



# Guidebook

## TEXAS WELL★BEING

Promoting Well-being in UT Learning Environments



The University of Texas at Austin  
**Longhorn Wellness Center**  
*Division of Student Affairs*



# INTRODUCTION

## 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.

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

In partnership with colleges, schools and departments, Texas Well-being helps faculty make small shifts in teaching that can make a major difference in students' mental health and well-being. The data we've collected within our program shows that faculty affiliated with Texas Well-being are rated by students as being significantly more supportive of their mental health than non-affiliated faculty (Woodruff & Boyer, 2024). Additionally, students in these classes score significantly higher on perceived autonomy in the class, comfort with the instructor, perceived instructor empathy, comfort in class, growth mindset, and mastery orientation. These findings highlight the need for Texas Well-being programming "designed to foster interpersonal connections between students [and faculty] and counteract potentially detrimental mindsets and motivational orientations that can undermine learning and mental health (Broda et al., 2018; Casad et al., 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Smith et al., 2018)" (Woodruff & Boyer, 2024).

Our data also shows that students report there are a variety of methods faculty can use to help students feel cared for and socially connected within their classes. Here are just a few examples from our qualitative data:

- "[He] asks if we have questions and how we are doing. Sounds simple but most professors don't."
- "She told us that she values us as individuals and that we are more than just our grades."
- "Multiple times a week, Professor \_\_\_\_\_ will lecture to us about life choices and thinking for ourselves. He does not simply stand and talk, he actually discusses the content with us. By creating an environment that is open for questioning, more like a discussion than a lecture, this makes me feel more involved and welcome in a conversation. This makes me feel like he cares about each of his students and what they have to say. He makes it clear that he wants to learn from us just as much as we learn from him."
- "When I asked for help with time management as a married student, \_\_\_\_\_ understood my situation and she introduced [me to] senior students who were married and who had children. This helped me a lot."
- "She sent me reminders to complete assignments I had forgotten about."



## WHY?

College student mental health concerns continue to grow more prevalent and severe. In one study comparing 2013 to 2018, the percentages of college student self-reported suicide attempts, severe depression, and moderate to severe anxiety all significantly increased (Duffy et al., 2019). According to a nationally representative survey of 3,000 students, 75% of students reported stress as negatively impacting their academic performance, and 40% said faculty should bear some responsibility for alleviating their stress (Flaherty, 2023). Additionally, the demand for mental health services at UT's Counseling and Mental Health

Center (CMHC) continues to increase. For example, from academic year 2009–2010 to academic year 2018-19, demand increased 87 percent, while the total number of students at The University of Texas at Austin increased by less than 2 percent (CMHC, 2019; The University of Texas at Austin, 2019).

Research has consistently demonstrated a significant relationship between college student mental health and academic performance (e.g., GPA, retention, graduation rates; Eisenberg, Golberstein, & Hunt, 2009; Gallup, 2023; Lipson et al., 2019; Renshaw et al., 2016). According to El Ansari and Stock (2010): “It is widely accepted that health and well-being are essential elements for effective learning.”

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).





# 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/mental health disorder condition 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.
- Convey your passion about what you teach.
- Use humor if possible.
- Show enthusiasm when 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 take care of your health and well-being, and have students share how they do as well.
- Include information in your syllabus about mental health (but avoid copying and pasting this information from somewhere else).. See this guidebook's "Syllabus Creation" section for ideas.
- Let students know you are open to talking with them individually about their states of well-being. (Refer to "Supporting Students in Distress: A Quick Response Guide" below.)
- Show students the "[Thrive at UT](#)" app developed by the [Counseling and Mental Health Center](#) ([healthyhorns.utexas.edu/cmhc](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/cmhc)), and model how to use it.



“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.”

— Professor, College of Liberal Arts

# SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS: A QUICK RESPONSE GUIDE

## CONCERN LEVEL

- Signs** Visible distress, crying, irritability, anger, fights/arguments, anxiety, personal loss or traumatic life events, declining academic performance, social withdrawal, increased alcohol and/or drug use
- What To Do** Initiate a conversation with the student, consider utilizing campus resources, or contact BCAL (Behavior Concerns Advice Line) for coordinated university services. A helpful approach is to start a conversation with the student you're concerned about by stating what you've noticed, followed by a question, e.g., "I've noticed you've seemed down recently. Is there anything you'd like to talk about?"
- Contacts** [Behavior Concerns Advice Line \(BCAL\)](https://www.bcal.utexas.edu): 512-232-5050, [bcal.utexas.edu](https://www.bcal.utexas.edu)  
Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC): 512-471-3515 (Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.)

