Supporting the Whole Student: Enhancing Well-Being in the Classroom

JENNIFER BERNARD | CATHERINE HOLLEY | MARISSA NUNEZ | AFNAAN QAYYUM

TEXAS LBJ School
The University of Texas at Austin
Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs

The University of Texas at Austin is composed of over 52,000 students, each with unique backgrounds and well-being needs.[1] The Counseling & Mental Health Center (CMHC) provides a breadth of resources to alleviate student mental health concerns. Our research explored environmental factors that may contribute to worsened mental health and well-being *before* students connect with the CMHC.

KEY FINDINGS

Concerns about stress and academic outcomes on the rise nationwide.[2]	Gap in research about faculty's direct impact on student well-being.[3]	"Whole student" approach to learning has positive impacts on well-being.[4]

The link between well-being and learning led us to analyze academic culture at the University of Texas at Austin. We interviewed core faculty at the Well-being in Learning Environments program, the SHIFT program, and the Signature Course program to understand key university-specific issues.

INTERVIEW TAKEAWAYS

- UT faculty has a wealth of underutilized resources.[5]
- UT lacks institutional incentives for faculty to prioritize student well-being in the classroom.[6]
- UT can effect the most change at the academic unit level (faculty, departments, and colleges).

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

As conversations develop around the link between faculty and student well-being, important considerations remain in ensuring optimal support for the whole student at the University of Texas at Austin.

- Incorporating well-being into academic culture could raise awareness of existing student support resources across campus.
- Empowering faculty with pedagogical tools to promote well-being supports the university's broader vision of changing the world.
- As Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion faces legal challenges, well-being will become a top priority for ensuring academic success for all students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Make Well-Being a core university value.

2 Incentivize faculty to reflect on their pedagogical approach.

3 Create faculty working groups, with paid faculty leads, to design discipline-specific standards.

4 Include a Mental Health Resource tab in every course Canvas page.

5 Auto-enroll all UT students in the Longhorn Wellness Canvas course.

REFERENCES

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5. Woodruff, Group Interview with Dr. Thea Woodruff.
6. Love, Group Interview with Dr. Brad Love.