From Foundering to Flourishing: Strategies That Promote Community College Students’ Mental Health and Well-Being in a Post-COVID World

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CTAE: Stronger Together
SESSION PRESENTER

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WAUBONSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Floundering is like...
Flourishing is like...
Overview

The pandemic is over. Why are we still talking about mental health?

What are the major challenges/current research related to college student mental health and well-being?

How are community colleges responding (e.g., best practices; gaps)?

What are YOUR questions, concerns, and/or strategies?
SELF-ISOLATE  
BREAD  
VIRUS  
QUARANTINE  
COVID-19  
TOILET PAPER  
RECESSION  
LAYOFFS

HOW ABOUT DOING A BIT OF SOCIAL MEDIA DISTANCING?
What May Be Compromising Our Students' Mental Health and Well-Being?
Community College Students & Mental Health

- More than 50% screened positive for symptoms of one or more mental health conditions
- They are less likely to use mental health services compared to four-year peers
- Those from marginalized backgrounds experience greater mental health burden; less likely to access services
- Financial stress is a significant predictor
- Perceived cost of care poses treatment barrier

Sources: Lipson et al., 2019; Lipson et al., 2018; The Healthy Minds Study (201-2022 Data Report)
Mixed-Methods Study of Student Mental Health During COVID-19 Pandemic

• **Flourishing (or lack thereof) during COVID-19: College students' social-psychological well-being during the Fall 2020 semester**

• **Students' mental well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic: Exploring ways institutions can foster undergraduate students' mental well-being**
A Holistic Framework for Promoting Student Mental Health & Well-Being
Surveys (Fall 2020) & Interviews (Spring 2021)

**Flourishing Scale** (Diener et al. 2009):

- Brief 8-item summary measure of respondent's **self-perceived success** in important areas (eg., relationships, self-esteem, purpose, optimism)
- Scale provides a single psychological well-being score (8-56 points).
- Measures (Fall 2020 Semester):
  1) Pre-pandemic Flourishing Scale (**in retrospect**, reported at start of Fall 2020 Semester
  2) Start of Semester Flourishing Scale
  3) End of Semester Flourishing Scale

Source: Diener et al., 2009
### What We Found...

**Participants**

- Struggled with lack of social connections in- and outside the classroom

- Encountered challenges in adjusting to primarily online learning environment

- Were aware of/concerned about decrease in their mental health but hesitant to seek out mental health resources

- Reported that housing arrangement impacted their well-being

Image: Sarah Gonzalez for NPR
What We Also Found...

Students' stress was reduced, and well-being was fostered by faculty who...

- Provided opportunities for increased engagement
- Were flexible and supportive
### Institutions Should:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Few Final Thoughts From the Study...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Craft more authentic messaging and proactive outreach</td>
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<td>Train faculty to reinforce messaging, initiate outreach, and contextualize instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop students’ mental health knowledge and self-regulatory behaviors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create more inclusive communities for students who struggle academically, feel isolated, and may be hesitant to reach out to faculty, staff, or peers</td>
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What's Waubonsee Doing at the Institutional & Instructional Levels?
Promoting Ease of Access to Multiple Services in Collaboration with Community Partners

**Community Resources**
Students with disabilities can find support on campus and in the community

- On-Campus Resources
- Community Agencies
- Counseling Services
- Legal Resources
- Informative Resources

Community Resources for Students with Disabilities
Association for Individual Development (AID)

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

- I am feeling overwhelmed.
- I need help finding a place to stay.
- I am short on cash.
- I just need someone to talk to.

CONNECT WITH WAUBONSEE FOR SUPPORT
Scan the appropriate QR code for more information on how Waubonsee can connect you to the resources you need.

