



Column #2

This is an ongoing series of columns supporting wellbeing strategies in the classroom, prepared by Dr. Sally Willis-Stewart from the School of Health and Exercise Sciences. For future editions of this column, be sure to check the [Healthy Campus Newsletter](#), distributed by UBC Okanagan Human Resources, or [visit the online archive](#).

Classroom Components that Foster Wellbeing

It is exciting to see the growing awareness and realization, based on the accumulating research, of the positive impact that student wellbeing has on their academic success. Furthermore, the efforts from instructors to make a difference in their own classrooms, is inspiring!

Recent research has identified 10 conditions for wellbeing in learning environments and summarized by the SFU Healthy Campus Community Initiative. These are:

1. **Positive classroom culture** (eg. a positive, inspiring place to be, respectful)
2. **Civic engagement**
3. **Instructor support** (eg. do you have office hours? Are you available by email etc.?)
4. **Services and supports**
5. **Real-life learning** (eg. ways of applying content to students' life and future career)
6. **Inclusivity**
7. **Personal development**
8. **Flexibility** (eg. is there options for assignments or due dates or weighting of assignments, or dropping one worst quiz mark?)
9. **Social connection**
10. **Optimal challenge**

Taking an active role in addressing these conditions in our classrooms can make a difference for student health. The inherent stress for our students in higher learning institutions causes physiological changes to the nervous system, cardiovascular health, and to mental health with increasing depression, anxiety and adoption of poor coping behaviours.

In addition, this chronic and/or acute stress negatively impacts creativity, flexibility and adaptability required for optimal learning.

These conditions do have generalized application to our campus but to ensure we are addressing our student needs, the UBC Wellbeing Initiative crew are carrying out a survey in 2017 to help us identify conditions unique to our campus and environment. In the meantime, this well-researched list can be helpful to us in taking action in our classrooms.

After reviewing the above 10 conditions, I hope you realize that you are probably already doing some things in your courses and classrooms that positively influence student wellbeing and learning.

Future Classroom Edition newsletters will focus on each of the areas identified above.

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Our UBCO VOICE Campus Health project conducted a student survey last fall (2016) and asked questions related to the role of the classroom professor in personal comfort, supportive evaluation, flexibility, social connection and expectations that positively impacted the students' feelings in the classroom. The results indicated that students felt supported and more positive about the course if the professor:

- delivered funny videos, jokes, music and/or stretch breaks
- had an organized, detailed syllabus with assignment grading rubrics
- did lots of group activities and discussions and group practice tests
- communicated well and demonstrated passion for their subject area, and
- provided flexible deadlines, office hours, assignments and grading.

These are some of the main examples and themes that emerged from analysis of the responses. From this survey the VOICE project students initiated the Golden Apple Awards for instructors integrating wellbeing into their classroom. Recipients were nominated by

students and honoured on Nov. 30, 2016, at a ceremony. The things that these instructors did to foster a wellbeing environment in their classroom were incredibly inspiring and their ideas will be added to the "Classroom Edition Toolkit" of ideas. This toolkit will be available soon for all to view and serve as a resource of classroom wellbeing ideas to incorporate into your classes as you see fit.

As busy instructors, don't think of this as another thing you have "to do." Just think of it as another way of doing things, another way of carrying out your courses to take care of both your students and your wellbeing. It is not changing or lowering standards, but offers students a greater possibility of success and university experience enjoyment.

We are keen to encourage a commitment from you to take more action within your courses and classrooms to foster student health and academic success. Our role is to support you in this endeavour, and to share and celebrate the actions; this column's purpose is to do just that.

If you have any comments or suggestions, or would like some ideas, please contact sally.willis-stewart@ubc.ca.