

StFX Student Experience and Opportunity Plan:

# Cultivating a Flourishing Campus

## Acknowledgements

We acknowledge that St. Francis Xavier University is located on the unceded and traditional territory of the Mi'kmaw, who have maintained a connection to this land. We acknowledge that we are in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People. This territory is covered by the 'Treaties of Peace and Friendship' which Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) Peoples first signed with the British Crown in 1725. The treaties did not deal with surrender of lands and resources but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations.

We acknowledge the work that needs to be done to break down the societal, institutional and divisional/systemic structures, systems, attitudes, and actions that have oppressed marginalized, and excluded many members of our university and society. Breaking down structures involves acknowledging the truth of our histories and current context, and then identifying, addressing and adapting our work in ways that challenge colonial and oppressive structures and discrimination, and proactively engages members from communities who have been affected by systemic exclusion – including (and recognizing intersectionality) Indigenous, Black, minoritized, 2SLGBTQIA+, and persons with disabilities.

StFX is committed to ensuring that our programs, supports and services are grounded in culturally competent, anti-oppressive and trauma-informed approaches that acknowledge the impacts of historical and ongoing oppression in historically excluded communities. We must continue to inquire, listen, and learn so that our actions are informed by our communities.

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## Our Story

The student experience at StFX University is comprised of individual stories that shape what we believe about the university's purpose and impact. The mission to foster equitable learning and living environments in which all students can flourish represents an important motivation, but its intentions cannot outweigh the importance of understanding our place in the broader student culture and experience.

This Plan has emerged in extraordinary times. As we continue to navigate the uncertainties of a global pandemic together, we are acutely aware of the increasingly complex challenges in the day-to-day lives of our students. These challenges are portrayed in popular media, illustrated in research findings, and all too often, experienced first-hand. We are also keenly aware of students' potential for strength, resiliency, adaptability and "doing their part" for their friends and the broader community.

We are committed to strengthening the ability for students to cope with the challenge and change that is part of the university experience. At the same time, StFX does not place responsibility for wellness on the individual alone as individuals exist within contexts and organizations. Therefore, this Plan recognizes the important role that our institution has in providing a supportive context in which personal agency can be developed and exercised.

To make the Student Experience story one about cultivating a flourishing campus, we can learn from storytelling to build empathy and shift culture. To create experiences that are student-centered, we must demonstrate our commitment to integrating research, theory, practice and assessment across all of the programs, resources, and supports we provide. We must be committed to understanding the impact of our work on the lives and experiences of all students, and we must make the story we want to have told about us true in every action, communication, and relationship.

## Culture & Vision

Understanding that the needs of students are varied, dynamic, and complex, this Plan takes a *whole campus approach* to cultivating a student culture and experience that supports *all students flourishing*.

Our students are drawn to StFX because of the potential to be socially engaged and find belonging in a strong community of people who share common values and interests. StFX is known for its vibrancy, strength in community and in the relationships that bind this community together. We celebrate the rich opportunities for students to engage in and learn from a myriad of experiential learning opportunities. We will leverage these strengths. However, we also recognize that the living and learning environment has unique challenges and dynamics that can impact wholistic student success and well-being. We must address these aspects of our culture if we are to create the conditions under which **all** students can flourish.

Our vision is for all Xaverians to discover their personalized pathway through StFX's rich, wholistic learning environment; engage in courageous conversations with our diverse community on and off campus; and develop the skills to *flourish* throughout their degree and after graduation.

This work starts with strengthening mental health supports and primary care services within Student Services. We prioritize reducing wait times; streamlining service pathways for students and employees; and improved communications around resources and services, including after-hours and off campus supports. By focusing on the first-year experience we will frontload evidence-informed resources, supports and programs that foster individual and collective student well-being. Through a commitment to empathy and collaboration, our student-centered approach to wellness will apply an intersectional lens that is adaptive to the needs of individual students and the campus community.

