

# BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS OF THE DIMENSIONS OF STUDENT WELL-BEING WITH SUGGESTIONS ON HOW THEY MIGHT BE ENHANCED

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## COMPETENCE & EFFICACY: ACADEMIC SKILLS

Students with optimal well-being know how to study for and be evaluated favorably in all the courses they take. While stressed at times, overall, they feel in control of their learning experiences. If their skill level is inadequate (e.g., as might be revealed in a difficult math or science course), they blame their shortfalls on a lack of effort or an inefficient study strategy, not their native intelligence. Then, they seek help and take steps to remediate weaknesses and redeploy their strengths.

### Increasing Academic Skills

- ❖ Have a growth mindset: don't ever believe low grades define your destiny. Always believe you can become better at nearly anything you sincerely desire to do. Then do it.
- ❖ Simply spend more time on the learning tasks you find to be challenging.
- ❖ Find a good study buddy, preferably an academically skilled person who you like and respect.
- ❖ Ask an academic coach, counselor, or tutor to help you.
- ❖ Monitor your progress. Celebrate your "little" achievements.

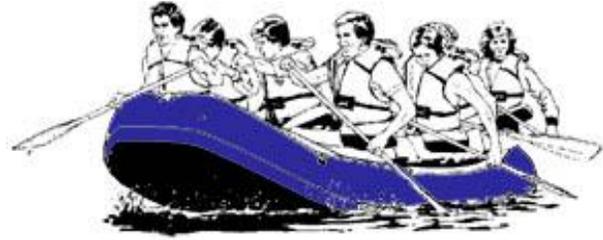


## AUTONOMY

Optimal well-being can be compromised by either rugged individualism or spineless conformity. Healthy autonomy is neither individual license nor absorption by a group. Students with strong mental health have the trust to join others but also the courage to stand alone if they must. They know when to retreat from friends who are taking unnecessary risks or acting irresponsibly and, on other hand, when to be a loyal, reliable contributor to a group. Truly autonomous students balance their rights and freedoms with those of others to achieve mutually rewarding, yet ethical outcomes.

### Strengthening Autonomy

- ✧ Foster your independence by becoming more competent in the daily tasks of life.
- ✧ Rely on others out of choice, not dependency.
- ✧ Build social relationships with people who respect your autonomy.
- ✧ Let interest drive more of what you do. You feel more in control when you are doing something interesting. The more you learn, the more interesting things become.
- ✧ Redistribute the energy you invest in what is intrinsically versus extrinsically reinforcing. Engage in more things that have intrinsic value for you. List the things you like to do for their own sake. List the people you like to be with simply to be with them.



## **ENGAGEMENT IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

The purpose of the core curriculum of most colleges is to promote self-discovery, expand perspectives and prepare emerging adults for a life worth living. General education should stimulate curiosity, encourage creativity, build wisdom and most of all, increase compassion. However, students with optimal well-being know that their development is incomplete and shallow without meaningful engagement in extracurricular activities. Therefore, they enthusiastically participate in college clubs and organizations and get deeply involved in community service. When they have free time, they adventurously get out of their residences to try new things and enjoy life beyond the classroom. These students intuitively know that extracurricular programs are the workshops of a genuine liberal arts education.

### **Deepening Extracurricular Engagement**

- ❖ Actively participate in the student clubs or organizations that challenge you or broaden your perspective. Don't only be a joiner.
- ❖ Do community service. Help others. Become more compassionate.
- ❖ Serve as a peer mentor, resident assistant, or academic tutor.
- ❖ With at least one student club or organization, formally serve as one of its leaders.
- ❖ Help start a new student club or organization. Enlist staff and faculty to help you.



## **SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS: RELATIONS WITH FACULTY**

Students with optimal well-being have the courage to approach their instructors outside the classroom. They build relationships with faculty and soon enjoy simply talking with them. They do this not to influence faculty, but to hold up their side of an important human relationship. They have the insight that teaching and learning are highly interdependent activities. They realize that by learning and performing well for their teachers, they are authenticating a vital generative human relationship.