- Housing Support
- Emergency Assistance
- Mental Health Support
- Request Additional Assistance
Waubonsee's Peer Support Leadership Program

- Participate in Peer Support Leader training and other ongoing trainings
- Provide peer support to students around mental health and wellness at special events, workshops, and drop-in hours
- Consult with WCC counselors weekly to support student wellness
# Fitting College into the Students' Schedule

## Comparison of Learning Formats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Face-to-Face</th>
<th>Online</th>
<th>Hybrid</th>
<th>Sync Online</th>
<th>Flex</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-campus attendance required</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation required at a specific time (synchronous)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Heavy use of technology (equipment, Internet, Canvas, Zoom)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to work well independently without set meeting schedule (asynchronous)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments due on specific dates</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Online and Flexible Learning** | Waubonsee Community College
Self-Paced or "Hyperflexible" Learning

For two of my classes, I use "recommended due dates" that keep students on a comfortable pace to complete all of the assignments, but I allow work to be submitted at any time before the end of the semester without penalty. For a third class, I have to stay a bit more structured around the midterm and final exam, so I push most due dates out to be due the week of or week before those exams. Most students turn the work in early or on the recommended due dates, but I have heard from many that they appreciated the flexibility that allowed them to work around their real lives and still get everything submitted and earn college credit. Flexible due dates don't work for all classes but can be great for some.

- Full-time CTE faculty member, Waubonsee Community College
Get to Know Your Students

• Create a "Getting to Know You" Google form assignment to quickly gather and assess class-level student data

• Share general findings to encourage social connections/community building

• Use findings to identify needs and support students' flourishing
Greatest challenge(s) with school/learning (This could be related to how you learn in general or specific to the pandemic, etc. Any information is helpful here!).

Source: A Google form for a class I taught during the COVID-19 Pandemic
Training for All!

*Do we make it mandatory?
Other Areas We're Proud of...

• More clinical mental health counselors on board; 3 bilingual counselors
• One counselor assigned to each academic division for greater visibility/personability
• Course "Navigators" embedded in targeted courses
• Academic Coaches to help with executive functioning skills
• 24/7 Tutoring Support
• Latinx-specific programming and support
• Increase in earning while learning opportunities; strategic alliance between Adult Education & CTE for-credit divisions
What We're Still Working On...

- Disaggregate student data and ACT on it
- Engage a diversity of student voices and perspectives in our planning
- Encourage greater participation among faculty in mental health support training
- Provide more visible, realistic support for students with specific needs (e.g., designated parking for pregnant students; gender neutral restrooms)
- Contextualize services, programming, and messaging (e.g., student parent peer support group; messaging catered to students with re-entry backgrounds)
Create Messaging that Transcends the "Traditional" Student
SPECIALIZED STUDENT SUPPORT

Do you know a student who needs help planning out their spring semester?

Refer them to one of our SE&O Success coaches specializing in neurodiverse and re-entry backgrounds. They help students overcome barriers.

LEARN MORE AT
WWW.AUSTINCC.EDU/IMPACT

Image: austincc.edu
Institutional & Societal Benefits

Image: The Healthy Minds Network
Community college students flounder for a variety of reasons, and in combination, these challenges can diminish one's mental health and well-being.

Flourishing occurs through practices that promote social connections, academic success, access to services, and contextualized messaging and support.

There is no ONE solution to addressing student mental health challenges; institutional, instructional, and interpersonal practices play integral roles.

A holistic framework is needed to guide institutions as they seek to integrate, contextualize, and expand resources.
We Need to Talk...

• Does your institution engage the voices of students who are "on the margins" or may have some insights to share about mental health challenges?
• What internal or community resources does your institution provide to students who may be struggling with mental health?
• What, if any, training is offered to faculty, our "front line" employees?
• Are there any "high-visibility" messages/resources at your institution to support special student populations, such as caregiving students?
• Are there any smaller "day-to-day" practices at your institution that promote mental health and well-being?
• How might your institution improve its efforts to foster students' flourishing?
Helping Students FLOURISH: What is ONE new approach you plan to tackle after attending this presentation?
Research & Resources:

A Framework for Promoting Student Mental Wellbeing in Universities
How Community Colleges Can Support Student Mental Health Needs (Rand)
Mental Health Early Action on Campus Act
Mental Health First Aid Training
Mental Health Resources (American College Health Association)
Mental Health Support for Community College Students (Community College Review)
The Growing Mental Health Crisis in Community Colleges (The New America)
The Healthy Minds Study (2021-2022 Data Report)
We Took Away Due Dates for University Assignments. Here's What We Found


THANK YOU!

Contact me at jmcmillen@waubonsee.edu