

Committee on Wellness Spring 2021

Overview

The Committee on Wellness was convened by Ric Hall in late February of 2021. The charge for the Committee was to **1. Define "wellness" at Lehigh; 2. Recommend ways in which our wellness services and resources might be better aligned, coordinated, or even better broadcast within and among the Lehigh community; and, 3. Envision and recommend a signature Lehigh wellness initiative.** Co-led by Kathleen Hutnik and Chris Liang, with Undergraduate students (Liz Kolaski, Adrian Suarez, Adam Zimmerman-Diaz), Graduate students (Kadia Hylton-Fraser, Natania Lipp), Faculty (Chris Burke, William Crow, Terry-Ann Jones, Jeremy Littau, and Valerie Taylor), Student Affairs (Maddy Eadline, Laurie Gray Evans, Briana Luppino, Jenna Papaz, Brooke DeSipio), Wellness & Recreation (Genna Albano, Doug Strange), Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (Rita Jones), Human Resources (Mary Jo McNulty), Communications (Lindsay Lebresco), International Student and Scholars (Caroline Neal). The Committee met 1 to 1.5 hours each of the 5 meetings from March through May.

Our Committee reviewed models of wellness found at other universities. We then followed a modified design thinking process. First, we brainstormed what wellness meant in a general sense, and then categorized the various definitions into common themes. From there, we proposed a number of "how might we" statements to begin to explore how these themes could help us form a definition of wellness specifically for Lehigh. The Committee's response to the Charge is provided below.

Definition

Wellness is the holistic and multidimensional pursuit of thriving that centers equity, diversity, and inclusion. It is not a destination but rather a practice toward Creative, Emotional, Environmental, Financial, Intellectual, Occupational, Physical, Social, Spiritual, and Sexual Wellbeing. Because the dimensions of wellness cannot be viewed in silos, campus policies are encouraged to be comprehensive and also support programs, services, and a culture that recognizes the symbiotic relationship between community wellbeing and individual wellbeing.

Recommendations for Coordination of Current Offerings

Although the temptation may be to rush to create a website to market wellness at Lehigh, the sentiment of the group is that the University should endeavor for more synergy and collaboration among different units, especially those focused on health promotion, prevention, and responsive treatment. While this may include units that are typically associated with wellness and wellbeing, such as the Health Center and Counseling, it should also include units that are equally focused on this important topic, such as the arts and humanities. To that end, the group recommends the development of a steering committee to organize conversations among those involved in wellness activities. Throughout all coordination, initiatives require the support of leadership and regular engagement on the part of individuals and the broader community, as well as continued commitment and humility of participating parties and for all constituencies. Discussing where there is opportunity, overlap, redundancy, and symbiosis, this group may:

Assess

- Do an inventory of current wellness practices/programs among the different dimensions and with our definition in mind.
- Talk to different groups to see what feels well or unwell in our community.
- Identify programs, policies, and services that currently enhance wellness and gain University support for all wellness programs and services across campus.
- Identify strengths and gaps in wellness offerings.
- Develop metrics for evidence for ongoing success (e.g., evidence might take the form of: decrease in bias incidents, people take lunch or breaks without guilt, all spaces on campus feel safe and welcoming.)
- Investigate where our incentive and reward structures might undermine wellness efforts. (i.e. If faculty are under tremendous pressure to produce X amount of research before tenure, how might it affect teaching and advising of graduate and undergraduate students.)

Plan

- Make data-based decisions.
- Suggest ways that behaviors and actions that encourage creativity, community, and authenticity are positively recognized. (For example, can we broaden the types of stories featured on our university website?)
- Design graphic representation of wellness programs and values. These graphics can be displayed on campus and in individual offices to indicate that wellness is practiced and encouraged here (similar to Safe Space graphics).

- Each office/department/unit could be tasked with defining what wellness looks like for them and how they can create/support a culture of wellness while consciously bringing the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Potential Units (e.g., UCPS, HAPS, Health Center, Fitness Center, LUAG, DE&I, Chaplain, etc) and Representatives (e.g., DOS and GLO, ERAC, Faculty Senate, Graduate and Undergraduate Student Leadership) that should be present on the Steering Committee.

Ideas for Signature Initiative

The group recognizes that further planning by the steering committee is necessary for creating cohesive programming across wellness units. This steering committee will be responsible for leading efforts for collective impact. The group encourages the steering committee to center the lives of its students, staff, and faculty, over a focus on marketing, quick solutions that appear to be collaborative, or “protecting turf.” The current group emphasizes the importance of sustainability over marketability, and intentionality - taking time to build the foundation for subsequent efforts for Lehigh. That said, two campaign names that the current committee imagined were “Lehigh Well Beyond ...” or “Lehigh Live Well.”

The current group views the Summer and Fall as an opportunity for the beginning of a transformation of campus culture - where the University provides leadership and structure for students, staff, and faculty to emerge from the pandemic with an acknowledgement of the importance of moving toward a more whole, authentic, balanced, and connected campus. The current group focused on the need to work toward a culture that actively demonstrates value for wellness as a process, and centers authenticity, vulnerability, kindness, and compassion and the need for greater emphasis on balance (e.g., life/work, individual/collective wellbeing) over a specific one-off program. These values can be seen in the ideas for “signature initiatives” that the group generated during a brainstorming session.