### **Improving Faculty Relations**

- ✧ Make an appointment with each of your instructors. Introduce yourself and find out who they are as people.
- ✧ Prepare for class and participate in class. Don't give into your shyness or the silence of your classmates.
- ✧ Linger after class to ask questions or just chat.
- ✧ Invite your instructors to participate in the extracurricular activities you enjoy.
- ✧ When it is time, thank your instructors for the work they have done for you.



## **SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS: RELATIONS WITH CLOSE FRIENDS**

Without the presence of family and away from high school friends, many college students must develop a surrogate family and form new friendships. Students with optimal well-being do this gracefully without much anguish. They know the difference between a close friend and a friendly acquaintance. They intentionally build warm, trusting relationships with a small group of close friends. They open up to these special friends and in return are confided in and trusted. While joy and affection are the prevailing emotions of these close friendships, fears, disappointments and sorrows are also shared.

### **Improving Friend Relations**

- ✧ Draw a picture of your friendship network. Place the friends you most deeply love closer to you. Draw lines connecting the friends who like and respect each other. Draw a circle around your *vital* friends; these are the friends you could not easily live without. Then, actively and deliberately care for them.
- ✧ Friendship is reciprocal. The friendship you get is the friendship you give. Start by giving.
- ✧ Don't let little things damage vital friendships. Allow your friends to be human. If they harm you, forgive them. If you harm them, offer an apology.
- ✧ Surprise your friends. On any random day tell them how much you appreciate their friendship. Send a note. Leave a little gift.
- ✧ Open up to your close friends. Confide in them and invite them to confide in you.



## GOALS & PURPOSE

Having goals that get you up in the morning and fill your days with meaning are good goals. “To-do-lists” are good too because they help you manage time, however, goals about vocations, callings, and service to others address the larger issues of being and purpose. These are the goals you must have to flourish. Students with optimal levels of well-being have a sense of purpose and they patiently focus their gifts, talents and energies on achieving their goals.

### Establishing Better Goals

- ✧ Discover your strengths then build your goals around your talents and gifts. This website has exercises based on signature strengths. Within the “Positive Learning” page try the exercises on “Discovering, Developing & Applying Your Signature Strengths.” At the Gallup organization’s website there are similar exercises for discovering and applying your talent themes.
- ✧ Discover your *major goals*: List the goals you have in education, career, social relationships and pastimes. Then on a 10-point scale rate how much each goal a) expresses your important beliefs & values, b) stretches & challenges you, c) is compatible with the goals of other people in your life, and d) elicits genuine respect from family or friends when it is pursued or achieved.
- ✧ Rearrange your “purpose portfolio.” Make a “done-list” recalling the things you did over the last month, then a “to-do list” of the things you plan to accomplish over the coming month. Highlight those activities & accomplishments that are directly connected to your major goals. Deliberately replace busy work with work that is more purposeful.
- ✧ Make your major goals more manageable by a) breaking them down into feasible achievable steps, b) adding ways to give yourself clear immediate feedback at each step and c) asking others to help you with their resources and social support.
- ✧ Give yourself incentives & rewards for achieving the steps that led to the accomplishment of a major goal. Celebrate majorly when you achieve a major goal. Involve family, friends, and others.



## **HEALTH HABITS & HARDINESS**

Physical health highly affects mental health and the capacity to flourish. Like athletes in training, students with optimal well-being know they must strive to keep healthy despite the stresses and distractions of college life. For example, getting enough sleep can be a challenge for college students. Like shift workers, their social and academic schedules can cause them to sleep irregularly getting insufficient sleep one night and too much on another. In turn, they may eat irregularly and not feel like exercising. However, students with optimal well-being deliberately try to manage their health by getting sufficient sleep, eating a healthy diet and exercising as often as they can. Their best strategy for achieving better health is to spend more time with friends who have healthy lifestyles.

### **Improving Health Habits**

- ✧ Establish friendships with people who possess the health habits you aspire to.
- ✧ Join groups or clubs that attract people with healthy life styles and people who are earnestly trying to improve their life styles.
- ✧ Reduce or change activities that cause you to eat or sleep irregularly. Allow your body to establish uncomplicated eating and sleeping habits.
- ✧ Find a form of exercise you enjoy then do it regularly. Convince a friend to join you.
- ✧ Read about food. Learn how to cook. Avoid diets and processed food. If you drink alcoholic beverages, do it in moderation.



