Moving Student Well-Being Forward

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Executive Summary

The Division of Student Affairs is committed to forwarding student well-being at OHIO. For the purposes of this report, the proposal is focused on interventions and supports situated in or from student affairs. The focus within higher education and at Ohio University on student well-being has grown over the last number of years. Most of the efforts to respond to this need has been centered in provision of professional services – through Counseling and Psychological Services and Survivor Advocacy Program. While new investments have been made in these more reactive efforts to address well-being, investments have been, at the same time, withdrawn from programs that proactively engage students in the life of the campus in ways that contribute to well-being.

**Framework.** Well-being is an abstract, multidimensional construct that cannot be defined by a single measure. Increased student well-being leads to positive outcomes for students and institutions. Recognizing the evolving nature of well-being, Ohio University sought to discover commonalities across the models rather than subscribing to one. The elements are framed as:

* **Fundamental** Access to food, housing, safe environments and financial security.
* **Personal** An active process of making positive choices, engaging in meaningful experiences, and connecting with others.
* **Social**Advocate for the well-being of yourself and others and reject prejudice and bias.
* **University-wide** OHIO provides opportunities for its community to thrive

**Next Steps.** Our framework distills moving well-being forward through the actions of caring and connecting. The potential pathways to wellbeing are broad and include both resources and conditions outside the individual (e.g., money, social support, culture) and skills, resources, and conditions within the person (e.g., values, beliefs, knowledge, emotional reactions, and social and behavioral skills). Through DOSA’s collective next steps, we will focus on building the skills, resources, and conditions within the student as well as those environmental inputs directly relevant to the campus community to realize the following outcomes:

* **Outcome #1:** Improve capacity to provide counseling services (CPS) **Outcome #2:** Improve effectiveness of outreach activities and access to resources about health and well-being
* **Objective #3:** Increase student participation in organizations, in producing events for other students, increase attendance at events, increase participation in campus recreation programs,
* **Outcome#4:** Reduce gaps in well-being support and outcomes for underrepresented groups

Framework

Well-being is an abstract, multidimensional construct that cannot be defined by a single measure. Increased student well-being leads to positive outcomes for institutions. Well-being dimensions are common in higher education and tend to have a foundation in the six dimensions defined by the National Wellness Institute: physical, emotional, intellectual, social, occupational, and spiritual. Several institutions have built upon this foundation, altering names, and adding dimensions unique to their setting and priorities. Research has shown that:

* Students who sleep more (Kelly & Kelley, 2001) and who eat more nutritiously (Burrows, Whatnall, Patterson, & Hutchesson, 2017) **have higher GPAs**
* Strong social wellbeing can help college students **effectively manage their stress** (Altaher & Runnerstrom, 2018)
* Prevention and treatment of mental health issues leads to **increased student retention and higher GPAs (**Eisenberg, Golberstein, & Hunt, 2009)
* Interacting with difference helps to **promote learning and development** (Fosnacht, Gonyea, & Graham, 2020)
* Positive emotions are associated with better **self-regulated learning, higher motivation, and better examination grades**(Mega, Ronconi, & De Beni, 2014) and have a positive effect on memory and attention processes (Fiedler & Beier, 2014).
* When studying well-being as a predictor of achievement, results revealed that **perceived stress, a component of psychological well-being, is a significant predictor of academic success** (GPA). (Wintre et al., 2011)

Several models have been created to communicate what specific elements influence well-being and the method in which they influence well-being. To develop Ohio University’s subjective well-being model, the literature was reviewed for subjective well-being models and their various elements were noted for comparison. Five models were explored that encompassed the true subjective nature of well-being with specific elements for enhancing an individual’s well-being: PERMA, DRAMMA, Ryff, Gallup, and the University of Minnesota’s wellbeing model. These are reviewed below and are followed by an in-depth description of OHIO’ framework.

**PERMA Model of Psychological Well-Being and Happiness**

Martin Seligman (2011) developed the PERMA (abbreviation of core elements) model encompassing five core elements of psychological well-being and happiness: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments. Positive emotions are more than expressing positivity through physical characteristics, rather they are allowing optimism to remain the driving force of the individual’s outlook on life. Engagement refers to an individual’s experience of enjoyment when consumed by a positive activity or hobby. Individuals need only to experience meaningful activities and hobbies to enhance their well-being. On the other hand, the element of relationships focuses on the importance of specifically engaging with other individuals to enhance well-being. Meaning focuses on the importance of knowing why you are here or understanding you have a greater impact. Knowing one’s purpose can help individuals create focus when progressing forward. Accomplishments are also important for progressing forward. Having a sense of accomplishment brings about feelings of fulfillment and allow the individual to continue to flourish.