Moreover, taking a whole campus approach is about the whole student, recognizing the powerful link between physical health, spiritual health, emotions, behaviour, social interaction, and student academic success. It is about recognizing that mental health and well-being can fluctuate, and the focus needs to be on *flourishing* at university, understanding that mental well-being is much more than the absence of illness.

We recognize the factors that affect mental wellness are complex – mental wellness is a continuum. Taking a wholistic approach that addresses discrimination, inequities, and social determinants of health are necessary to build and support culture of all students flourishing at StFX. Our approach to supporting wholistic student success and well-being is one that recognizes intersectionality – the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, ableism and classism) combine, overlap or intersect, especially in the experiences of historically-excluded individuals and groups. We must inquire, listen, and learn so that our actions are informed by our communities.

In this respect, StFX recognizes that wholistic student success and well-being cannot be totally achieved through a focus on the delivery of mental health services and supports alone. StFX is known for and prides itself on a focus on the academic and personal development of students making community and social involvement a large part of the learning experience. Thus, our campus community requires a *whole campus approach* where services, policies and environments are examined through a lens of equity, student mental health and wellness. **An integrated effort will best serve StFX students by creating a cohesive network of options that can help them flourish.** This plan will enhance StFX's current strengths in prioritizing wholistic student success by embedding equity and student well-being through the student experience.

## Values

*Belonging. Resilience. Courage. Respect. Learning. Flourishing. Community.*

## Principles

The development of guiding principles helps determine the decisions and actions involved in achieving our vision. The guiding principles of the Plan also hold us accountable, ensuring that we are taking an inclusive, intersectional approach to supporting wholistic student success and well-being.

### Mental Health and Wellness

We will create work and learning environments grounded in respect and support, guided by a shared responsibility for equitable access and the mental health well-being of our faculty, staff, and students.

### Equitable

We draw on anti-oppression, anti-racism, and trauma-informed practices, as well as inclusive and universal design, to cultivate equity, access, inclusion and sense of belonging, through an intersectional lens. Taking a wholistic approach that addresses discrimination, inequities and social determinants of health are essential to build and support a culture of well-being at StFX.

### Wholistic

We understand student well-being as a continuum of mental and physical health concerns that may affect people during their lives. We intentionally and proactively

centre student well-being by considering the whole student's experience, highlighting culturally responsive and trauma-informed pathways to care, and building individual and institutional capacity to support wholistic student success and well-being.

#### Integrated

Our work is supported by and in collaboration with our partners. With students at the centre, we work to evolve our programs, services and resources to meet their needs. Through partnerships, we support a rich, vibrant student experience.

#### Developmental

We support wholistic, strengths-based learning and development by providing opportunities for students to achieve their personal, academic and career goals, and instill passion and skills for continual exploration, learning and growth.

#### Learning Focused

We recognize student learning and development as a process that takes place during a student's entire university experience. By intentionally scaffolding student learning and engagement, we provide opportunities and supports to help student learning and development through all programs and years of study.

#### Personalized

We acknowledge diversity in student lived experience and proactively respond to evolving student-centric needs in order to provide services, supports and experiences that are personalized and adaptive. We draw on assessment, data, research and consultation to improve our planning, processes and decision-making.

The learning experiences and wellbeing of students is significantly impacted by interrelated physical, cultural, spiritual, policies, socio-economic, and organizational contextual factors (Silverman, Underhill and Keeling, 2008). StFX is committed to providing space for all students to develop skills and promote learning. To do that well, we must adopt a Plan that not only responds to individual concerns but also makes wholistic student success and well-being a priority in all that we do.

We heard from members of our university community that student wellbeing must be a priority – in our classrooms, across our campus, in our policies and through our actions. We need a coordinated, collaborative approach across the university that focuses on our strengths and gives us the opportunity to be leaders and champions for supporting *all students flourishing*. This Plan amplifies the significant work that has been done to date, the commitments of our faculty and staff to the student experience, and their efforts to leverage our strengths and elevate wholistic student success and wellness on our campus – we are all in this together.