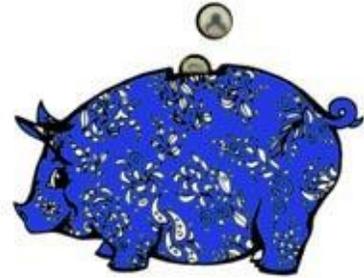


## **SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS: INTIMATE RELATIONS**

Intimacy, passion and sex pose challenges for everyone, particularly emerging adults. College students use their charming attributes and physical attractiveness to find intimate partners. Often these intimate relationships are a source of pleasure and splendid fulfillment, but sometimes can cause confusion and emotional distress. Compared to other college students, students with optimal well-being find more splendid fulfillment than emotional distress in their intimate relationships. They accept their sexuality but do not unhealthily yield to it. They believe sex is important, but not the most important part of their college life. They are not preoccupied with finding a perfect partner or an ideal romance. Instead, they look for a more comfortable, down-to-earth kind of intimacy that promotes the growth of themselves and their partner.

### **Enriching Intimate Relations**

- ❖ Remember it's harder to keep love than find love. Give up looking for Miss or Mister Right, but never give up making things right for one special person in your life.
- ❖ Talk: light talk or heavy talk, easy talk or awkward talk, funny talk or straight talk, clean talk or dirty talk. Just talk.
- ❖ Openly talk about the “intimacy contract” you have with your partner. Question each other. Is it only about passion? Is commitment important? What does commitment mean for someone in college? Do you want companionship? What will you do when you need to change the contract? How will you know when it is time to change the contract? Do your close friends support or undermine your intimacy contract?
- ❖ Avoid jealous, unforgiving, moody, self-centered, short-tempered, or pessimistic people. If you have some of these traits, change them! Involve your partner in helping you change.
- ❖ Leave relationships that have become consistently passionless and numbing, or emotionally exhausting and fatiguing, or psychologically abusive or violent. Your mental health and growth are much more important than saving a troubled relationship.



## **COMPETENCE & EFFICACY: MONEY & FINANCIAL SKILLS**

The management of resources like time and money requires skill and knowledge. Students with optimal well-being may not be wealthy, but they know how to manage the money they do have. They are likely to work part time while in college to supplement their income, however, they realize that money cannot buy happiness. They are motivated more by their likes than their wants, and they like what they have, and don't waste money on what they have been led to believe they should want.

### **Improving Money Management Skills**

- ✧ Attend a workshop on money management.
- ✧ Work part time while in college. When you are working, you are not spending. Adjust your hours to give priority to your academic work.
- ✧ Discriminate between your "likes" and your "wants." Don't mindlessly pay for something someone has led you to believe you should want. Most of your "likes" are free, priceless or at least worth their costs. Most of your "wants" cost you a lot and are rarely worth it.
- ✧ Do financial planning. Make a yearly and monthly budget. Practice saving. Saving even small amounts of money will increase your money management skills.
- ✧ Hang out with friends who have similar incomes and manage their money well.



## ENGAGEMENT IN RESIDENCE LIVING

The learning of students both inside and outside of the classroom is influenced by who they live with and the quality of their residence. Whether students live on campus or off, residence experiences should deliberately facilitate growth, not inadvertently impede it. Students with optimal well-being can tolerate mediocre living conditions, but they are happiest when they share a comfortable residence with students who have similar goals and aspirations. They view a dormitory, townhouse, or apartment building as a community, not merely a place to reside.

### Improving Residence Comfort

- ❖ If given a choice, pick a residence, on or off campus, that will enable your growth, not interfere with it. Will the residence have the technical support you need? Will the students or other people you live with help or hinder your learning? Is it easy to commute between the residence and your classrooms?
- ❖ If not given a choice, and you must tolerate an unsatisfactory situation, adopt a second home for social purposes and maybe another for academic work. Visit friends and find solitude in a library or other quiet places.
- ❖ Even an unsatisfactory residence life can provide opportunities for growth. View living with someone who is different than you as a chance to strengthen your tolerance. If the quality of the residence is less than what you have become accustomed to, view this as an opportunity to adapt and live with less. You will need this kind of learning later in your life.
- ❖ Earnestly participate in activities sponsored by residence life staff or student leaders.
- ❖ Get more involved in the community of your residence by serving as an event planner, student leader, or resident assistant.

