz strategy.
NOT IMPORTANT	DELEGATE <i>Who can do it for you?</i> Scheduling interviews. Booking flights. Approving comments. Answering certain emails. Sharing articles.	DELETE <i>Eliminate it.</i> Watching television. Checking social media. Sorting through junk mail.

*"What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important."
-Dwight Eisenhower, 34th President of the United States*

The Eisenhower Box

The coping techniques, above, do not address what is causing the stress – *too much to do and not enough time*. You can manage this by prioritizing your time. Critically appraise what you are doing: "Do I need to email, can I make a call or do we need to meet? Does it need to be a meeting, or can we do it in a better and more time efficient way?"

Potential facilitators for faculty wellbeing on campus

- Flexible work hours
- Academic supports (physical, emotional, other)
- Others:
 - o *Human contact in meetings and wellbeing (this addresses isolation)*
 - o *Diversity of tasks in the day*
 - o *The faculty centre – getting to know each other as human beings who care about what we do and care about our students*
 - o *Building trust with the individuals we work with*
 - o *Use of common meeting spaces – having to go across campus to meet rather than being isolated in separate areas on campus.*
 - o *Faculty TRIADS are very helpful as well.*

Consider how you can best navigate your work without burning out.

- Focus on what you can control and what gives you nourishment
 - Position abolishments have occurred and this can cause you high levels of stress; or, you can focus on the positive. Look at the good work you are doing and the good work your department is doing and ensure your work is recognized. Beyond that, there is nothing you can do to impact the outcome, so there is no value in stressing about it.
- Gratitude Practice (Emmons & Stern, 2013)
 - "Gratitude has one of the strongest links to mental health and satisfaction with life of any personality trait—more so than even optimism, hope, or compassion. Grateful people experience higher levels of positive emotions such as joy, enthusiasm, love, happiness, and optimism, and gratitude as a discipline protects us from the destructive impulses of envy, resentment, greed, and bitterness.

² Specific actionable items for faculty are in green text so you can do a quick scan and not read the full set of notes from the event.

People who experience gratitude can cope more effectively with everyday stress, show increased resilience in the face of trauma-induced stress, recover more quickly from illness, and enjoy more robust physical health. Taken together, these results indicate that gratitude is incompatible with negative emotions and pathological conditions and that it may even offer protection against psychiatric disorders.”

- *Keep a work gratitude journal – at the end of each day write three things that you are grateful for at work. Then at the end of the week read through them and focus on the value you are bringing to your community.*
- Assessing new opportunities before agreeing to them, and say ‘no’ when needed
 - Really consider your current commitments and if you need to take on the additional task or if someone else could do it.
- Support networks

Discussion:

- The idea of gratitude practice is something a lot of the older generation grew up with and younger generations behave, sometimes, in the opposite way: as victims and placing blame externally. How much of this do you think contributes to stress at work?
 - o This is an interesting concept. If we think of our happiness, some research suggests 50% of our happiness is determined by genetics 10% by our unique circumstances in life (employment, family, house etc.) and 40% is determined by our mindset and how we approach things. We tend to underestimate the power we have to dictate how we feel about and respond to things.
 - o Victimhood and negative perceptions: it is good to view these emotions with curiosity. Am I over tired, what is going on in my community, why am I having the negativity I have at this point? Consider why something is happening. What is the story – this way things can present in a new light and you can then shift from this place to a place of gratitude. To do this you need to pull yourself back first from the negativity.
- We do take the time on campus to celebrate achievements and this contributes to wellbeing (e.g. Teaching Excellence awards, Faculty Spring Retreat etc.)
- Duration and intensity of stress. When it goes on for months it has different implications than just busy days or weeks.
 - o There is an optimal level of stress that motivates and propels us, but too much stress is bad. At this point you need to take a critical step back when there is ongoing and high stress situation. Look at what you can change – what can you say no to – what are some new strategies.
 - o Stress is a symptom and unmanaged stress can have a morbidity and turn into illness. What is critical that you utilize the strategies that exist to manage your stress. We know what stress we can manage and when we feel high levels of cortisol it can lead to health problems and we need to be aware of this.
- We can acknowledge where we have stress and where we have problems and then focus on what we can do ourselves to improve how we manage stress.
- Further data gathering:
 - o The MRFA could ask members where their stressors come from
 - Employees experiences of bullying – 14% of faculty reporting being bullied by students within the last 2 years
 - o We could flip this to ask where members find the most joy and learn from each other in this way as well.
 - Happiness and appreciative inquiry – looking at what works well and expanding on that to make improvements
- It helps to remain open to experiences and connections with others – we are a culmination of everything which has led us to where we are now.

Enhancing Wellbeing in the Classroom for Faculty and Students

Glen Ryland and Rachelle McGrath

Research on Faculty Wellbeing in the Learning Environment

Not a lot of research has been done on faculty wellbeing outside of cyber bullying, but some recent studies include the following:

- There was a study done on the retention of teaching practitioners in Nursing. These were good teachers who came out of the field but then burned out as teachers. This raises a larger question about workload relating to all faculty. To address this burnout they instituted a discipline of gratitude where they needed to tell each other how appreciative they were of each other. This cultivated a way of talking and recognizing the contributions of others. Collegiality and retention were both improved in this process.
- African American professors teaching in an almost all white university in the states decided they would focus more on their students to promote their wellbeing. They made student achievement the most important thing and then the learning environment improved for the instructors.