## URGENT SITUATION LEVEL

- Signs** Expressions of hopelessness, talk of suicide or harm to others, being out of touch with reality
- What To Do** If you observe warning signs of suicide, ask the student directly, "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" If the answer is "yes," remain calm, express care and concern and connect them to a resource. Reassure them by saying, "This is really brave of you to share, and I want you to know I'm here for you. I do need to connect you with someone on campus who can help you through this." Next, get immediate assistance.
- Contacts** [Behavior Concerns Advice Line \(BCAL\)](https://www.bcal.utexas.edu): 512-232-5050, [bcal.utexas.edu](https://www.bcal.utexas.edu)  
Counseling and Mental Health Center 24/7 CRISIS LINE: 512-471-2255  
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988  
Consider escorting the student to the Counseling and Mental Health Center on the 5th floor of the Student Services Building (Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.).

## EMERGENCY LEVEL

- Signs** Immediate threat of harm to self or others
- What To Do** Seek immediate assistance by calling 911.

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## 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 care, or that their concerns 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
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## SHIFT THE CULTURE AROUND SUBSTANCE MISUSE

Substance use can adversely affect students' attendance, participation in class discussion, performance on assignments and exams and overall GPA. Faculty are well positioned to contribute to changing students' expectations around substance use and help shift the culture.

- If you hear students say, "Everyone gets wasted in college," interrupt and correct the misperception. Most UT students don't binge drink, and many choose not to drink at all. An even smaller minority use substances other than alcohol.

- Examine your own beliefs about college student substance use. If you carry the same misperception that all students are doing it, you may unintentionally reinforce this norm or expectation in your language.
- If appropriate, incorporate the topics into your course through assignments and case studies where substance use is the focus.

### HOW TO TALK TO A STUDENT ABOUT POTENTIAL SUBSTANCE MISUSE

- Set healthy boundaries.
- Adjust your approach based on the circumstances.
- Keep a student's trust and privacy in mind.
- Avoid having the conversation when the student is drunk or high.
- Remember and convey they aren't a bad person.
- Use "I" statements (e.g., "I feel concerned when you miss several classes in a row" vs. "You are missing classes, and you may receive a lower grade").
- Always be kind, and offer support.
- Make a list of the warning signs you and/or your TA are witnessing, and share them thoughtfully.
- Don't take things personally; the student may react defensively.
- Know that you can't fix them.
- Meet the student where they are.
- Affirm student choices, including harm reduction, taking a break and/or abstinence.
- Let them know resources are available.
- Talk with them sooner rather than later.

### WARNING SIGNS FOR SUBSTANCE MISUSE

- Sudden grade drop
- Excessive absenteeism
- Isolation or social anxiety
- Numerous trips to bathroom
- Lack of willingness to engage; apathy
- Appearing under the influence of a substance (e.g., nodding off, mania, slurring, inappropriate responses to questions, inability to sit still, weight loss or gain, bags under eyes, hygiene difficulties)





## SUPPORTING STUDENTS SEEKING RECOVERY

- Substance Use Disorder (SUD) is a health condition, not a moral failing.
- Addiction does not discriminate; access to resources does.
- Avoid stigmatizing language, such as “abuse” and “abuser.”
- Exercise compassion, patience and non-judgment when speaking with a student experiencing SUD.
- Encourage students in recovery to find support and connection with other college students in recovery.
- Affirm there are multiple pathways to recovery and that many people use more than one. Medication, therapy, mutual aid groups like 12-step or SMART, faith, exercise and peer support are all good options.
- Connect the student with The Center for Students in Recovery ([recovery@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:recovery@austin.utexas.edu)) and the Counseling and Mental Health Center 512-471-3515.

“ The professor knew we had a lot of exams and deadlines drawing near, so an assignment was delayed. That meant an awful lot to me. ”

— Student

“ I walked a distressed student to CMHC for mental health treatment. She was struggling, and so appreciated that someone cared. She wrote me a thank you letter after and expressed that it was life-changing. ”

— Professor, College of Liberal Arts

# CONDITIONS FOR WELL-BEING

## SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AND BELONGING

Social connectedness and belonging have direct effects on college student retention, according to Allen, Robbins, Casillas, and Oh (2008). Evidence also suggests that they have positive relationships with academic motivation, self-efficacy and engagement (Freeman et al., 2007; Walton et al., 2012; Wilson et al., 2015; Zumbrunn et al., 2014). Faculty whom students view as “caring, supportive, competent and good communicators” have been found to create learning environments where “students feel more connected to each other and to the instructor” (p. 375, Kirby & Thomas, 2022). Additionally, students perceived these environments as highly organized, having high academic expectations, and being supportive of their learning. Intentionally building social connectedness into your classes may not only support student well-being but it may also help students to learn more effectively.