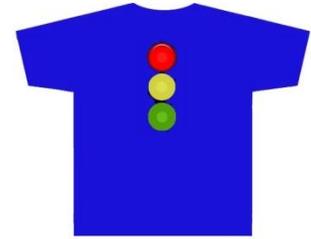


## **SELF-ACCEPTANCE**

Self-acceptance is an honest and objective form of self-appreciation. Students with optimal well-being know who they are. Their self-understanding is neither inflated by self-esteem, nor deflated by self-loathing. While they know they are not perfect and have made mistakes in the past, they accept themselves in the present with the same compassion they extend to others. They narrate their life story in an accepting and entirely human way, however they are not complacent. Fueled by hope and optimism, with the lessons of the past in hand, they desire to move forward to create a better life for themselves and others.

### **Achieving Self-Acceptance**

- ❖ Realize that while you are the captain of your ship, you cannot control the weather. You are not 100% responsible for every success and failure in your life.
- ❖ Worry more about self-worth than self-esteem. Competence and social support build self-worth; opinions build self-esteem. Self-worth is achieved; self-esteem is contrived.
- ❖ Learn from failure, but leave it behind you. You cannot fix a broken leg by obsessing on how you fell or proving you were pushed.
- ❖ Intentionally try something, albeit unimportant, you are likely to fail at. Then practice laughing at yourself. Enjoy your humanity. Be compassionate with yourself.
- ❖ Surround yourself with mentors, coaches and teachers who increase your competence and friends or family who give you unconditional social support.



## **COMPETENCE & EFFICACY: SELF-DISCIPLINE SKILL**

Knowing when to play and when to work, and knowing the difference between a distraction and a diversion is fundamental to students with optimal well-being. They can say “no” to themselves when they are tempted to get off course and “yes” when work is done and it is time to have fun. They are prudent but not prudes. For example, they may go out with friends but only after their responsibilities have been taken care of and progress has been made on their academic work. When hanging out with friends, if they drink, they drink in moderation to avoid the unhealthy consequences of excess alcohol consumption.

### **Strengthening Self-Discipline**

- ✧ Don't overestimate your ability to resist temptation. Don't underestimate your capacity to strengthen your self-discipline.
- ✧ Put barriers between yourself and the people or things that cause you to make bad choices. Follow the recommendation of most religions, “avoid the occasion of sin.”
- ✧ Eat properly and sleep well. When your brain does not have the energy it needs, you will be more likely to make impulsive foolish decisions.
- ✧ Build your self-discipline muscles by taking up an endurance sport like running or swimming, or enrolling in a highly demanding course like statistics, or a modern language. Intentionally allow yourself to suffer a little. Learn the value of suffering. Discover how resilient you are.
- ✧ Befriend someone who is less reckless than you are. Become more prudent, but don't become prudish.



## **COMPETENCE & EFFICACY: SOCIAL SKILLS**

Students with optimal well-being have the social skills and knowledge to form warm, stable social relationships. They prefer doing things with others although they know when to find solitude. They appreciate kindness and readily express their gratitude. They are very good listeners, so other students seek their company and feel comfortable confiding in them. When conflicts inevitably occur, they seek win-win solutions but may settle on compromises. If they offend someone, they apologize. If offended, they sincerely forgive those who have harmed them.

### **Enhancing Social Skills**

- ✧ Take a course or two on topics such as close relationships, group dynamics, human communication, conflict resolution, social justice, or cultural anthropology.
- ✧ Get out of your sheltered world and intentionally surround yourself with people who are not similar to you. Study abroad for an entire semester, not just a few weeks in summer. Do community service for people of another ethnic group for a month or longer.
- ✧ Watch movies by film directors known for their social sensitivity and deep understanding of the human condition. Read literature by authors known to develop strong characters of high social intelligence.
- ✧ Read texts on social & emotional intelligence. Attend workshops on social & emotional intelligence.
- ✧ Attend counseling sessions on relationship enrichment. If you do not have a partner, invite a friend to serve as your partner.