So, on the one side we have positive psychology and on the other side we have the reminder that we are really here for our students. **We need to focus on that – that we are here to teach our students.**

The MRU Academic Plan and Wellbeing

The MRU Academic Plan is not overly focused on wellbeing. The Plan says that “this Academic Plan will create a welcoming environment where all members of the Mount Royal community (faculty, staff and students) can find space and time to flourish.” This idea of space and time indicates that a flourishing university requires dynamic learning spaces and a healthy workplace for staff and faculty. Many Healthy Campus Initiatives, like those implemented at Simon Fraser, are needed to move the vague statements on wellbeing in the Academic Plan to some kind of reality.

Okanagan Charter (MRU signed on to this in 2016)

This charter provides an Action Framework for Higher Education:

- Embed health in all campus policies
- Create supportive campus environments
 - What can we do to improve our spaces to make them safer?
 -
 - How can we have tidier classrooms? Even small things like this can improve wellbeing.
- Generate thriving communities and a culture of wellbeing
- Support personal development
 - A lot of focus has been placed on students with respect to wellbeing. Not as much has been done to consider faculty wellbeing, and faculty can overlook staff.
 - Supporting Personal Development means to “Develop and create opportunities to build student, staff and faculty resilience, competence, personal capacity and life enhancing skills – and so support them to thrive and achieve their full potential and become engaged local and global citizens while respecting the environment.”
 - This is discussed a lot – we need to develop as professionals and we need to be researchers and continue to grow but this is hard to do with how busy we are.
- Create or re-orient campus services
 - Ensuring the services are supporting the whole community

What is the relationship between wellbeing and the learning environment? (Discussion)

(Beginning most basically in the classroom)

- There is a strong relationship between wellbeing and the learning environment. If we do not have a strong sense of wellbeing as teachers then students will be impacted and learning will be hampered.
- How do you know when your wellbeing is at a point that it is having this impact on students?

- When a faculty member is uncomfortable or distracted in the classroom this comes from their general wellbeing, or lack thereof.
- Your mental wellbeing and your thoughts can impact how you present and there students respond to this.
- Focusing on creating a good learning environment for our students can contribute to faculty members' sense of wellbeing in the classroom. The following are some tips that came up in the discussion and further resources are linked below.
 - Teaching is very performative – it is important not to rush. Try to arrive early and be prepared. Students notice immediately if you are or are not prepared.
 - Related to wellbeing and space is taking the time to make yourself enthusiastic – trying something new in the classroom, focusing on what you are conveying that may be exciting for the students.
 - Try to care about your students and get to know them
 - They appreciate you knowing their names
 - They appreciate you remembering the work that they do
 - Make sure they know you care
 - When you do not value your students you feel less personal value and connection to what you are doing as a professor.
 - Take time to understand your students so that their reactions to your expectations are not so personal (i.e. recognize that they have busy and separate lives outside of class, that it is not a positional relationship, and that you are both busy and sharing a common endeavor of learning)
 - Take time to talk to your students about unrelated matters. Though it seems like a poor use of time it can have significant impacts on your learning environment
 - When there are difficult students or things are not going well in a class your mental wellbeing can deteriorate before you even get into the classroom. This attitude affects the class and how it proceeds in terms of how quickly you go through the material and how open you are to questions etc.
 - We are in control of the atmosphere in the room and students can tell if you do not want to be there. Students know if you are preferring to be in your research and not in the classroom.
 - It is important to also use positive rather than negative language
 - It is up to professors to not be victims: they are in control and they should be responsible for setting the environment that works in the classroom.
 - It is helpful to acknowledge that the learning classroom is about energy exchange and what we bring to the classroom is what we get back
 - We are all actors when we are in the classroom – we need to leave our personal selves at the door and come into the classroom as positive, enthusiastic and engaging individuals. Leave everything else in the hall and focus on your students. To do this you need to rely on your passion for your subject – this is genuine and real and you can draw on this even when you are stressed and challenged.

Wellbeing in the Learning Environment – for Students

- Positive & Inclusive Classroom Culture
 - Creating a place where students want to come and learn and where faculty want to come teach
- Social Connection & Belonging
- Real Life Learning
- Flexibility
 - Consider universal design matters (though this can be challenging it has positive impacts)
- Optimal Challenge
 - Having challenges that students can arise to – not making things too challenging and not making things too simple
- Instructor Support

– Supports & Services

UBC Wellbeing, n.d.; Burgess, Anderson, & Westerby, 2009; Dyjur, Lindstrom, Arguera, & Bair, 2017; Simon Fraser University, 2017)

Links for Further Information

[Mental Health Faculty Toolkit](#) is available on MyMRU Faculty tab

- Supporting students – syllabus statements and blackboard module on mental health
- Building your capacity to support others – additional supports and information provided by counselling
- Supporting yourself