- 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.
- Consider student needs when it comes to seating, visual/audio equipment, note taking, test taking, response opportunities, etc.
- Consider providing your pronouns and having students share their pronouns on the first day of class.
- 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.
- 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 and check-ins at the start of class. (See the section below for examples.)
- 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” & CHECK-INS 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.



## MINDFULNESS AND STRESS REDUCTION

Mindfulness is “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (p. 145, Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Kerrigan et al., 2017). 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 (Dvorčáková 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 (e.g., Bearden et al., 2024; Sapanci, 2023).

- Engage in “brain breaks” that allow students to take their minds off the learning content. (See our [Well-being Activities and Tools](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc) at [healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc))
  - 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).
  - Play music and then share their thoughts or feelings about the experience.
- 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., [MindBody Labs](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/cmhc) at [healthyhorns.utexas.edu/cmhc](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/cmhc)).



## 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 and to reduce inequities in academic performance (Bostwick et al., 2017; Broda et al., 2018; Casad et al., 2018; Degol et al., 2018; 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.
- Instead of using traditional grading practices, try using standards-based or specifications grading (maybe try one of these on one assignment).
- Have students redo assignments or exams using feedback you provide to extend their learning.
- 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.)
- 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, instead.....
  - 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.
  - Allowing students to fix mistakes and work through problems they've encountered so they can see the progress being made.
  - Letting students know they don't need perfection. Do this by using words like "learning" and "growing," rather than "achievement" or "performance."

### **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.



## RESILIENCE

Resilience is the ability to recover from stress despite challenging life events that otherwise would overwhelm a person's ability to cope with that stress (Smith et al., 2008). Students with more resilience tend to have better mental health, wellness and academic outcomes (Holdsworth et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2014). Being able to bounce back from difficult experiences can mean coping after a low 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 (Brewer et al., 2019; Goodchild et al., 2023; Schultz et al., 2019). Studies have shown resilience is linked to mindfulness, a sense of purpose in life, an optimistic outlook and active coping styles (Smith et al., 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, not just as endpoints. 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.

“ [The instructor] provides very detailed personal feedback in major assignments, and when I misunderstood the requirement of a project, she gave me a chance to fix it rather than give me a very low score.

— Student ”

“ I share many of my past failures and lack of perfection with them (As an undergrad, I got a 'C' in Intro Psych! I failed O. Chem! I was a teen mom! I used to smoke, and it was really really hard to quit! etc.!! There are so many options for humanizing me... and I'm not afraid to use them). I also share my work ethic and tell them all the time that if they are willing to work hard, they can do anything I've accomplished and more.

— Professor, College of Liberal Arts ”

## GRATITUDE

In simple terms, researchers define gratitude as “a felt sense of wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation for life” (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Lyubomirsky, 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; Tolcher et al., 2024). 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; Lyubomirsky, 2007; McCullough et al., 2002). Additionally, research has demonstrated relationships between gratitude and school life satisfaction, classroom engagement and academic commitment and retention (Flinchbaugh et al, 2012; Froh et al., 2008, 2011; Mofidi et al., 2014-15).

- 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 describing 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. 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.



“

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.

”

— Professor, College of Liberal Arts



## SELF-COMPASSION AND EMPATHY

Self-compassion 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 conducted here at UT suggests that “self-compassionate individuals may be better able to see failure as a learning opportunity and to focus on accomplishing tasks at hand” (p. 274, Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005). Being self-compassionate has been tied to resilience, stress management and improved health and well-being (DiFonte et al., 2024; Homan & Sirois, 2017; Soysa & Wilcomb, 2015). In addition to building self-compassion into your class, being empathetic to students’ struggles and needs relates to them feeling you’re supportive of their mental health (Woodruff & Boyer, 2024).

- 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 them see things from your perspective.
- Give students the benefit of the doubt. Try not to assume they’re avoiding work or being unmotivated.
- 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, has been shown to contribute to college students’ mental health, academic identity, college retention and completion, resilience and persistence (Bronk et al., 2009; Hill et al., 2016; Sharma et al., 2021; Sharma & Yukymenko-Lescroart, 2022; Yukymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2023). Having a sense of life purpose has multiple positive associations with coping, health, well-being and adaptive coping strategies (Thompson et al., 2003). It also relates to a lower incidence of psychological disorders (Owens et al., 2009). Helping students understand how a course’s content and outcomes link to their sense of purpose can help them maintain motivation and engagement.

