

DESCRIPTIONS OF DIMENSIONS OF FACULTY WELL-BEING WITH SUGGESTIONS FOR STRENGTHENING WELL-BEING

The research on human well-being (Keyes, 2007; Ryff, 1996) suggests that there are at least nine dimensions of faculty well-being. Please view these dimensions as highly interdependent states and conditions, not simply isolated characteristics of individual instructors. More so, they are points of reference to view the overall quality of work environments of instructors in higher education.

In the following paragraphs, examples of traits and behaviors of faculty who are likely to experience optimal states of well-being are provided. These examples are intended to be illustrative, not exhaustive, of what is meant by high well-being. A companion to this profile is an instrument to assess faculty well-being: the *Inventory on Teaching Climate and Faculty Well-Being*. Instructors, staff, and administrators are urged to use the *Inventory on Teaching Climate and Faculty Well-Being* to monitor faculty well-being and evaluate programs conceived to promote it. This self-administered survey is only one of many possible ways to operationally define the dimensions of instructor well-being. Interviews with individual instructors or groups of instructors, behavioral observations, and analyses of archival data are equally valid methods to assess faculty vitality. Nonetheless, if the administration of the inventory is followed-up with feedback sessions or focus group inquiries, it can serve as a beginning of a useful dialogue on faculty vitality.

AUTONOMY AND CONTROL

Faculty who experience high levels of well-being are *responsibly* autonomous. They are good at balancing their needs to be self-determined with their needs to be collaborative. Like great jazz musicians, they have learned to play alone together well. They want *sufficient* autonomy, not independence and not license. They acquire enough professional freedom to grow, express their talents and achieve their goals. Faculty with high autonomy teach the way they believe teaching should be done. They feel in control. They do not feel restricted by the choices of others nor by the shortcomings of the environments in which they work. Faculty with high well-being are appropriately political. They guard the freedoms they need to do their work excellently. However, if their voices go unheard, they may withdraw from the people who constrain their freedoms and

avoid the work that has become joyless. Where they find sufficient autonomy, albeit small, that is where they invest themselves.

Acquiring More Autonomy & Control

- *As a school, develop a realistic, useful definition of faculty work.*
- *Support cafeteria models of tenure and promotion, and merit pay.*
- *Keep focused: “Just say no” to meaningless work or too much work.*
- *Become more efficient in teaching. Do less of it better.*
- *Be assertive and avoid compromises.*
- *Develop yourself in the areas your autonomy is strongest.*
- *Be political. Gain power through consensual agreement and unified action.*
- *Negotiate to obtain sufficient autonomy, not license.*
- *Establish an instructional policy committee in your department or college.*
- *Serve on an instructional development advisory committee.*
- *Improve the physical environment of teaching and learning.*

CAREER ACCEPTANCE

High levels of vitality and well-being can only be felt by faculty who have fully accepted their decision to become college teachers. When they recall the past and reflect on it, eyes open, they accept it all: fortunate and unfortunate times, wise and dumb choices, good and bad consequences. While they may harbor some bitterness, have some regrets and self-criticisms, overall, they appreciate themselves and endorse their professional lives. They do not have a strong need to start all over again or make radically different life choices. Faculty with high well-being feel they have dealt with the challenges of their professional lives in an entirely human and understandable way. When asked about their decision to become professors, most will say it was a natural choice for them and some, without hesitation, will say it was a calling.

Accepting Your Career in Higher Education

- *Talk with a faculty development specialist about your issues with career acceptance.*
- *Discuss career issues with a mentor or trusted colleague.*
- *Reconsider the match between yourself and the institution where you teach. Would you be more comfortable in another department or at another institution?*
- *Do you have some troubles in living that are adversely affecting your career? Improving your private life may improve your professional life.*
- *If you are angry, frustrated and stressed most of the time regardless of what you are doing or who you are with, you may benefit from counseling or therapy.*

- *A lot is expected of professors, and if you are a perfectionist you may be imposing unrealistically standards on yourself and your colleagues. Loosen up. Be more playful.*
- *Take a leave of absence to pursue something you love to do or have a passion for.*
- *Invest yourself more in your pastimes and hobbies, especially those that help you build a social support network outside the college or university where you teach.*
- *Redistribute the effort you invest in teaching, research and service. For example, community service may give you more opportunities to express your professional values than teaching does at this point in your career.*
- *Consider changing careers, but first take steps to improve your well-being as a college instructor.*

RELATEDNESS: COLLEGIAL SUPPORT

Faculty with high well-being weave their lives into the college where they work. They value collectives, and strive to make the groups they work in more cohesive. While they may work alone, free from distractions, overall, they prefer working *with* others. They like collaborative forms of teaching and learning, and they are likely to have done most of their research and other professional work with colleagues or students. They probably have had mentors and may have served as mentors themselves. Some of their closest friends are colleagues. While they enjoy working with colleagues, perhaps even more, they enjoy playing with colleagues. When under stress, they seek others for support and welcome them to do the same. Faculty with high well-being are trustworthy warm people in whom their colleagues can confide.

