



UNIVERSITY OF  
SASKATCHEWAN

# *Wellness-Centric* Course Design



*A toolkit to increase student retention rates and overall academic growth*

The relationship between learning and wellbeing is bidirectional. Research indicates that student wellbeing is critical for engaged learning and that students' academic experience can have a profound impact on their wellbeing.

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**As educators we play an important role in proactively supporting student wellbeing**

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Recognizing the wide variability in class size, course content, learning objectives, and individual teaching style, this tool is intended to present a range of options to create the conditions that support wellbeing, and foster academic integrity as an added and related benefit.

**Suggestions are given in the following categories:**



**Syllabus**  
**Course Alignment**  
**Assessment Principles**  
**Instructional Strategies**  
**Relations and Environment**

# Syllabus



Promoting wellness in the syllabus is about creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment that prioritizes the holistic well-being of students. By addressing well-being from the beginning, you set a foundation for a positive and thriving classroom experience.

<b>Suggestion</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Intent</b>
<b>Include a welcoming and inclusive statement</b>	Set a positive tone and emphasize the importance of creating a safe and supportive learning environment where all students feel valued and respected.	Students feel acknowledged, valued, and supported, which can enhance their overall well-being and engagement in the course. It encourages diversity, respect, and open-mindedness, fostering a more collaborative and productive classroom atmosphere.
<b>Communicate clear expectations and learning outcomes</b>	Clearly outline the course expectations, objectives, and learning outcomes	When students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them, it reduces anxiety and provides a sense of direction and purpose.
<b>Provide a comprehensive schedule</b>	Include a detailed schedule that outlines the topics, assignments, and assessments throughout the course.	It helps students plan and prioritize their workload, leading to a more balanced academic experience and a healthier work-life balance by reducing uncertainty and minimizing stress
<b>Use transparent assessment practices</b>	Clearly communicating expectations, criteria, and meaningful feedback to students in a timely manner.	Provides a sense of fairness, preventing students from feeling overwhelmed or disadvantaged by unclear or subjective assessment methods.
<b>Provide flexibility and choice</b>	Allows for adaptable learning paths and customizable content selection to cater to the diverse needs and preferences of learners.	Promotes intrinsic motivation and autonomy over their learning or assessment experiences
<b>Provide resources for academic and accessibility supports</b>	Include information about academic and accessibility support services available on campus	These resources help students overcome challenges, build confidence, and promote inclusivity.
<b>Model self-care as an instructor</b>	Demonstrating that you prioritize your own wellness sends a message to students that it is important and valued.	This sets an example that demonstrates the importance of taking care of your physical, mental, and emotional needs, which impacts learning.

# Course Alignment



Alignment in course design is essential because it ensures that all components of the course work together cohesively to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Alignment enhances the clarity of expectations for both instructors and students, promotes a focused and purposeful learning experience, and increases the likelihood of students' success.

<b>Suggestion</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Intent</b>
<b>Clearly articulate SMART learning outcomes</b>	Ensure that the outcomes are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART)	Provides direction, focus and clarity reduces ambiguity and stress.
<b>Aligned assessments</b>	Develop assessments that align directly with the stated learning outcomes	This is a fair and transparent process where students can see the connection between their efforts, performance, and the desired learning outcomes, which fosters a sense of equity and reduces feelings of frustration or injustice
<b>Use backward by design</b>	Apply backward design principles by starting with the desired learning outcomes and then designing instructional activities and assessments that align with those outcomes.	By clearly defining the desired outcomes, educators can prioritize essential knowledge, skills and assessment practices, avoiding unnecessary overload and reducing students' stress and overwhelm.
<b>Scaffold learning experiences</b>	It involves breaking down larger learning objectives into smaller, manageable steps	This approach ensures that students receive the necessary support and resources to overcome challenges and make progress
<b>Implement spaced practice and repetition</b>	Instead of cramming content all at once, spaced practice involves reviewing or revisiting material multiple times through the entire course	This approach allows for better encoding and consolidation of information in long-term memory, leading to improved retention, retrieval of knowledge, and overall success of student growth
<b>Incorporate active learning strategies</b>	Active learning strategies involve engaging students in interactive and participatory activities that promote their involvement, critical thinking, and application of knowledge.	These create dynamic and interactive learning environments that stimulate curiosity, collaboration, and meaningful engagement, enhancing students' sense of connection, satisfaction, and overall well-being.
<b>Feedback Loop</b>	Offer timely and constructive feedback on student work, focusing on providing guidance for improvement rather than solely on grading.	This approach allows students to track their progress, make improvements, and experience a sense of growth and accomplishment which increases their intrinsic motivation

# Assessment Principles



By incorporating best assessment principles, you create meaningful approach that supports student learning, provides authentic and constructive feedback, and promotes the development of essential knowledge and skills.