- In your syllabus, state clear learner outcomes for your class and have students evaluate which of these are most important to their goals.
- Have students set goals for what they want to accomplish in the course.
- Throughout the semester, have students assess their progress toward meeting their goals.
- Share how content relates to your own life, values and goals.
- While teaching, explicitly connect content to students’ values and goals.
- Set up times to talk informally with students about their goals and life plans.

## SLEEP PROMOTION

UT Austin students, like many students across the country, are not getting enough sleep. Roughly 74 percent of UT Austin students reported feeling sleepy or tired for three to seven of the past seven days. Students rank sleep difficulties (21.6 percent) only behind stress (39.4 percent) and anxiety (27.3 percent) when asked about the impacts to their academic performance (American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment, 2019).

In one study, 82 percent of college students believed that inadequate sleep and sleepiness impacted their school performance (Hershner & Chervin, 2014), and research supports their claims. Insufficient sleep has been linked to decreased memory consolidation, learning, decision making, critical thinking and a greater frequency of stress (Batterink et al., 2017; Lemma et al., 2014; Dusselier et al., 2005).

Sleep plays a bigger role in GPA than most would assume. Students who get seven to nine hours of sleep had higher grade point averages than students who did not get that much sleep regularly (Yu & Arendt, 2017). Sleep habits, in particular weekday and weekend wake up times, had the greatest effect on GPA, even greater than other variables including eating breakfast, exercise, gender and age (Trockel, Barnes, & Egget, 2000).

Data shows that UT students want resources about how to get a better night's sleep. A discrepancy currently exists between students who have received information about sleep difficulties (about 33 percent) and those who are interested in receiving more information (about 66 percent; American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment, 2017).

Faculty can play an active role in encouraging healthy sleep habits in students. The following examples show how you can promote good sleep habits among your students.

### IN YOUR SYLLABUS AND CANVAS PAGE

- Adjust assignment deadlines in Canvas from the default of midnight to 8 p.m. or earlier to ensure students are not staying up until midnight to finish assignments.
- Link the Longhorn Wellness Center (LWC) [Healthyhorns Sleep](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc) (at [healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc)) under resources and point out how students will benefit academically, physically and emotionally by prioritizing sleep. Find [examples of syllabus statements](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc) (at [healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc)).
- Space out assignments and exams to limit intensified times of work. Use this [workload estimator](https://cat.wfu.edu/resources/workload2) (at [cat.wfu.edu/resources/workload2](https://cat.wfu.edu/resources/workload2)) to calculate the approximate time a student spends each week on work for your course.

### ASSIGNMENTS

- Integrate wellness and goal-setting activities in class that include assessing sleep habits.
- [Order free sleep kits](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc) (at [healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc)), each of which contains an eye mask, earplugs, lavender spray, mini-journal, herbal tea and resources for your class. Have students complete a written or verbal reflection on how they used the kit to aid their sleep.
- Create an assignment where students track their sleep for one week using a sleep diary to identify barriers and sleep strategies.
- Have students complete the [Healthyhorns Sleep Assessment](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc) (at [healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc)) to obtain tailored and personalized feedback about their sleep habits.





## IN CLASS

- A few days before and the day before an exam, remind students not to pull all-nighters, and discuss the positive academic impacts of getting seven to nine hours of sleep consistently and prior to exams.
- At the end of class, offer a sleep tip or debunk a sleep myth. You can find many examples at [Healthyhorns Sleep](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc) (at [healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc)).
- If you notice students falling asleep in class, do not call them out or embarrass them. Approach them after class and check-in one on one. This may involve referring the student for support services through [University Health Services](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/uhs) ([healthyhorns.utexas.edu/uhs](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/uhs)) or the [Counseling and Mental Health Center](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/cmhc) ([healthyhorns.utexas.edu/cmhc](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/cmhc)) and/or discussing workload and balance.
- Invite a Longhorn Wellness Center coordinator or [Longhorn Wellness Peer Educators](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc) (at [healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc)) to talk about sleep health and other wellness issues. [Request an LWC workshop](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc) (at [healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/lwc)).

“ The instructor is always very human. The content we cover in his class is pretty challenging. Instead of making us feel bad about not understanding, he constantly reminds us of the difficulty and that it is normal not to understand the information immediately. I think when I feel most connected to the class is when he shares moments of him trying to learn the same information as when he was younger. ”

— Student

“ 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. ”

— Professor, College of Liberal Arts



# EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

## SYLLABUS CREATION

One way to support your students' mental health and well-being is to exercise care when creating your course syllabus. Eberly et al. (2001) suggest that syllabi should serve to address three domains of need in higher education: administrative, course development and interpersonal. Unfortunately, most syllabi do not address all three of these domains. "[T]he syllabus is viewed not as a learning tool but as a calendar of events. If more effort was put into constructing the syllabus initially, faculty would find that the stage is better set for the implicit teaching-learning contract on the first day of class, as well as directing course expectations for the remainder of the semester" (Eberly et al., 2001, p. 69).