Strengthening Collegial Support

- *Team teach.*
- *Participate in community learning programs.*
- *Get involved with interdisciplinary teaching and learning.*
- *Create community time.*
- *Create community space.*
- *Occasionally have breakfast or lunch with a colleague.*
- *Don't be shy, take risks, ask for help. Seek a mentor.*
- *Serve as a mentor.*
- *Volunteer for committees known to have good social chemistry.*
- *Develop friendships outside the workplace.*
- *Add group-centered activities to your list of hobbies and diversions.*

RELATEDNESS: GENERATIVE BONDS WITH STUDENTS

Faculty who possess high well-being delight in sharing the value and meaning of their knowledge with students. They enjoy welcoming young people into adulthood, being the hand that touches generations to come. They are purveyors of hope and stewards of human potential. Doing these things is not their job, it is their sacred duty. It is *why* they teach. They live to have an immediate effect on students, to see their faces light up when learning is wondrous and to be there when knowledge reshapes convictions and defines new life purposes. Faculty with high well-being aspire to be in the memories of their students; they know that the value of good teaching is ultimately in the enduring effect it has on the lives of students. To be generative, they connect with students and stay connected with students. They are great communicators and masters of establishing rapport. While they may prefer natural, spontaneous communication with students, at times they may ask students for feedback in more formal ways; for example, through mid-semester course assessments or evaluations. They open up these additional channels of communication because they feel uncomfortable merely assuming they are having an effect on students. Faculty high in well-being invite feedback because it satisfies an essential generative need: *knowing* whether or not they are having a *desired* effect on students.

Obtaining Generative Feedback From Students

- *Do classroom assessment to get immediate feedback from your students.*
- *Write notes and letters to current and past students.*
- *Ask students to write to you.*
- *Keep an e-mail folder on past students.*
- *Use social media to connect with current and past students.*
- *Serve as an advisor for a student organization.*
- *Go with students on a study abroad program or community service project.*
- *Teach tutorials or small seminars; avoid large classes (20 or greater).*
- *Encourage students to take two or more classes from you in succession.*
- *Reconsider who your student is at the moment. Who do you really enjoy teaching?*
- *Recruit your student by changing what and how you teach.*
- *Get involved in student extracurricular activities that highly interest you.*
- *Assign course work that allows you to respond to students as individuals.*
- *Become an academic advisor.*
- *Participate in a mentor program (your student may be a junior colleague).*

MEANING, PURPOSE AND GOALS

Higher levels of well-being are experienced by faculty who set challenging and important goals for themselves and their students. Their goals are carefully selected, not only to be compatible with each other, but also to be in harmony with those of their colleagues and students. Surprisingly, they set only a small number of *essential* goals. Quality is preferred over quantity and they like to keep focused. While challenging, their goals are feasible, concrete and vulnerable to assessment. Faculty who manage goals well are not mere list makers, they set goals that give purpose and meaning to their work and inspiration to those who work with them.

Enhancing Purpose & Goals

- *Set challenging worthwhile goals for yourself, students and colleagues.*
- *Keep your goals compatible (i.e., have a handful of overlapping goals).*
- *Translate challenging major goals into smaller, more feasible steps and objectives.*
- *Make weekly “do lists”.*
- *Take the Teaching Goals Inventory (TGI) or some other inventory on goals.*
- *Discuss program goals with your colleagues (e.g., achieve consensus on the TGI).*
- *Do goal setting exercises at the beginning of each course you teach.*
- *Start each class day with a statement of your goals and objectives.*
- *Do one-year and five-year life plans for your personal life and professional career.*
- *Help a close professional friend do some goal setting and career planning.*
- *In your role as an advisor, ask your advisees to do goal setting.*
- *Read about goals and goal setting.*

PROFESSIONAL EFFICACY: PEDAGOGICAL SKILL WITH GROUPS OF STUDENTS

Faculty who are strong on this dimension are effective leaders in their classrooms. They work well with students and seldom have conflicts with them. However, they are not simply good managers of students, in greater measure, they are leaders of students. Their students readily accept their influence. Initially their authority may be solely based on their status as faculty, but soon they earn the respect of students and become emergent leaders, not merely appointed managers. Faculty with high well-being are exceptional at establishing good social climates for learning (i.e., at the whole classroom level as well as subgroup levels). Students in their classes quickly acquire a sense of community,

and because of the trust and the assurance they feel, to sustain membership in this respected group, they work hard outside of class and eagerly participate in class.