There is no one-size-fits all model for supporting wholistic student success and well-being – everyone’s experience is unique. That is why we view the whole university as the domain to be addressed. Our approach is about:

- Building and supporting an environment at StFX conducive to all students flourishing that is grounded in the values of equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility.
- Recognizing and responding to the social determinants of health; taking a wholistic approach that addresses inequities to build and support a culture of student wellness.
- Promoting agency through wholistic student engagement, understanding that learning can be intentionally programmed through all of the places where students engage at StFX.
- Harnessing a developmental and proactive approach, initiating early and frequent connections with students to support transition and persistence through to graduation.

### Continuum of Care Model

At StFX, we understand that mental well-being exists on a continuum that recognizes the full spectrum of all mental and physical health concerns that may affect people during their lives. An individual without a diagnosed mental illness can still experience fluctuations in their mental health (Keyes, 2007). Likewise, people living with mental illnesses can still have good mental health, if the right environmental conditions and supports are in place.



Our preferred continuum model moves from healthy adaptive coping (green) to mild and self-limiting distress or functional impairment (yellow) to more severe, persistent injury or impairment (orange) and clinical illnesses and disorders that require more concentrated medical care (red). The arrow along the four colour blocks indicates health is a continuum and the state of one's health can move back and forth. Mental wellness is not static. Many people have physical and mental health concerns that – when identified and treated early – can be temporary and reversible. Even if injured or ill, it is possible to return to healthy and achieve a high level of functioning if the right supports and environment surrounds them.