### WORK TO CREATE SYLLABI THAT SUPPORT STUDENT WELL-BEING BY DOING ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING:

Instead of copying and pasting a statement about mental health and resources from another source, write your own personal statement about the importance of mental health and resources available to support it. See the mental health resource statement example below.

#### Statement

Your well-being is a priority in this class – above even learning the content. College and its coursework are difficult for everyone, and this difficulty can become overwhelming. If you are struggling to cope, please reach out to me, the TA, a friend or family member, or another resource. I'm not trained as a professional counselor, but I can help you get the support you need. Here are a few resources that may be helpful:

- 24/7 Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC) Crisis Line  
512-471-CALL (2255)
- Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC)  
[healthyhorns.utexas.edu/cmhc](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/cmhc)  
512-471-3515
- CARE (Counselors in Academic Residence Program) Counselor, CMHC  
counselors located in all academic schools and colleges  
[healthyhorns.utexas.edu/cmhc](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/cmhc)  
Our college's counselor: \_\_\_\_\_
- 24/7 University Health Services (UHS)  
Nurse Advice Line  
512-475-NURS (6877)
- 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, call or text 988, [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org)
- University Health Services (UHS)  
[healthyhorns.utexas.edu/uhs](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/uhs)  
512-471-4955
- Student Outreach and Support  
[deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sos](https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sos)  
512-471-5017
- Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)  
[bcal.utexas.edu](https://bcal.utexas.edu)  
512-232-5050
- Center for Students in Recovery  
[recovery.utexas.edu](https://recovery.utexas.edu)  
[recovery@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:recovery@austin.utexas.edu)

Please do not hesitate to reach out. My job as an instructor is to help ensure everyone in this class learns, feels cared for, and knows that they belong in this course and at UT.

- Consider writing similar statements related to students with disabilities and include information about campus academic support and religious holidays.
- Include your email address so students can reliably reach you. Let students know your realistic turnaround time for responding to email.

- For more information about required and recommended syllabus components, see the UT Provost's Office [Your Syllabus at UT Austin](#) page (at [provost.utexas.edu](http://provost.utexas.edu)).

## IN-CLASS INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

The instructional practices used in a classroom will vary according to any number of factors, including the content taught, learning outcomes, classroom size, etc. In planning our instruction, we should keep in mind the emotional and motivational outcomes of the learning experiences we create for students (Miller et al., 2024; Tyng et al., 2017). Many faculty have reassessed their instructional methods and realized the importance of using strategies that enhance student engagement and motivation (Walters et al., 2023). 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 et al., 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 et al., 2014; Clark & Talbert, 2023; Cross & Angelo, 1988). Research also shows that instructional methods that encourage students to ask questions and work cooperatively can improve both well-being and academic achievement (e.g., Johnson et al., 2014).



### 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 notes 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.
- To the extent it makes sense for the content you teach, 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.

## 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
  - Provide snacks and conversations 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.



## WELL-BEING IN VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Just as you support student well-being in in-person classes, you can support student well-being in your online courses. When surveyed, students say that online learning should be designed in ways that give them more control over their learning, provide flexibility, allow for collaboration, and help them develop metacognitive strategies for planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning (Schraw, 1998; Yu, 2020). Although you may have to be creative in building mental health supports into your online courses, multiple ideas and resources are available to help make it possible. Check out our list below, and then visit the resources and references.