Improving Pedagogy with Groups of Students

- *Do mock exercises on grading, testing or other things your students argue about or grudgingly comply with.*
- *Read about small group performance.*
- *Skim through an introductory text on social or organizational psychology and apply what you have read to the management of your courses.*
- *Do classroom assessment (particularly assessments that help you to learn more about who your students are).*
- *Do mid-semester course evaluations.*
- *Attend workshops on conflict prevention and management.*
- *Avoid large, heterogeneous classes.*

PROFESSIONAL EFFICACY: PEDAGOGICAL SKILL WITH INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS

Instructors with high well-being are very effective teachers. They are proficient at both the art and science of teaching the individual student. They view teaching as a profession to be mastered. In their endeavor to be effective with students, they have acquired a variety of techniques and strategies for communicating the intricacies of topics in their disciplines. Their teaching is scholarship-driven, not technique-driven, therefore no class is exactly like another. They are not steadfast lecturers or disciples of new methods or technologies; instead, from a rather large kit bag they carefully chose teaching techniques and learning activities that work with students. They tinker devotedly on their teaching. These instructors often know what works with students because of the formal and informal classroom research they do. Because they are sincerely interested in student learning, they read about human learning and are likely to subscribe to journals or newsletters on college teaching.

Improving Pedagogy for the Individual Student

- *Subscribe to discipline-based journals on teaching.*
- *Subscribe to a listserv or e-newsletter on teaching in your discipline.*
- *Publish short articles on teaching in your discipline.*
- *Lead a brown bag session on a specific topic on teaching.*
- *Attend a half or full day workshop on teaching.*
- *Read about human learning, memory, cognition, and motivation.*

- *Do classroom assessment and classroom research.*
- *Do a sabbatical on an advanced topic in teaching (e.g. online courses).*
- *Manage a campus newsletter on teaching and learning.*
- *Manage a campus web page on teaching and learning.*
- *Video tape yourself teaching (if you prefer lecturing).*
- *Team teach.*
- *Be reviewed by a peer.*
- *Serve as a peer reviewer.*
- *Tinker seriously.*

RELATEDNESS: REWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Pay, plaques, awards and stipends do not by themselves motivate faculty with high well-being; rather, these external incentives are important because of what they represent. However, when rewards are meaningful and valuable, and are granted fairly, they can affirm a duty that faculty with high well-being hold dearly: teaching. When promotion, reward and recognition programs are managed well, the intrinsic motivation of faculty is not taxed, neither do they feel exploited or martyred to the causes of teaching. Because of the recognition and support they get from deans, chairs and other administrators, they *know* their institution cares about teaching as much as they do. They know that excellence in teaching is a *genuine* reflection of the character of their institution and, in turn, respect the institution and feel honored to be a member of its *teaching* faculty. On the other hand, when promotion, recognition and reward programs are indifferently managed or mismanaged, faculty with high well-being may be the first to feel a violation of the psychological contract that bonds them to their institution.

Improving Rewards & Recognition

- *Start a faculty appreciation program within your own department.*
- *Support college wide award programs that recognize the complexities of teaching (e.g., programs that have separate awards for new and older faculty, faculty who teach large classes, faculty who excel in tutorials, and faculty who advance the craft of teaching itself or help improve the teaching and learning environment).*
- *Support award programs that use valid and reliable, publicly stated criteria and that dispense meaningful and valuable rewards.*
- *Simply say thanks to colleagues who have served as models or who have helped you in smaller ways to become a better teacher (e.g., write them a brief note).*
- *Support teaching innovation grant programs.*
- *Budget for teaching excellence and innovation (travel funds, clerical support, TAs, technical support, release time, etc)*

- *Develop pay systems that reward consistently excellent teachers.*

PROFESSIONAL EFFICACY: SCHOLARSHIP

Scholarship is fundamental to the well-being of college teachers. Instructors who are strong on this dimension are experts in their disciplines. Through reading, research, publication and active participation at professional conferences they keep abreast with new developments in their fields. An abiding interest in their disciplines causes them to develop new courses and constantly inject old courses with fresh information. So, *what* they teach is continuously developing. However, the *way* they teach also sustains their scholarship. Because they enjoy doing research *with* students or for students, the range of their expertise may be quite broad. While they have an allegiance to a discipline and may engage in highly focused research, because they are avid learners, their range of knowledge is likely to encompass many related and some seemingly unrelated disciplines.

Strengthening Scholarship for Teaching

- *Do research or other scholarly work.*
- *Do research with students.*
- *Acquire new expertise in your discipline through a preemptive sabbatical or leave.*
- *Attend a week-long summer conference on new topics in your discipline.*
- *Team teach honors courses or seminars.*
- *Develop and teach a new course.*
- *Prepare and publish a new undergraduate textbook.*
- *Write articles in professional publications for general audiences.*
- *Organize and manage a colloquium series.*
- *Actively participate in two or more regional conferences each year.*
- *Update the content of an old course.*
- *Read the journals in your discipline written for the generalist.*
- *Take a GRE or comparable standardized test in your discipline.*
- *Obtain a copy of the current graduate comp reading list from your alma mater.*