<b>Suggestion</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Intent</b>
<b>Align assessments with stated outcomes</b>	Ensures students' learning is accurately measured and evaluated in relation to the intended goals	Provides students with a clear understanding of their progress and achievements, reducing ambiguity and confusion
<b>Transparency of assessment practices</b>	Clearly communicate the assessment criteria and expectations to students, ensuring they understand what is being assessed and how their work will be evaluated.	Creates a fair and supportive learning environment where students understand the criteria for evaluation, reducing anxiety, building trust, and fostering a sense of confidence and psychological safety in their academic pursuit
<b>Incorporate formative assessment</b>	Integrate ongoing methods throughout the course to provide students with timely feedback on their progress such as low-stakes quizzes, Poll Everywhere, self-reflection, etc.	Shifts the focus from grades to the learning process, encouraging students to reflect on their progress, identify strengths and areas for growth, ultimately fostering resilience, motivation, and a positive attitude towards learning.
<b>Use well-designed feedback, offered early and often</b>	Constructive, specific, and timely information that highlights student strengths and identifies areas for improvement	A continuous feedback loop allows students to monitor their progress, identify areas for improvement, and experience a sense of growth and mastery
<b>Engage students in the assessment process</b>	Actively engage students in the process to promote a sense of ownership	Fosters a sense of autonomy and agency, over their learning, which enhances their motivation and self-confidence
<b>Incorporate authentic and real-world assessments</b>	Design assessments that mirror real-world scenarios, tasks, or challenges relevant to the course subject.	Bridges the gap between theory and practice, enhancing confidence, sense of competence, and readiness for real-life challenges and opportunities.
<b>Offer opportunities for self-reflection and self-assessment</b>	Have students critically evaluate their own learning progress, goals, and strategies, fostering metacognitive skills, self-awareness, and a sense of ownership	Provides opportunities to introspect and gain self-awareness, leading to deeper understanding of thought and behavior, ultimately promoting personal and academic growth and resilience

# Instructional Strategies



By incorporating these instructional strategies that promote wellness, you create a learning environment that supports students' overall well-being, engagement, motivation, and success.

<b>Suggestion</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Intent</b>
<b>Active learning strategies</b>	Incorporate active learning strategies such as group discussions, hands-on activities, case studies, or problem-solving exercises.	Promotes engagement, motivation, and reduced stress, while also fostering a sense of mastery leading to increased motivation and enjoyment of the learning process.
<b>Encourage collaborative learning</b>	Promote collaborative learning activities that foster a sense of community and support among students such as group projects, peer mentoring, or collaborative problem-solving tasks	Allows for diverse perspectives and shared responsibility, promoting a supportive environment that reduces feelings of isolation and enhances self-confidence
<b>Build in regular opportunities for reflection and self-assessment</b>	Include regular moments for students to reflect on their learning progress and evaluate their own performance	This increases student ownership and agency, which are highly associated with persistency for equity seeking students and an easy proactive way to make space for diversity.
<b>Use technology to enhance engagement and connection</b>	Leverage technology tools and platforms to enhance student engagement and facilitate communication and collaboration such as Perusall and Poll Everywhere	Interactive platforms and tools that promote active participation, collaboration, feedback, and meaningful interactions can foster a sense of connection and engagement.
<b>Foster a positive and supportive classroom environment</b>	Create a positive and supportive classroom environment through instructional strategies such as active listening, empathy, and constructive feedback	A safe space where students feel valued, respected, and supported leads to increased self-esteem, confidence, and a sense of belonging.
<b>Offer experiential learning opportunities</b>	Real-world applications, and immersive activities that promote active learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills in authentic contexts	Students develop relevant competencies, gain insights into their chosen fields, and build confidence, setting a strong foundation for successful career transitions.
<b>Offer Choice</b>	Provide options or methods to demonstrate knowledge, skills, or abilities, allowing selection of approach that aligns best with strengths	Fosters a sense of autonomy and control over process by demonstrating a strength based approach to learning

# Relations and Environment



Intentionally build relationships with your students. By creating a positive and supportive learning environment where students feel valued, supported, and motivated, a strong teacher-student relationships can be formed that contribute to students' overall well-being and enhance their learning experiences.

Suggestion	Description	Intent
<b>Take the time to learn student names</b>	When possible, greet students individually	This simple gesture can create a supportive and inclusive learning environment, contributing to students' overall happiness and engagement
<b>Practice active listening</b>	Provide opportunities for students to share their thoughts, ideas, and concerns, and ensure that they feel heard and valued	This practice enhances overall mental and emotional well-being as it promotes effective communication, validation, and mutual respect in relationships.
<b>Foster a positive and supportive classroom environment</b>	Prioritize building relationships, cultivating open communication, and nurturing a sense of respect and inclusivity among all students	Creates a safe and inclusive space where students feel comfortable expressing themselves and take risks in their learning
<b>Provide options for learning modalities</b>	Recognize and accommodate diverse learning preferences by offering multiple modes of instruction.	Students can actively participate and engage with the content in ways that align with their strengths, promoting a sense of autonomy and well-being.
<b>Provide timely and constructive feedback</b>	Offer timely and constructive feedback on student work to support their learning and growth.	When feedback is given promptly and focuses on specific areas of improvement, students feel supported, connected, motivated, and empowered in their learning journey
<b>Incorporate personal connections</b>	Look for opportunities to connect course content to students' personal experiences, interests, or backgrounds that resonate with their lives	Offers an overall satisfaction, fostering a positive and holistic approach to education as this approach establishes a sense of relevance and meaning in their learning experiences
<b>Be approachable</b>	Clearly communicate your availability for one-on-one consultations, either in person or virtually	Being accessible and supportive builds trust, and encourages open communication, ultimately fostering a positive and inclusive learning atmosphere
<b>Offer voice, and flexibility</b>	Recognize that students have diverse backgrounds, circumstances, and learning preferences. Be understanding and flexible in accommodating their needs whenever possible	When students can make choices, express their ideas, and adapt their learning experiences, it enhances their sense of autonomy, engagement, and overall satisfaction