### THE WHOLE STUDENT

- Share ways you practice self-care while existing in the remote-learning environment.
- Encourage students to take care of their own health and well-being.
- Have students write reflections about how they take care of themselves and others.
- Provide time in breakout rooms or other small-group time for students to discuss how they're taking care of themselves and others.
- Consider teaching from a trauma-informed perspective. For more information, visit the trauma-informed pedagogy (TIP) module in the [Texas Well-being Canvas course](https://instructure.com/enroll/4YJTK9) (at [utexas.instructure.com/enroll/4YJTK9](https://utexas.instructure.com/enroll/4YJTK9)).
- Share mental health, wellness and learning resources with students. Resources include:
  - [UT Outpost](https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu) (at [deanofstudents.utexas.edu](https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu))
  - [UT Sanger Learning Center](https://undergradcollege.utexas.edu) (at [undergradcollege.utexas.edu](https://undergradcollege.utexas.edu))
  - [UT Texas One Stop](https://onestop.utexas.edu), [onestop.utexas.edu](https://onestop.utexas.edu)
  - [UT Texas Financial Wellness](https://financialwellness.utexas.edu), [financialwellness.utexas.edu](https://financialwellness.utexas.edu)
- Reach out to students when you see them struggling or in distress and help them access needed resources, including:
  - UT Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), [healthyhorns.utexas.edu/cmhc](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/cmhc)  
[CMHC Crisis Line](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/cmhc) 512-471-CALL (2255); CMHC Telehealth Services; [CMHC Groups](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/cmhc); CMHC Substance Use Support Team
  - [988 Suicide and Crisis LIneline](https://988lifeline.org), call or text 988, [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org)
  - [TimelyCare](https://timelycare.com/utexas), [timelycare.com/utexas](https://timelycare.com/utexas)
  - Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL), 512-232-5050, [bcal.utexas.edu](https://bcal.utexas.edu)
  - [UT Student Outreach and Support \(SOS\)](https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu) (at [deanofstudents.utexas.edu](https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu)), including [UT Outpost](https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu) food pantry and career closet
  - UT Center for Students in Recovery, [recovery.utexas.edu](https://recovery.utexas.edu), [recovery@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:recovery@austin.utexas.edu)
- Be authentic. Allow students to see you making mistakes.



[The instructor] does a check in at the beginning of class that sets the tone. She is very open to listening to questions or problems.



— Student



I meet with each student in my class at the midpoint of the semester. I learn about their goals, and I ask what I can do to help them achieve their goals.



— Professor, College of Liberal Arts

## CONDITIONS FOR WELL-BEING

### Social Connection

- Use synchronous learning opportunities (e.g., small-group learning time, office hours, coffee chats) for students to connect with you and fellow students.
- Use breakout rooms during class.
- Join different breakout rooms throughout the class to listen to and facilitate student discussions and collaborations.
- Create an “Ask the Instructor” discussion in Canvas for students to post questions to you.
- Allow students to see a bit of your personal side (e.g., letting pets walk on screen, putting your favorite artwork behind you).



### Growth Mindset

- Have students set goals for your class and focus on helping them meet those goals by revisiting their progress toward meeting them throughout the semester.
- Be vulnerable. It's okay to have technical difficulties (e.g., stop worrying about making the perfect instructional video). Students need to see you struggle just as they are struggling.

### Self-Compassion and Empathy

- Treat yourself compassionately and encourage students to be compassionate with themselves.
- Remind students that you are on their side and want them to be successful.
- Provide “informal sharing space” (e.g., start your Zoom session 10 to 15 minutes early, create an ongoing class chat; Bagar-Fraley, 2020).

### Mindfulness and Stress Reduction

- Be present. Do not multitask during class.
- Open online sessions with a check-in question or activity.

### Life purpose

- Help students make connections between course content and their own goals, interests and values.
- Have students examine their goals and values in relation to course content.
- Share real-world applications and stories of how you have used course content.

### Accessibility

- Add captioning to your videos. Zoom adds captions if you record videos to the Cloud. Google slides will automatically add closed captions if you select it when in presentation mode.
- Record all lectures for students to access later.

“ [The instructor] helped me through a personal emergency and very vulnerable moment, making sure that any assignments that week were extended for me so I would have ample time to complete them. ”

— Student

“ 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? ”

— Professor, College of Pharmacy

## CREATING EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

- Balance synchronous and asynchronous learning. Asynchronous instruction allows you to fit learning into students' varying schedules while synchronous instruction can help build class community and social connections among you and students (Craven, 2020; Sebastien, 2020).
- Allow students to respond in different ways online (e.g., verbal responses, chat responses, polls, gestures, facial expressions, with their hands or bodies; Sebastien, 2020).
- Rather than using a few high-stakes exams or projects, break up student learning and assessment across multiple low-stakes quizzes, projects, assignments, etc.
- Create online assignments that connect with students emotionally by using stories, personal rewards, simulations, role-playing, etc. (Darby, 2020).
- Increase student choice by allowing students to decide about assignment topics, formats, etc. (Darby, 2020).
- Be consistent and structured. For example:
  - Provide synchronous sessions on the same day and at the same time each week.
  - Send assignments, announcements, etc. at a designated day/time each week.
  - Do not send out announcements and other information randomly.
- Be flexible. Students may need more time for learning content, finishing assignments, etc. Ask yourself, "...does [this] policy relate to my teaching philosophy or does it simply 'promote the power and position of the professor?'" (Spangler, 2020; Weimer, 2018).
- Change the deadlines for assignments from the Canvas default of midnight to sometime earlier in the day and provide students with an explanation for the deadline, e.g., "This assignment is due at 5:00 p.m. on Friday because I am preparing you for the business world" (Spangler, 2020).
- End class on time or early. Do not go over. Students need a break between online classes, meetings, etc.
- Have regular optional "Question and Answer" sessions throughout the semester (Bonner, 2020).
- Try adding humor to lectures or instructional videos you create by adding comics, funny videos, quotes, silly polls, etc.
- Create collaborative documents (e.g., Google documents) for students to complete activities in breakout rooms or outside of class.

## CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING RESOURCES

- [The Commons, ctl.utexas.edu/commons](https://ctl.utexas.edu/commons)
- [Online Learning and Teaching](https://ctl.utexas.edu) (at [ctl.utexas.edu](https://ctl.utexas.edu))
- [Hybrid Learning and Teaching](https://ctl.utexas.edu) (at [ctl.utexas.edu](https://ctl.utexas.edu))
- [Architecting Online Courses](https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/1238294), (at [utexas.instructure.com/courses/1238294](https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/1238294))
- [Community Building](https://ctl.utexas.edu) (at [ctl.utexas.edu](https://ctl.utexas.edu))
- [Student Engagement in Hybrid Courses](https://ctl.utexas.edu) (at [ctl.utexas.edu](https://ctl.utexas.edu))

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Texas Well-being Canvas course](https://utexas.instructure.com/enroll/4YJTK9) (at [utexas.instructure.com/enroll/4YJTK9](https://utexas.instructure.com/enroll/4YJTK9)).
- [Open Metacourse in Online Instruction](https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/1293100), Duke & Hellmer (at [utexas.instructure.com/courses/1293100](https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/1293100))
- [Blanton Museum of Art, University, Digital Resources](https://blantonmuseum.org), "Thinking Through Art" and "Community and Well-being" (at [blantonmuseum.org](https://blantonmuseum.org))

## 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 health and 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 Outreach and Support 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 UT's Center for Teaching and Learning 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).





# EXAMPLES OF COLLEGE AND DEPARTMENT WELLNESS PROGRAMS

Many UT colleges and departments have begun their own wellness initiatives and centers that collaborate with Texas Well-being. The following are a few examples of administrators and faculty organizing and leading various wellness efforts.

## **College of Pharmacy: Division of Student Well-being and Success**

The College of Pharmacy piloted Texas Well-being starting in 2017 and has continued to develop and implement well-being practices in and out of the classroom. The college hosts a Student Success and Well-being Committee, which is made up of faculty, staff and students interested in embedding well-being practices throughout the college. Foundations of Professional Development (a required course for all pharmacy students) course instructors collaborate with Texas Well-being to deliver well-being workshops every semester to all first- through third-year students. The college hosts a Well-being Week each semester with various activities designed to promote student well-being. Additionally, the college requires every student and encourages all faculty and staff to be trained in Mental Health First Aid, which is delivered by one of their own faculty members.

## **McCombs School of Business: Wellness Center and Building Community**

McCombs School of Business established the McCombs Wellness Center in 2021. The Center houses the school's Counselors in Academic Residence (CARE), meditation rooms, part-time counselors from the Employee Assistance Program, and hosts an annual Wellness Fair. The McCombs School of Business Accounting department collaborated with Texas Well-being to conduct classroom visits and provide instructors individualized feedback for incorporating well-being practices in their classes. Additionally, McCombs administrators and faculty collaborated to create a "Top Ten" list of techniques that McCombs faculty can use to help students be more socially connected. The college also invited Texas Well-being to present to all of their faculty and staff about the importance of sociality both in general and in the classroom.

## **Cockrell School of Engineering: Community Well**

The Cockrell School of Engineering's electrical and computer engineering (ECE) department piloted Texas Well-being starting in 2017. In 2020, Cockrell formed its own student mental health and well-being committee to lead wellness efforts throughout the college. This committee collaborated with Texas Well-being to provide every department with workshops discussing student mental health and strategies faculty can use in their courses to better support student well-being. The collaboration also resulted in a list of student well-being resources faculty could share with students, a video of faculty and staff sharing their own self-care practices and a list of simple well-being strategies distributed to all faculty across the college. In ECE, faculty have formed Community Well, which is a group of faculty and staff focused on supporting student well-being through well-being workshops and tabling events. Additionally, the department has created a Student Success and Well-being Canvas course for sharing wellness information and resources to all ECE students and the Tools to Enhance Academic Success course, in which faculty teach students about motivation, self-regulation and various self-care practices.