[Wellbeing toolkits and guidelines from UBC](#) - specific strategies to foster healthy learning environments

[Wellbeing toolkit from SFU](#) - specific strategies to foster healthy learning environments

Schroeder, M., & West, A. (2019). [Student Mental Health and Wellbeing: Supportive Teaching and Learning Practices Annotated Bibliography](#)

MRU [Employee Wellness Brochure](#)

Postural Health at Work

Dr. Allison Gross

Roll Squeeze and Tuck

To establish good posture at your desk, set a reminder for every 20 minutes to do a roll, squeeze and tuck:

1. Roll your shoulders up and back
2. Squeeze your blades together and down to your bum (engaging the muscles below your shoulder blades)
3. Tucking your chin and stretching up your neck



Other Tips for Postural Health at Your Desk:

- Keep your elbow close to your body when controlling your mouse (this will ease strain on your upper back)
- Raise your seat (your hips need to be level with your knees and not lower than your knees to reduce hip and back pain)
- Double screens – if you primarily use one screen then use that one and place it in a primary location. You do not want to continually be looking in between screens.
- Get out of your chair on different sides of the chair during the day.
- Switch up the angle of your back rest

Tips for Postural Health during Lectures:

- When standing you may get lower back pain from slumping (do roll, squeeze and tuck if possible).
- Change which side of the room you are on – switch it up in one class or across multiple classes
- Move around the classroom (make it okay for students to get up too)
- If standing still, shift your weight from front to back, side to side, and from narrow to a wide stance
- You can bring in a block that you can rest your foot on behind a lectern and this eases back pain

Tips for Postural Health during Meetings:

- Provide breaks in the meeting
- Allow people to change sides (make a mental note to sit in different locations in meetings)
- Permit people to get up in meetings
- Move in your seats – march in your seat, do hip stretches

General/Other tips for postural health

- Change allows muscles to have a break and reduce fatigue of your muscles. Take a break and go for a walk on the track: this doesn't have to be a big time commitment - just change your shoes and go for a walk.
- Take a moment when you sit at your desk and roll, squeeze and tuck and do a stretch
- Do wall squats with a tennis ball and move it around problem spots on your back ([Wellness Services Video on Tennis Ball massages](#))
- You can also use a ball in a meeting and hold the pressure on a trigger point until it releases
- Use a shepherd's hook to relieve muscles ([Wellness Services Video on shepherd's hook](#))
- Inactive positions for a long period can cause pain when standing up. To reduce this pain, change your leg position when sitting: straighten your legs, swing your legs etc. and/or go for a walk
- Use the technology we have to set reminders for yourself to check posture, stretch, walk etc.

MRU Faculty Benefits

Cindy Hamonic and Heidi Peterson

Faculty Health and Dental Benefits

There were some positive changes to faculty benefits in January 2020:

- A lot of options for personal spending accounts – there is a list of eligible expenses under PSA accounts
- Vision coverage - \$250/24 months for adults and \$250/12 months for child plus one eye exam every 24 months for adults and every 12 months for child.
- Separate maximum of \$1,000/year for psychologist coverage. The \$500/year for all other paramedicals remains the same. (this was moved out of the paramedical expense coverage)
- Increase hearing aids to \$1,000/3 years
- Custom Orthotics are covered up to 80% and a referral is needed

Dental coverage improvements:

- Recall exams revised to every 6 months for adult recall.
- Increase combined annual maximum for Basic and Major to \$2,000/year (previously 1500)
- Increase Orthodontic lifetime maximum to \$2,500 (previously 2000)

EFAP – Homewood Health

- Counselling
- Life Smart Coaching
- Call Homewood Health at their toll free number (1-800-663-1142) or check out the website
- Find the link on MyMRU / Employee tab

Accommodations in the Workplace

- Faculty with medical conditions requiring accommodations in the workplace should contact Heidi Peterson.
- Various accommodations are possible from varying hours of work, sit to stand desks etc.
- Heidi will assist in facilitating short term disability for those needing short term leave from work
- Recent changes to Short Term Disability:
 - Short Term disability increased to 75 days
 - First 35 days are paid at 100% of pay
 - Remaining 40 days are paid at 90%

Discussion:

- Regarding EFAP services – there are 6 free one hour sessions and beyond that they will make recommendations for further psychological assistance
- What is the effect of our phone and our computers on our mental wellbeing and our students' wellness?
 - These do have negative impacts on our physical and mental wellbeing. It is a good idea to hold up your smartphone/device higher so you are not looking down at it constantly.
 - Students on their computers can be distracting for other students.
 - Students and youth know they are addicted to their devices and time without them is good for them. Some faculty have banned technology in the classroom with some very positive outcomes and student experiences.
- Is moving away from paper really a good thing for us and our wellbeing?
 - There are filters for blue light on computers and you can get glasses that filter out the blue light
- Wellness Services has funding from different sources (revenue, institution, and grants).
 - Between 2700 to 2800 students and employees come to MRU health services. The cost benefit of having these services on campus for employees is a huge benefit to the University in terms of the time saved that employees do not spend travelling to doctor appointments. The return on investment here from the University is huge. They get a 65% return on their investment in terms of reducing lost productivity.