Mountain Hawk and Wellness

One committee member drafted the graphics presented below. The mountain hawk feathers represent the dimensions of wellness, with the base of each dimension centered with diversity, equity, and inclusion. The suggested slogans are “Live Well Lehigh” or “Lehigh Beyond Well.”



“My Normal isn’t Your Normal”

My normal isn't your normal. Recognizing this not only reduces the pressure that normal creates, it also makes us less biased, more compassionate, and more accepting of difference. What kinds of things do you need to thrive? What makes you feel safe? What makes you smile? What can you do to feel better about where you are? What helps you feel comfortable? Getting to know yourself is the best way to figure out your world and how to make sure it's what you need it to be. Only then will you know when you need to take a break, take a walk, talk to someone, get help, or do any of the things that'll help you get back to you.

“Take a Break”

Habits of working through lunch breaks existed pre-Covid. These habits worsened during remote work, with staff and faculty working through break and normal commute time. The creep of work into personal time (during and after work hours) is not healthy.

In this effort, University leadership and immediate supervisors will actively encourage those who wish to take a break in the day (to engage in self-care, exercise, etc...) to do so. Further, boundaries between life and work hours will be clearly communicated so that staff and faculty do not have to be available 24 hours a day, every day.

“Being Human at Lehigh”

The campaign is centered on the belief that the students, faculty, and staff of Lehigh University would benefit from a campus that created opportunities for engaging more authentically in themselves (through self-reflection), one another, and the broader community.

Through this campaign, options could include soliciting stories from our administrators, faculty, staff, and students. The stories (including those centering social identities) of vulnerability, kindness and compassion, imperfection, and resilience could be posted and archived on a password-protected University-monitored website. The campaign could move from passive to active, with the offering of prompts to facilitate conversation hours, planned/protected lunch-time walks (through sculpture gardens, art galleries, or the University's labyrinth) involving colleagues/students, or structured meetings (in-person or via zoom). These prompts would encourage deeper reflection, growth, connection, and understanding of our humanity.

“LeHi: Just Checking In”

When we find spaces that are toxic or harmful to people, we work together to help unlearn those practices, without shaming people, and utilize restorative practices to re-find wellness for individuals and the collective. At Lehigh, we care about the health and wellness of our community and ourselves, and one way we demonstrate that care is by saying "hi!" to folks we meet and intentionally checking in with each other and ourselves. Knowing that they are surrounded by a supportive community allows individuals to explore and grow, including understanding what it means to be sad or overwhelmed sometimes.

Humans are ever-changing creatures, and we support people moving through different states of being. We provide skills and toolkits for faculty, staff, and students to embed checking-in moments as part of each person's day-to-day. These are not additional tasks; rather, these checking-in moments will be acknowledged as part of the normal work day.

“Unlearning Wellness”

Humans are always learning and being flooded with information. We learn from what we see, smell, touch, taste, and hear. Learning may be the most powerful tool we have but if what's going into our brains isn't good, then we may have to actually unlearn. For example, at one point we were told smoking was good for us or fat-free is healthy. Being exposed to negative imagery can help spread problematic representations of what it means to be well. That fear, misunderstandings, and/or stereotypes result in the adoption of stigmas which can make us less compassionate, more biased, and less responsive to ourselves and others. This campaign will be aimed at challenging the things we've been told by considering the unfamiliar and exploring new ideas -- ideas about how to strive for and maintain good well-being, about acceptance, diversity, equity, inclusion, and togetherness.

Summary and Initial Recommendations

With the aforementioned charge, the committee defined wellness, offered that a wellness steering committee be formed to engage in ongoing work to align, coordinate, and communicate wellness within and among the Lehigh community; and envisioned and recommended the need for a culture shift, with some recommendations for signature Lehigh wellness initiatives.

Additionally, the following themes emerged during these meetings: (1) wellness needs to be viewed holistically, with campus efforts integrated as much as possible; (2) a culture shift on campus, where wellness is centered and prioritized, is needed; (3) campus leadership must communicate and model expectations for our campus wellness efforts; and (4) faculty, staff, and students all need to be actively engaged in each's wellness. In closing, we offer that:

1. The chair(s) of the steering committee needs to ground that group's efforts in a culture shift. That is, the current ad-hoc committee on wellness does not endorse simply repackaging of existing programs or even the creation of new on-off programs.
2. The culture shift will not be easy. We are embedded in an American higher educational culture that goes beyond Lehigh's borders; our university ecosystem includes people with different roles and degrees of power who are working and studying under varied reward and punishment systems. Facing these realities is essential as we work to create a healthier campus community.
3. Conversations with department chairs, faculty senate, and faculty on their role and practice of wellness is needed.
4. Members of the current committee are asked to join the steering committee and others, particularly from D,E,I and Religious Life areas are invited to join.