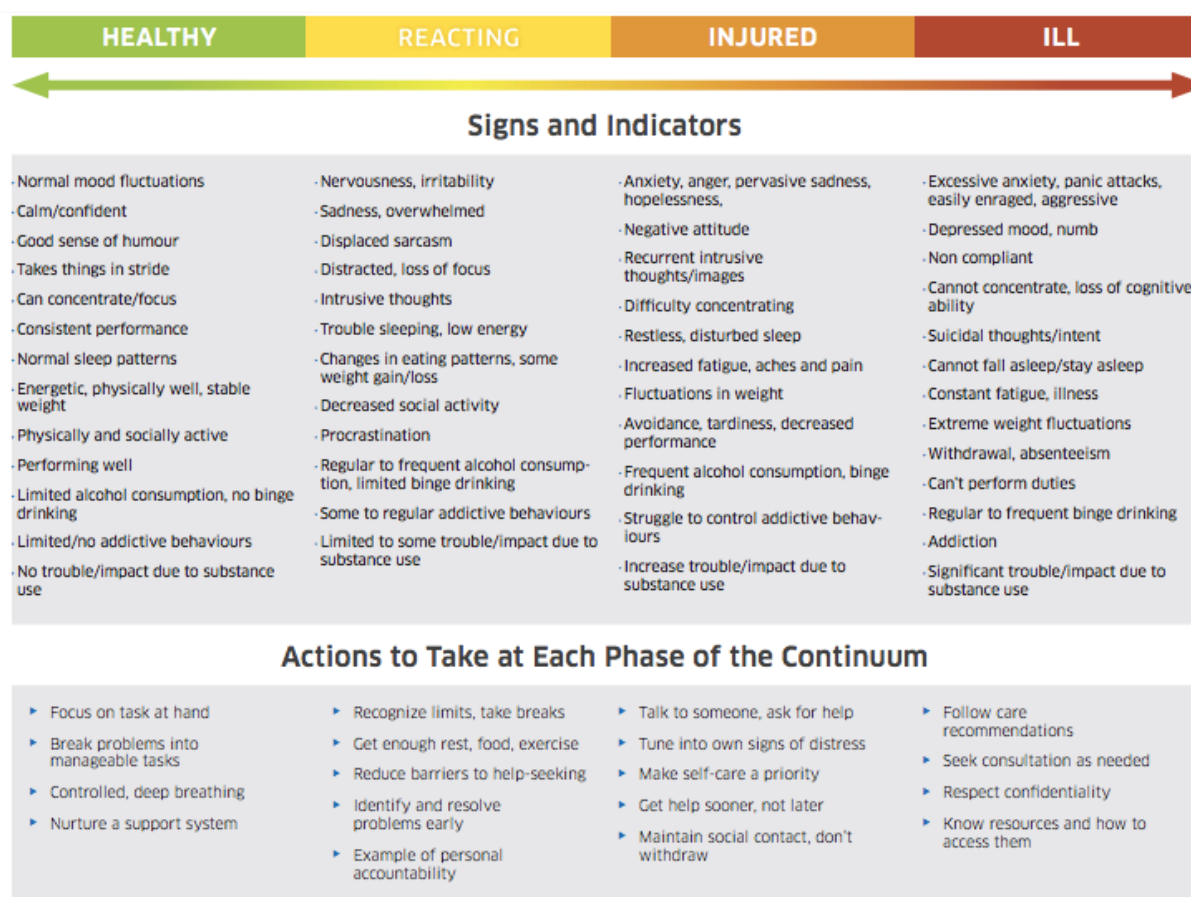


Figure 1: Mental Health Continuum (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2017)

Given the breadth of factors that impact mental wellness, concerns about student mental health and well-being cannot be effectively addressed through a focus on the delivery of mental health services and programs alone. This Plan takes a much broader approach that requires participation at individual, departmental and institutional levels, as well as the need to look beyond the university to community partners to connect students with appropriate supports and services.

Based in this evidence-informed framework, StFX has adopted a **Continuum of Care model** which is a flexible and comprehensive system for delivering programs, resources and services for supporting wholistic student mental health and well-being. This model helps to ensure that students have access to the care and resources they want and need, regardless of where they find themselves on the mental health continuum.

The components of the model highlight a student-centric approach, with a focus on prevention and the reduction of stigma. Students can engage with any part of the Continuum of Care, or multiple parts of the continuum at the same time. Intensity can be increased or decreased depending on the level of distress, need and readiness to engage in the process. Programs can also be selected and arranged based on need. There is no starting point of finish line – only resources and supports that deliver the right care at the right time. Together, the model supports an integrated system with the ability to effectively build and support mental health and well-being across the continuum of care.

