

Teaching with Intention

Cultivating Well-Being in Learning Environments

Strategies Adapted from the Texas Well-Being Initiative at UT Austin

**Working
with
faculty
to support
student
mental
health.**

**Thank you for doing
your part.**





The Texas Well-Being Initiative

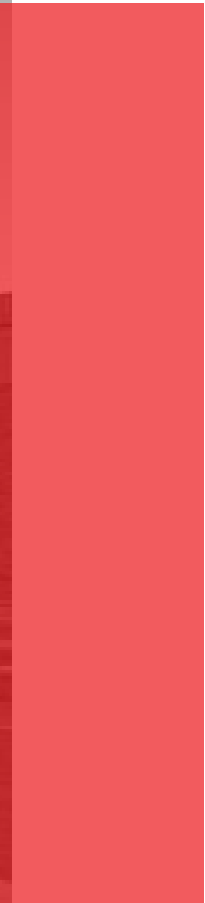
- Focuses on prevention of mental health issues and promotion of well-being
- Supports faculty and departments in considering student well-being when planning instruction
- Improves student outcomes by working with faculty to make small shifts in instructional design and delivery

Health and well-being are essential elements for effective learning.

(El Ansari and Stock, 2010)

Research shows that higher levels of perceived support are vital for college student success:

- Students with mental health concerns are more likely to have a lower GPA and have a higher probability of dropping out (Eisenberg, D. Golberstein, E. & Hunt, 2009)
- Most students feel that professors do not know what students today experience or how much students have to do on a daily or weekly basis (Stuart and Lee, 2013)
- Students that have professors that care about them as people, make them excited about learning, and encourage them to pursue their dreams are 2x more likely to be engaged at work (Gallup, 2014)



College students' mental health seems to be worsening nationally. Proportions of students reporting the following have increased from 2007/2013 to 2018 in the following areas (Duffy, Twenge, & Joiner, 2019):

- Suicide attempts: 0.7% to 1.8%
- Severe depression: 9.4% to 21.1%
- Moderate to severe depression: 23.3% to 41.1%
- Moderate to severe anxiety: 17.9% to 34.4%

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light even more student mental health concerns (Healthy Minds Network, 2020):

- More than 60% of students are very or extremely concerned for the people they care about
- 66% report a more stressful financial situation since the start of the pandemic
- 60% report greater difficulty accessing mental health care
- 31% (up from 22% in Fall 2019) report their academics have been impaired by their mental health struggles





Well-being supports assist in creating effective learning environments.

The following conditions for Well-Being can be embedded into the learning environment to take into consideration the needs of the whole student:

- Social Connectedness
- Mindfulness and Stress Reduction
- Growth Mindset
- Resilience
- Gratitude
- Inclusivity
- Self-Compassion and Empathy
- Life Purpose



Social connectedness has a direct effect on college student retention.

(Allen, Robbins, Casillas, and Oh, 2008)

Here's how to incorporate the social connectedness condition for well-being into the classroom:

- Smile and greet students
- Carry on informal conversations before class
- Play music before class. Let the students choose the music
- Allow students to go over homework in pairs or groups
- Close class with something positive. Have students share something they learned or something they are more interested in learning



*One way to increase social
connectedness is to ask
students to share a WOW,
POW, or CHOW with
the class.*

WOW: Something great that happened in the past week

POW: Something disappointing that happened in the past week

CHOW: A great new restaurant experience

Mindfulness may improve memory and testing performance, reduce stress, and foster better health.


(Bonamo, Legierski & Thomas, 2015; Kerrigan et al., 2017)

Here's how to incorporate the mindfulness and stress reduction condition for well-being into the classroom:

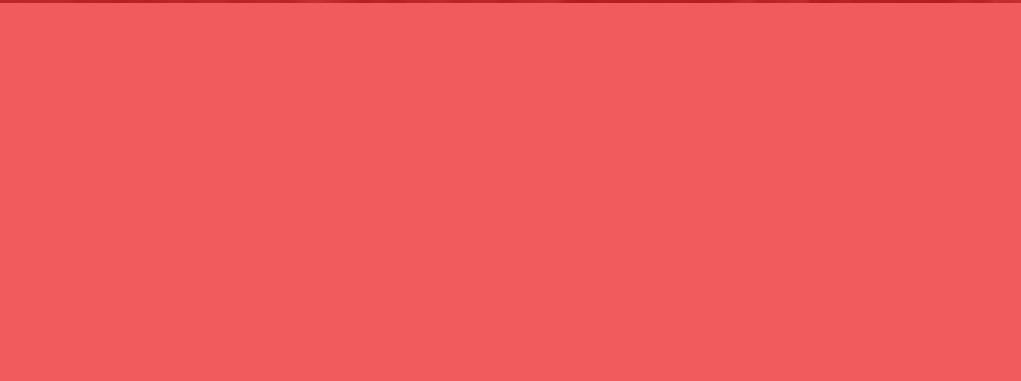

- Use “Brain Breaks” in your lectures.
Allow for short periods of movement or use collaborative discussion or other interactions during instruction
- Incorporate a “Mindfulness Minute” at the beginning of class or before exams.
Encourage or allow students to sit quietly and use deep breathing techniques
- Incorporate resources for mindfulness on campus into your syllabus and communications with students
Ex: Student Counseling Center, RISE, TAO, etc.

**Talk about mental
health & normalize
the topic in your
classroom.**





**Growth mindsets are
associated with more
adaptive coping and
learning strategies
after failure.**



Students' mindsets can influence how they react to stressful situations, failures and challenges.

(Dweck & Leggett, 1988)

Here's how to incorporate the growth mindset condition for well-being into the classroom:

- Teach students how to use mistakes/failures to their advantage
- Let students see you make mistakes, then show them how you use those mistakes to learn
- Focus less on competition and performance and more on learning and mastery

Examples of focusing on learning and mastery include:


- Allow students to retake exams or parts of exams to learn from mistakes
- Have students take exams both individually or in groups or a mixture of both

Inclusivity gives students the opportunity to be their authentic selves in your classroom.

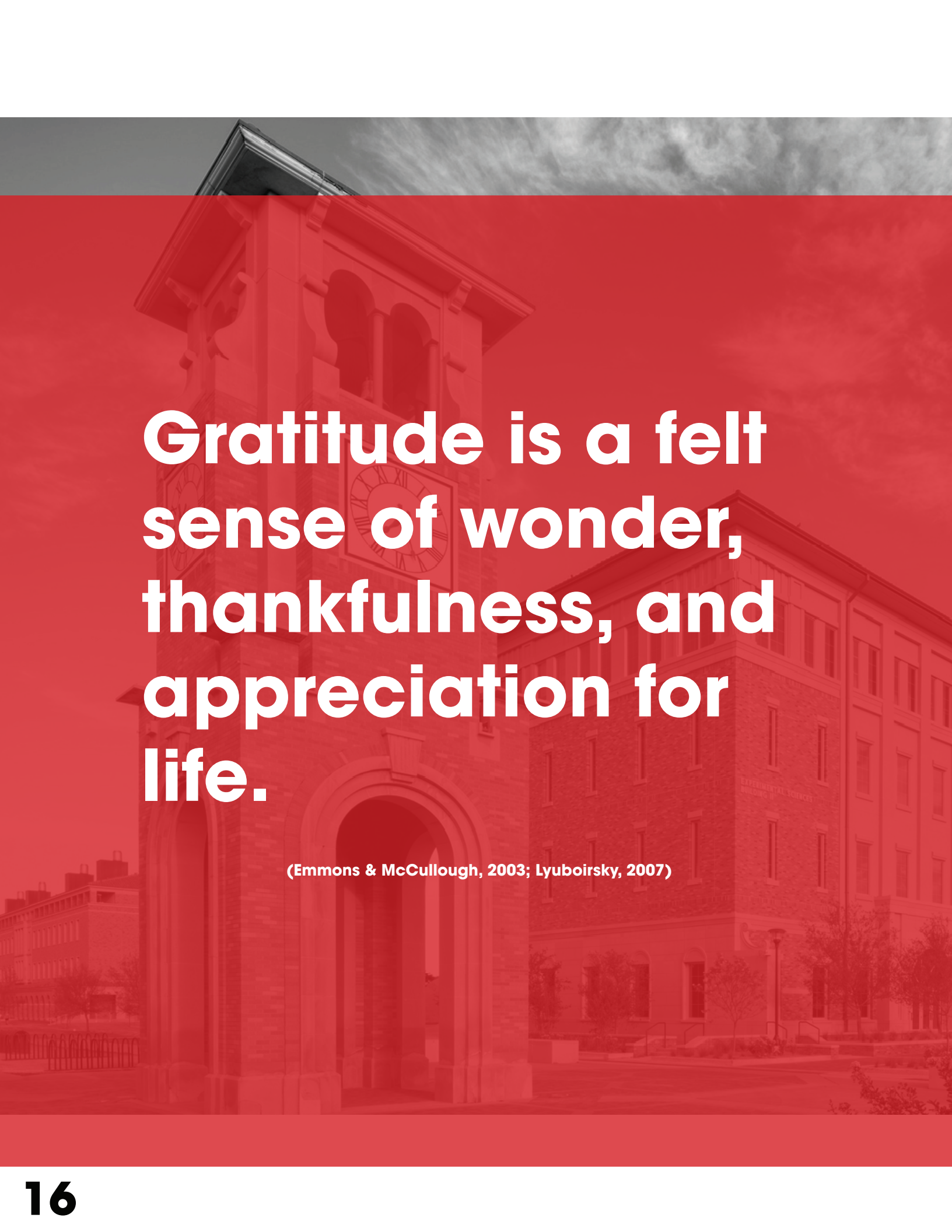
Here's how to incorporate the inclusivity condition for well-being into the classroom:

- Consider student needs when it comes to seating, visual/audio equipment, note taking, test taking, etc.
- Use inclusive language and gender-neutral pronouns
- Provide resource information in your syllabus or elsewhere
- Explicitly talk about mental health and well-being to normalize difficulties
- Create a safe space
- Record all lectures for students to access later






**Inclusivity is honoring
and recognizing the
differences among
students.**



**Gratitude is a felt
sense of wonder,
thankfulness, and
appreciation for
life.**

(Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Lyuboirsky, 2007)



Through consistent practice, gratitude can be developed over time, leading to higher levels of happiness, self-worth, & stronger relationships.

(Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Lyubovitsky, 2007)

Here's how to incorporate the gratitude condition for well-being into the classroom:

- Show students how to express gratitude
- Ask students to write a letter to someone who has made them feel grateful
- Be optimistic. Focus on the positive more than the negative

Examples of focusing on gratitude include:

- Share things in your life for which you are grateful
- When going over an assignment or exam, focus on what the students did correctly before addressing their mistakes

Resilience is the ability to recover from stress despite challenging life events that otherwise would overwhelm a person's normal ability to cope with stress.

(Smith et al., 2008)


Here's how to incorporate the resilience condition for well-being into the classroom:

- Talk about times that you have failed and how you worked through those failures. Humanize yourself
- Use exams and other assignments as teaching tools. Go over the exam or assignment and discuss areas of common struggle, what these mistakes mean for thinking and learning, and how they connect to new learning
- Be optimistic about how students are doing in your class

Here are examples on how to use exams and other assignments as teaching tools:

- Go over exams and assignments and discuss areas of common struggle
- Examine what these mistakes mean for thinking and learning
- Understand student mistakes and connect the mistakes to new learning





**Being an example for
your students when it
comes to resilience
can be impactful.**



**Creating
effective
learning
environments
starts with
you.**



Tips for creating an effective learning environment:

- Allow students to respond in different ways online or in class (verbal responses, chat responses, polls, gestures)
- Rather than using a few high-stakes exams or projects, break up student learning and assessment across multiple lower-stakes quizzes, assignments, projects
- Be consistent and structured. Send out assignments at a designated day/time each week
- Be flexible. Give students more time for learning and finishing assignments
- End class early or on time. Students need a break between classes and meetings

Contribute to the university-wide commitment of supporting student mental health by adding this standardized syllabus statement and qr link to mental health resources to your course materials:

Being a college student may present a number of challenges that can hinder your learning potential. These might include being overwhelmed, feelings of anxiety, unmanageable stress, unhealthy relationships or high levels of substance abuse. If you or a friend are experiencing any of these barriers or would like to talk about any other concerns you have, help is always available. You can learn more about mental health resources by scanning the QR or visiting <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/rise/mentalhealth.php>

Notes

**How I'll implement
these strategies:**

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