## **SPIRITUAL-RELIGIOUS BELIEFS & PRACTICES**

Goals motivate students and provide a sense of purpose in life. However, discovering what is sacred in the lives students can integrate and encompass their goals within a larger arc of meaning. Certainly all religions attempt to answer the big questions and fulfill the spiritual needs of people, but some religions may not fully satisfy the spiritual hunger of some emerging adults. Students with optimal well-being are as serious about their spirituality as they are about their religiosity. They have the insight that the pursuit of the sacred is not limited to membership in a religious group or participation in religious ritual. So, while they may attend religious services or be active within their religious communities, they also search for what and who is sacred in art, literature, nature, social causes, sports and other potentially transcendent experiences.

### **Broadening Spirituality Practices**

- ❖ By some definition, everyone is spiritual, even agnostics, even atheists. If you do not believe you are spiritual, you have not yet discovered what is sacred in your life.
- ❖ Broaden your view of spirituality to include all people, places, and things that are sacred to you. Discover what is sacred by making a list of what is priceless in your life. Then list what deeply moves you, then what you would be willing to sacrifice your life for without hesitation.
- ❖ If you are religious and have become so out of a process of critical self-reflection and well reasoned choice, not merely family tradition or habit, you have probably already found spirituality through a traditional religion. The more you examine your religious beliefs and put them to the test, the more spirituality you should reap from them. If this does not happen, you may need to refresh your belief system.
- ❖ Attend the religious services of friends who are not from your religious tradition. Experience the diverse ways that other people pursue their spirituality.
- ❖ Be open to the possibility that you can find spirituality in unlikely places like an old family home, a baseball field, a football arena, a historic battlefield, an art museum, a concert hall, a mountain ridge or a deserted beach.



## **SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS: RELATIONS WITH STAFF**

Although time spent with faculty is important, faculty are not the only educators and builders of character on a campus. Residence life staff, campus security, and food services personnel, to name a few, are also important in the lives of students. Students with optimal well-being are aware of this support. They value their social relationships outside as well as inside the classroom and respect staff and administration who also promote their growth and development.

### **Improving Staff Relations**

- ❖ Simply say “thank you” to the staff members who help you daily at college. When residence life staff, security personnel, food service staff, health or counseling professionals, or administrative secretaries make your day a bit easier, thank them.
- ❖ Spend some time talking with staff members. Invite them to tell you their stories. Do a feature on them in a campus newspaper or newsletter.
- ❖ Observe staff. Learn about what they have to do and how their work lives are different, yet similar to the lives of students.
- ❖ If there is not an award program for staff already established at your college, start one. Ask faculty and administration to help you.
- ❖ Work part time with staff in the residences, cafeterias, administrative offices or other places on campus.



## **SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS: RELATIONS WITH STUDENTS**

Within a couple weeks after arriving on campus, often for the first time in their lives, college students encounter people of different economic backgrounds, races and ethnicities. Students with optimal well-being embrace this diversity and accept the challenge of forming new social relationships. Consequently, they soon get along well with a wide variety of people both inside and outside of the classroom.

### **Improving Student Relations**

- ❖ While some instructors deliberately create a community of people in their classrooms, many do not do this. Approach these instructors and respectfully ask them to spend a few minutes breaking the ice and allowing classmates to get to know each other.
- ❖ If you are extraverted and find yourself in a class of introverts, by example, lead an effort to increase classroom participation. Take a chance. Talk it up. Invite your classmates by saying something like, “That’s what I think, what do you think?”
- ❖ Literally go out of your way to meet those students who live in your residence you do not easily bump into. Go to the end of the hall, around the corner, or to the next floor and introduce yourself.
- ❖ College is a time to grow socially as well as intellectually. Use this time to learn about people you believe, at first sight, are very different than yourself. Start a conversation with these “strangers.” See where it goes.
- ❖ Make a list of students you consider to be your close friends and another for your acquaintances. Are some of your friends actually acquaintances and some of your acquaintances actually friends?