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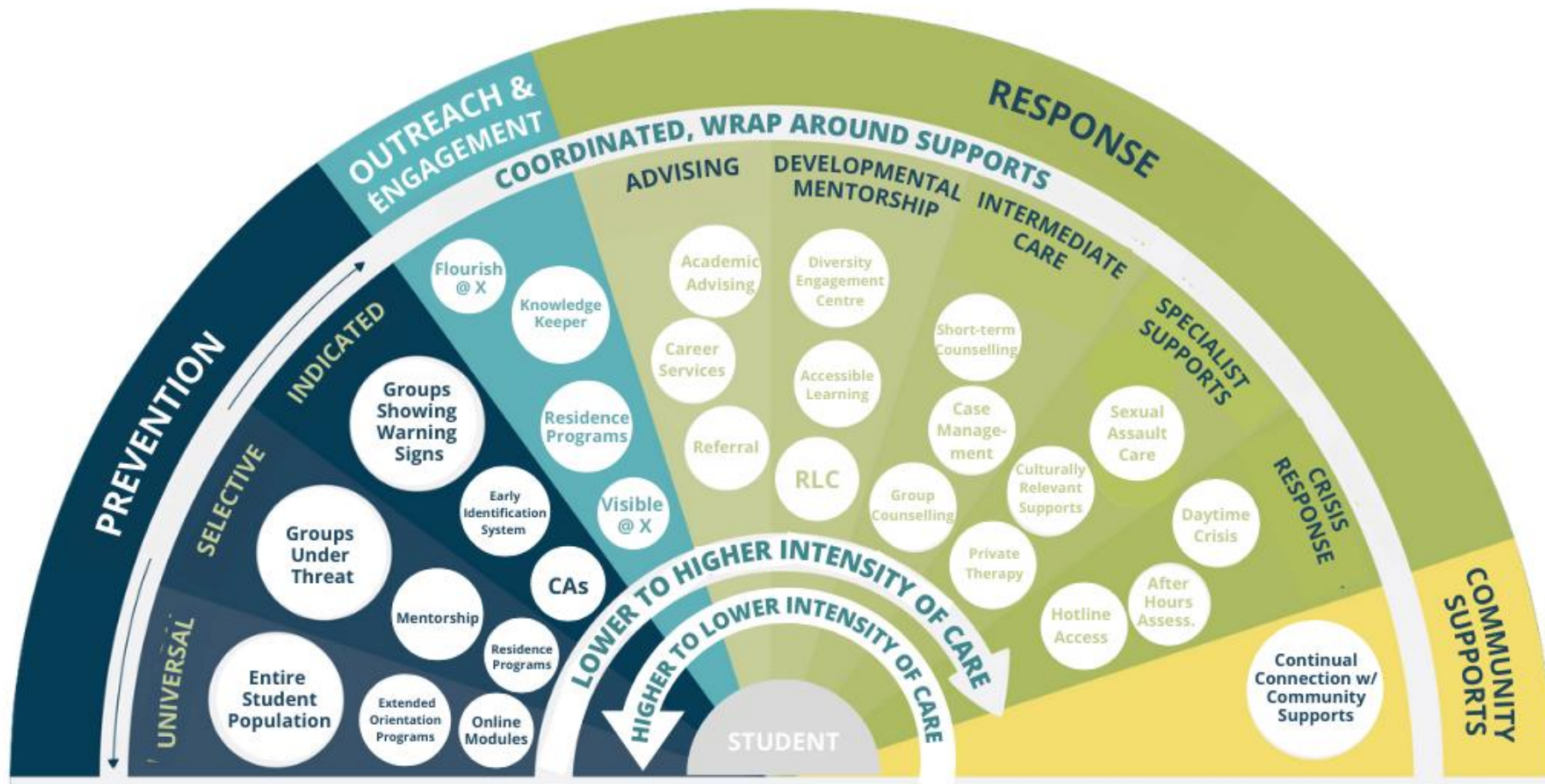


Figure 2: StFX Continuum of Care Model

## Priority Areas

StFX is a unique environment and we are proud of what differentiates us from other post-secondary institutions. We believe in and embrace our commitment to **build a university as it is meant to be**. We also recognize that the living and learning environment at StFX has unique challenges and dynamics that can impact student wholistic student success and well-being.

We aspire to create the conditions for all students to feel supported and be well and to be guided to opportunities to explore and develop their strengths and talents. We have examined and researched many approaches and strategies to inform our work. We heard from students, staff and faculty that we need to prioritize mental health literacy, develop students' capacity to manage stress and develop resiliency skills, ensure ongoing communication of available resources and services, review policies and practices from an anti-racism and trauma-informed lens, and ensure that proactive support for wholistic student success and well-being is integrated into all facets of our university culture and experience.

Understanding that the needs of students are varied, dynamic and complex, this Plan takes a whole campus approach to all students flourishing. To achieve this vision we will build understanding, capacity and connection across the StFX community and with the external community.

Build Understanding	Build Capacity	Build Connection
We will educate students, faculty and staff about mental health issues and barriers experienced by students, and in particular students from historically-exclude groups to reduce stigma and create the motivation to engage in skill development and support change. We will ensure that StFX has an equitable and respectful culture that reflects the values of our institution, and the wellness needs of our communities.	We will create an environment where our focus on wholistic student success and well-being is apparent in our priorities, policies, practices and environment. We will strengthen our programs and services to support students in their well-being. We will create opportunities for skill development and having conversations about well-being. In doing so, we will create the conditions for those experiencing difficulty to seek and gain support before harm occurs.	By leveraging internal and external partnerships – and ensuring ongoing communication and engagement – we will seek opportunities to create meaningful connections and improve access and opportunity for students while at university and in their local communities.

