

Teaching Philosophy

Mental health and resilience as a prerequisite for learning

At the core of our teaching philosophy, we believe resilience and mental health provide an essential foundation for effective learning and academic success. Resilience is recognized as the ability of individuals to manage and cope with life's challenges, to bounce back from adversity and maintain their wellbeing. To this end, we designed a 7-week interdisciplinary, holistic program that supports student learning through the development of resilience. Program evaluation data indicates the effectiveness of our teaching methods. As effective educational leaders, we strive to model the integration of mental health and wellness concepts into the learning environment. To this end, some of us have been involved in the broader dialogue about the importance of integrating wellness learning into post-secondary programming through international conference presentations and involvement in the Campus Mental Health Strategy committees.

Interdisciplinary

Effective interdisciplinary learning occurs when professionals from different disciplines work together toward a common goal. In interdisciplinary learning environments, students are able to develop foundational knowledge, integrate ideas from multiple disciplines, and apply knowledge. When the program started, we began with a smaller subset of facilitators. However, because of our belief in the value of interdisciplinary practice, we grew to include facilitators with diverse backgrounds and experiences. We each have unique knowledge, skills, and resources that contribute to student learning, supporting and enhancing wellbeing. As one student stated, "The most significant thing I learned from this program was the importance of maintaining all aspects of your health (mental, spiritual, and social), not just your physical health." We believe an interdisciplinary learning environment is essential to the understanding of wellness. We strive to enhance students' understanding of wellbeing by engaging them in different ways and through different perspectives. This becomes apparent as each facilitator draws on their individual strengths to involve students in the learning process.

Collaborative

As educational leaders, we strive to model effective use of collaboration to enhance student learning and professional development. Each facilitator actively draws on the expertise of the students in the learning process. Facilitators strive to maintain a relaxed, informal and engaging environment that honours and values the knowledge in the room. We intentionally maintain space for students to direct conversations and apply content to their own life experiences. We also create learning opportunities that are emergent in nature, such as discovering spiritual wellbeing through the drumming circle or enhancing wellness through the health behaviour change plan.

We also see teaching as dialogue that occurs between facilitators and participants, and between participants and other participants. In line with adult teaching principles, we limit telling participants what to do. Instead we focus on

providing information and options for improving wellbeing, create space for student expertise and sharing of experiences, and allow students to make choices and decisions that fit best for them through their involvement in experiential activities. A couple of our sessions are still too didactic and student feedback encourages us to reevaluate teaching strategies to enhance opportunities for collaboration with students.

As educational leaders, we foster each other's professional development and mentor others within the university community. For example, within the Roots of Resiliency program, early-career facilitators are involved in co-facilitation with more experienced facilitators to enhance their teaching skills and obtain skills in disseminating knowledge at conferences. The program is also used as a mentorship opportunity for student volunteers from the Faculty of Kinesiology to see the experiential teaching approach brought to life. We provide guidance to other units on campus who are interested in developing similar programming for U of C staff. We have also shared our successes in program development with other Wellness Centre staff to support further mental health program development.

Learning within Community

In line with the Campus Mental Health Strategy's "community of caring", we recognize the importance of social connection and a positive learning community for fostering wellbeing. As such, we value shared experience and the expertise in the room. We recognize and value the diversity within our student population and create space for diverse perspectives. This is demonstrated through creation of a safe, supportive environment that supports learning and vulnerability. We strive to be positive and encouraging, setting expectations in regard to confidentiality and giving each student an opportunity to set their own personal boundaries for self-disclosure. We take learning beyond the 1.5 hour instructional sessions by offering individualized appointments with the counsellor following the first and final sessions. Further, one of our team members serves as a contact person throughout the program if students encounter any barriers to their learning experience.

Learning through Active Engagement

We believe learning occurs through active engagement. We acknowledge that students learn in different ways and benefit from a broad array of methodologies that enhance student engagement and thus learning. To this end, we integrate aural, verbal, kinesthetic, and visual learning stimuli. We make learning experiential and interactive. Information becomes knowledge through application. To this end, we create opportunities for students to apply the knowledge they are acquiring and receive feedback. Students are encouraged to practice, make mistakes, and determine what works best for them. We are also intentional about providing current and appropriate resources that students can use in between sessions to enhance their learning and skill development. As educational leaders, we bring our experiences teaching in the Roots of Resiliency program back to our respective work environments to inform related curriculum development.