**DRAMMA Model of Leisure and Subjective Well-Being**

The DRAMMA model suggests leisure is a core ingredient for well-being that instigates the following psychological mechanisms: detachment-recovery, autonomy, mastery, meaning, and affiliation (Newman, Tay, & Diener, 2014). Detachment-recovery refers to the understanding that individuals need time away from work to recover physiologically and psychologically from work stressors and during that time of recovery the individual is returned to a mental baseline. Autonomy is viewed as a requisite of leisure in most leisure studies (Newman, Diener, Tay, 2014). Autonomy in this model refers to the individual’s perception of control and freedom in relation to participating in leisure activities. Building onto autonomy is its direct mechanism, mastery. Mastery refers to the condition of being challenged and enhancing the skills necessary to accomplish a task. Unlike the PERMA model, meaning refers more to the quality of the experience, rather than the individual’s purpose. It is important for individuals to select leisure activities that promote or increase their life value. Affiliation in this context refers to our relationships with others. Affiliation is accomplished when an individual connects with others by relating or caring for them—it is understood this affiliation is mutually beneficial.

**Ryff Model of Psychological Well-Being**

The Ryff model, first developed and named after Carol Ryff, is another model focusing on subjective well-being (Ryff, 1989). The Ryff model was developed with the understanding that well-being refers to a philosophical response to an individual’s life and cannot be determined biologically. The Ryff model is broken into six categories: self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, and autonomy. In Ryff’s model, individuals who possess self-acceptance can accept both good and bad aspects in their life, but ultimately have a positive attitude about themselves. Personal growth refers to the direction of energy—individuals possessing strong personal growth understand they are changing over time and consistently improve upon themselves throughout life. Having a lack of purpose, according to the Ryff model, suggests the individual has few or no goals, lack a sense of direction or forward motion, and do not see a meaning to their life. Positive relations with others are closely related to the previous two models, in that it places emphasis on the importance of connecting with other people whether through shared experiences or empathy. Environmental mastery defines the idea of being prepared to improve or change our surrounding contexts. Individuals with high environmental mastery can make effective use of their surrounding contexts, determined by their circumstances. Autonomy is defined similarly to the DRAMMA model in that individuals can regulate their life by their own personal standards as opposed to submitting to the standards of others.

**Gallup Five Essential Elements of Well-Being**

Gallup developed the Five Essential Elements of Well-being through a comprehensive assessment tool that asked individuals what their best possible future would look like and compiled the answers to create the five elements: career, social, financial, physical and community (Rath & Harter, 2010). In this model, career well-being refers to your overall satisfaction with what you are doing. Social well-being takes the place of relationships, affiliation, and positive relations with others from the previous models. Gallup emphasizes the miniscule tasks that increase these elements are typically taken for granted (exercising, saving for retirement, engaging with friends outside of work) and thus should be the focus for improving in these elements—small, daily tasks that add up.

**University of Minnesota Wellbeing Model**

The University of Minnesota developed a well-being model that identifies six elements that make up well-being: health, relationships, security, purpose, community, and environment (Kreitzer, 2016). The university utilizes a 13-question quiz for individuals to gauge their well-being as it relates to these elements. Subcategories considered include diet and nutrition, physical activity and fitness, sleep, thoughts and emotions, spiritual health, relationships, relationship with money, life purpose, community well-being, home environment and relationship with nature.

**Summary**

Subjective well-being (SWB) refers to how people evaluate their lives and is defined as an individual’s overall state of subjective wellness (Diener, 1984). It is a broad concept commonly divided into two components (Busseri & Sadava, 2011; Diener, 1984; Eid & Larsen, 2008). Affective well-being (AWB) reflects the presence of pleasant affect (e.g., feelings of happiness) and the absence of unpleasant affect (e.g., depressed mood). Cognitive well-being (CWB) refers to the cognitive overall evaluation of life satisfaction (i.e., global life satisfaction) as well as of specific life domains (e.g., job satisfaction or marital satisfaction) (Diener, Inglehart, & Tay, 2013). Domain-specific levels of SWB can be aggregated to obtain an overall SWB score (e.g., Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2004) and allow the assessment of possible bottom-up influences of specific domains on overall SWB (e.g., does a bad experience in a particular life domain affect the overall sense of wellbeing?) (Bucker et al., 2018). Well-being is often referred to as psychological well-being constructs, consisting of depression, perceived stress, self-esteem, and perceived physical health (Wintre et al., 2011).

Through an analysis of these models, Ohio University sought to identify the core common elements that cut across the various frameworks rather than subscribe to a particular one. The result is an Ohio University subjective well-being model that comprehends these five models and proposes a focus on the following common elements to support well-being: Purpose, Resilience, Relationships and Achievement.