## Learning Goals

With students at the centre of our work, we understand that learning can be intentionally programmed across all of the places where students engage at StFX. By defining shared learning goals and scaffolding intentional learning experiences across the student lifecycle, we will support all students in achieving their current and lifelong academic, personal and career goals, which depending on the focus, includes undergraduate and graduate students; part-time and full-time students; mature students; international and domestic students.

Research identifies five key factors post-secondary administrators and educators can foster by maximizing the academic, interpersonal and intrapersonal development of students. These five factors are positive perspective (optimism about the future), academic determination (investment of effort to reach educational goals), engaged learning (engagement in the process of learning), social connectedness (healthy connection to others) and diverse citizenship (commitment to making a difference in the world (Schreiner, Louis and Nelson, 2020).

By taking a whole campus approach, StFX has the opportunity to intentionally support wholistic student success and well-being across all five factors. We commit to help students develop in these ways whether it be through involvement in on campus employment, as it is in volunteering for student government, or attending a program in residence. This is part of supporting the development of a *whole campus approach to all students flourishing* because it enables us to determine whether our programs, supports and services are supporting *wholistic* student success and well-being. Throughout our collective work, we seek to cultivate Xaverians who are distinguished by the following characteristics\*: *\*Student Services will continue to evolve and define these goals through discussion as we cocreate the Academic and University-wide Strategic Plans and will align with the learning goals that are articulated as outcomes of those plans.*

Learning Goal	Characteristics
Critical Thinkers	<i>Students who are curious, engaged and reflective.</i>
Future-Focused Planners	<i>Students who are goal-oriented, motivated and self-directed.</i>
Adaptable Problem-Solvers	<i>Students who are hopeful, self-determined, resourceful &amp; creative.</i>
Community-Minded	<i>Students who are relational, empathetic, collaborative &amp; self-aware.</i>
Engaged Citizens	<i>Students who are equitable, globally aware and socially responsible.</i>
Innovative Leaders	<i>Students who exhibit integrity, judgement &amp; intercultural competency.</i>

### 3 Strategic Initiatives

Our goal is to cultivate a whole campus approach to all students flourishing. We understand that to achieve this goal, we need to broaden and coordinate efforts across the university. The following three strategic initiatives identify the ways that we will work together to cultivate a flourishing campus, where we intentionally create living and learning environments that inspire, engage and enrich the whole student as they engage in their educational journey. The three initiatives are:

- 1) Optimize the first-year student experience
- 2) Strengthen mental health and wellness supports and services
- 3) Foster early and on-going engagement with, and recognition of, experiential learning

Achieving these initiatives will help to ensure that StFX is on track to deliver upon the priorities outlined in the Student Experience and Opportunity Plan. These initiatives will be supported by the following five priority actions:

1. Develop an Integrated Mentorship Model: Develop an integrated, proactive mentorship program that will support student transition by cultivating meaningful connections and enabling all students to discover their personalized pathways to success.
2. Create an Extended Student Orientation and Transition Program: Create an Extended Orientation and Transitions Program by frontloading resources, supports and programs in first year and intentionally scaffolding student learning and engagement as part of an immersive, learning-focused experience through all years of study.
3. Formalize Collaborative, Wrap Around Supports: Advance a wholistic approach to student mental health and well-being, that facilitates access to both proactive and responsive services and fosters an integrated philosophy of evident care to support wholistic student success and well-being.
4. Create Opportunities for All Students to Participate in Meaningful Experiential and Co-Curricular Learning: Facilitate guided learning opportunities for all students that proactively advance common learning goals across living and learning environments. Cultivate agency by engaging students in the process of discovering their strengths and personalized pathways to wholistic success and well-being.
5. Radically Welcome and Engage Students from Historically Excluded Groups: Radically welcome students by advancing equitable access to culturally relevant, trauma-informed programs, resources and services for students from historically excluded and equity-deserving populations. Foster belonging by creating opportunities for community and connection across diverse and intersectional identities.