### **Undergraduate College: SHIFT'S 40 Assets Model**

The Undergraduate College began implementing the SHIFT initiative's 40 Assets for the Forty Acres program within their Signature Courses in 2019. The 40 Assets is a framework grounded in evidence-based practices from the Search Institute. These assets are protective factors proven to lead to student success while also mitigating risk for substance misuse and other potential challenges related to a student's mental health. Faculty interested in collaborating in the program participate in a workshop and then meet with SHIFT staff to identify a minimum of ten assets they will incorporate in the teaching of their courses. Through these efforts, many Signature Course faculty have embedded well-being practices within their courses. SHIFT also provides Assets in Action workshops every spring semester for Signature Course faculty to share strategies they've found effective for supporting student well-being.

### **College of Natural Sciences: Mental Health and Well-being Committee & Texas Mindset Initiative**

The College of Natural Sciences (CNS) formed a student mental health and wellness committee in 2021 to lead the college's wellness efforts, including the creation of a well-being website and a video by the college's dean. The committee collaborated with Texas Well-being to lead student well-being workshops in every department. Through these and other efforts, many CNS faculty intentionally implement well-being practices within their courses. Texas Well-being also collaborated with CNS faculty to create a quick response card that was distributed to all UT Austin faculty and staff. CNS has established a Student Wellness Center that houses mental health counselors and non-academic coordinators and hosts student-led wellness programming. Additionally, many CNS faculty participate in the Texas Mindset Initiative to develop instructional practices based on growth mindset research and increasing students' sense of belonging.

### **College of Liberal Arts: Humanitas**

The College of Liberal Arts (COLA) piloted Texas Well-being starting in 2017 and has continued to develop and implement well-being practices across multiple departments and classrooms. As of summer 2024, COLA had more faculty actively collaborating with Texas Well-being than any other UT college. In 2021, COLA administrators established The Humanitas Collective, which is a group of faculty and staff who lead well-being efforts in the college. The college organizes wellness workshops, restorative poetry sessions and other well-being events for students, faculty and staff, including the COLA Common Read program and the COLA Well-being Center in Jester Dormitory.

## Center for Teaching & Learning

UT Austin's Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) has been a key partner of Texas Well-being. The CTL's experts collaborate with Texas Well-being regularly to deliver faculty and staff workshops and presentations, including sessions on general well-being instructional practices, incorporating social connection in the classroom and integrating growth mindset into teaching. Texas Well-being delivers well-being sessions for CTL's Graduate Student Teaching Preparation Series every semester. The CTL has also led workshops and book studies focusing on effective instructional techniques, such as alternative grading, incorporating active learning and writing an effective syllabus. Faculty within the CTL's Provost's Teaching Fellows program have also collaborated with Texas Well-being to develop and share instructional practices that support students' academic success.

## Examples from Other Colleges and Departments

- The School of Nursing has a faculty-led mental health and wellness committee that hosts wellness events for faculty, staff and students. This committee has invited Texas Well-being to lead a few well-being workshops and attend several of their meetings.
- Moody College of Communication's Center for Advancing Teaching Excellence (CATE) has collaborated with Texas Well-being to deliver several well-being workshops to faculty and staff and to the students in their Undergraduate Learning Assistants program.
- Moody, the Steve Hicks School of Social Work, College of Education and College of Fine Arts have several active collaborators in the Texas Well-being program. Additionally, the School of Social Work invited Texas Well-being to present a well-being session at a college faculty meeting.
- Dell Medical School began collaborating with Texas Well-being in the fall of 2023. Their administrators co-presented with Texas Well-being on ways faculty can work to support student well-being in their classes and residency work.
- The Graduate School collaborated with UT's CTL and Texas Well-being to create a Canvas course on graduate student mentoring. Texas Well-being worked with UT faculty and staff to create a module on mentoring through a wellness framework that discusses strategies for incorporating well-being into a mentor-mentee relationship.
- Sanger Learning Center: Sanger Learning Center experts have collaborated with Texas Well-being to deliver several workshops on motivation and self-regulation, growth mindset and self-care to Sanger's supplemental instructors and tutors.

### References

Guidebook  
TEXAS WELL•BEING

Prioritizing Well-being in U.T. Learning Experiences

The University of Texas at Austin  
Longhorn Wellness Center  
Division of Student Affairs

Scan the QR code to view  
the TXWB References





The University of Texas at Austin  
Center for Teaching and Learning



The University of Texas at Austin  
Longhorn Wellness Center  
*Division of Student Affairs*

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