**Ohio University’s Well-Being Model**

As Ohio University was wrapping up its own model pursuit, the Inter-association released a larger model for well-being developed by NIRSA, NASPA, and ACHA. Pulled together, the subjective work from 2018 and the Inter-association’s ecological approach from 2020 informed Ohio University’s Well-Being model. The following paragraphs define each aspect, fundamental, personal, social, and university-wide.

**Fundamental**

Bobcat well-being defines fundamental as access to food, housing, safe environments and financial security. Expanding on our definition, it is inspired from the Inter-association’s model. In their definition this layer includes but is not limited to, “sufficient resources such as food, housing, safety, and physical/mental health care; experiences of systemic equity and diversity; experiences of liberty and freedom of participation at all levels of society; and experiences of unfettered human rights such as freedom of speech, voting access, and justice system protections” (2020, p.3). At Ohio University, this is not limited to a particular department or area of expertise on campus but does include specific work that comes out of DOSA to meet fundamental needs. Further expanding this work, staff support, direct, and help students in pursuit of these fundamental needs.

**Personal**

Bobcat well-being defines personal as an active process of making positive choices, engaging in meaningful experiences, and connecting with others. This layer of Ohio University’s model is where the earlier work exploring subjective well-being is expressed through four elements, purpose, relationships, resilience, and achievement. The scan of the literature identified these as recurrent factors contributing to subjective well-being. They are not limited to a particular department or area of expertise on campuses, and they are relevant in life beyond the college experience. The following paragraphs explore each element.

*Purpose*

Bobcat Well-being defines purpose as “recognizing the meaning of what one does and the value of how it impacts others.” Students looking to enact purpose can use goal setting to both recognize the gap between their current state and where they want to go. Students can create a greater sense of purpose by setting a goal and creating a plan to achieve it. As students commit to the goal and begin mobilizing their plan, students gain awareness that their actions take on greater meaning or value in the pursuit to achieve their desired goal. This self-instruction and focus on the importance and value of one’s efforts to achieve the desired goal give students a sense of purpose and support their well-being.

*Resilience*

Bobcat Well-being defines resilience as “believing in oneself and overcoming adversity by making good choices and effectively utilizing surrounding opportunities (or resources).” To overcome these challenges, a student’s mood and emotions play a significant role, specifically in term of self-belief, i.e., confidence, and positive thinking in the form of envisioning a “positive future.” By addressing or re-framing emotions and moods, practitioners can help students make positive choices and stay engaged and committed through the process of resilience. This ability to remain committed and use available resources to persist through adversity and increase self-belief supports and impacts a student’s well-being.

*Relationships*

Bobcat Well-being defines relationships as “building positive relationships and belonging to a greater community through social engagement.” A person’s social environment can be influential. In this definition, relationships is constructed by the students and belongingness can reference both in-person and digital communities. In both, students identify allies and develop a support system. Practitioners can serve an important support role that students may count on. The opportunity and ability for students to build meaningful and engaging relationships supports their well-being.

*Achievement*

Bobcat Well-being defines achievement as “accomplishing worthwhile goals by engaging in experiences that provide the means to thrive in all areas of life.” As outlined explicitly in the definition, accomplishing a goal directly supports a student’s well-being. However, the connection is strengthened due to the emphasis on the value of the desired goal and the fulfillment that is felt by achieving that goal. As the achievement definition outlines, it is “worthwhile” goals that significantly impact personal well-being. While many people may consider “the journey” to be as valuable as accomplishing the goal itself, it is the completion of the worthwhile goal that carries the most weight when supporting well-being. When students recognize the gap in their desired state and set a worthwhile goal, the act of accomplishing this goal and filling the gap positively impacts personal well-being.

**Social**

In the Bobcat well-being model social is defined as advocating for the well-being of yourself and others, and rejecting prejudice and bias. This layer extends the individual subjective well-being underpinnings to the community. Individuals contribute to community by supporting others’ subjective well-being. In the Inner-association definition they state that individuals “[recognize] their own value and impact on the whole community, they actively participate in at least one behavior that benefits others.” When enacted, this social layer of the model looks like Bobcats supporting other Bobcats.

**University-Wide**

In this final layer of the model, University-wide is defined as OHIO provides opportunities for its community to thrive. In this layer, we see subjective well-being united with objective well-being. This community-based layer of the model calls out that a system cannot be well without appropriate structures, systems, and normative behavior.

Ohio University’s well-being model was developed to guide day-to-day work. Grounded in a thorough review of the literature, informed, and structured by the leading practices of professional associations, this model is set up to succeed. Further, the model is adaptable and scalable to departments, divisions, and colleges. We believe this framework can and does support and enhance the fulfillment of the university’s mission while supporting students needs.

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