### 3.1 Optimize the First-Year Experience

#### Goals

- Frontload resources, supports and programs in first year and intentionally scaffolding student learning and engagement as part of an immersive first-year learning experience.
- Develop an integrated developmental mentorship model and training program to cultivate meaningful connections and enable all students to discover their strengths and personalized pathways to success.
- Strengthen a student culture of health, safety and wellness by cultivating personal and bystander awareness, knowledge and skills.
- Radically welcome and engage students from historically-excluded populations by creating opportunities for students to cultivate a sense of belonging. This includes Indigenous, Black, minoritized, 2SLGBTQIA+, international students, first-generation students, and students with disabilities.

#### Priority Initiatives:

- Create a New Student Experience Framework that maps intentional co-curricular student engagement and learning opportunities throughout the entire first-year experience. This framework will be developed in partnership with Academics and Student Services, working together to support academic transition and wholistic student success.

##### ***Build Understanding***

- Collaborate with the Students' Union, academic units and other campus and community partners to develop and deliver an evidence-informed Orientation Week Program, based in student flourishing. Identify and remove barriers to participation in Orientation Week.

##### ***Build Understanding***

- Develop high-quality co-curricular learning experiences and transitions programming for off-campus, mature, distance learning, transfer students and student athletes that enrich their student experience.

##### ***Build Understanding***



- Coordinate a Winter transitions program to welcome new students arriving in January, and re-orient all first-year students to programs, services and supports provided by StFX.

***Build Understanding***

- Establish an ongoing partnership between StFX Student Services, Graduate Studies and Continuing and Distance Education to enhance understanding of the specific needs of graduate and distance learning students and deepen an understanding of their transitional needs.

***Build Understanding***

- Develop online videos/modules for parents and supporters to be empowered to support their student in their transition to university. These same tools may be used by faculty, staff and students to understand the supports available and how to access them.

***Build Understanding***

- Provide proactive programming and experiential initiatives that support harm reduction approaches to substance use and provide healthy alternatives to socializing.

***Build Understanding***

- Leverage the “Being Xaverian” campaign as an opportunity co-create and share Xaverian community values and share stories of diverse student experiences at StFX.

***Build Understanding***

- Collaborate with Academics to establish a transition year program to support student success (both pre-entrance and during first year), including formal (e.g., camps and courses) and informal supports (e.g., mentorship). Areas of focus will include the development of a Summer Bridge Program focused on academic orientation and community connection for all students, with tailored programs and engagement opportunities for historically-excluded students.

***Build Capacity***

- Build capacity for the Residence Life Leadership Team, Diversity Engagement Centre, and peer leaders to frontload developmental mentorship and coaching in support of first-year transition and student success through intentional leadership development, coaching, and training opportunities.

***Build Capacity***



- Develop a mentor training and development program to increase mentor skills development, strengths-based coaching, equity and inclusion and promote positive and enriching mentor-mentee relationships.

***Build Capacity***

- Create group mentoring networks for students from historically-excluded groups to come together in community, share experiences, explore, and access academic, personal and career opportunities and pathways. This includes Indigenous, Black, minoritized, 2SLGBTQIA+ students, international students, first-generation students and students with disabilities.

***Build Connection***

- Promote broad mentorship networks with StFX faculty, alumni and Career Services to ensure all StFX students have opportunities to seek career mentors from a diverse network.

***Build Connection***

- Expand our current professional mentorship networks with increased opportunities for students to gain career experiences both at StFX and within Nova Scotia.

***Build Connection***

- Create an online web platform for StFX students (undergraduate, graduate, full-time or part-time) to share their stories, guided by a content strategy based in student flourishing.

***Build Connection***

### 3.2 Strengthen Mental Health and Well-being Supports and Services

#### Goals:

- Increase mental health by building resilience and creating opportunities for skill development and the awareness of resources to mental wellness. We will foster an open and accepting environment that reduces stigma and celebrates individual and collective well-being.
- Build capacity to recognize concerns and intervene early by educating our students, faculty and staff in recognizing early warning signs of distress. Streamline and simplify pathways to care. In doing so, we will create the conditions for those experiencing difficulty to seek and gain support before harm occurs.
- Create a supportive environment where our focus on wholistic student mental health and wellness is apparent in our priorities, policies and practices. Advance equitable access to culturally relevant, trauma-informed programs, resources and services to support students from historically-excluded groups in their well-being.

#### Priority Initiatives:

- Strengthen awareness around the full range of student resources available at StFX and streamline access to those resources. Ensure students have access to information about Mental Health and Addiction Services, critical care, and resources in our local community.

##### ***Build Understanding***

- Develop tools and resources to support administrative leaders, faculty, staff, and students in identifying signs and symptoms of distress or at-risk behaviours, and enable efficient and timely access to appropriate resources.

##### ***Build Understanding***

- Frontload transitional supports for all students that normalize help seeking behaviours and increase awareness about the resources available. Incorporate mental health and wellness literacy, development of resiliency and stress management skills, and awareness of campus supports and services within Orientation and Extended Orientation programming; build into graduate student orientations, varsity sport teams' training, etc.

##### ***Build Understanding***

- Create and maintain student-facing wellness programming designed to capture, learn and understand diverse student experiences. Use a variety of assessment strategies to develop and adapt programs, services and resources to meet the needs of both specific and broad intersectional student identities, including Indigenous, Black, minoritized, 2SLGBTQIA+, international students, graduate students, mature students, and students with disabilities.

***Build Understanding***

- Create evidence informed frameworks that support our Residence Education programming, Alcohol and Substance Use Strategy and Mental Health & Wellness initiatives, ensuring that our programs are sensitive to diverse student experiences.

***Build Capacity***

- Make changes to how mental health services and supports are structured to match how students are accessing information and services. We prioritize reducing wait times; streamlining service pathways and follow-up for students, faculty and staff; and improved communications around resources and services.

***Build Capacity***

- Streamline access to culturally relevant, trauma-informed supports and services available to students who have experienced acts of racism, harassment and/or discrimination. This will include reviewing policies, processes and procedures within StFX that may unintentionally discriminate, and revise policies to better enable equity, diversity and accessibility. New policies and procedures will include but will not be limited to: Return to Campus Following Hospitalization procedures, Accommodations Policy for Episodic and Non-Permanent Injury or Illness, and Employment Equity Policy.

***Build Capacity***

- Continue to expand and diversify culturally-relevant resources, services and supports for students from historically-excluded groups, including Indigenous, Black and international students. Continue to strengthen relationships with Mi'kmaq, African Nova Scotian communities and dedicated service providers to improve access to culturally-relevant resources for our students.

***Build Capacity***

- Expand support model for students with disabilities (including temporary or episodic) to incorporate a *whole student approach* through mentoring, case management, outreach and engagement.

### ***Build Capacity***

- Implement a case management model to support students of concern. This may include students with mental illnesses or students who may be experiencing mental distress, who are in academic difficulty or may be heading toward or experiencing a crisis. Case Management supports students who have complex or multifaceted situations requiring a coordinated response.

### ***Build Capacity***

- Partner with faculty experts on campus to build our knowledge and innovate our programming based on evidence-informed practices and cutting-edge research. We will start by focusing our partnerships on three areas: Student Mental Health; Alcohol and Substance Use; and Residence Education.

### ***Build Connection***

- Identify and streamline pathways to care to support early identification, self-care, and help-seeking by putting students in contact with the appropriate resources at the appropriate time.

### ***Build Connection***

- Convene regular Students of Concern Committee meetings to formalize a coordinated, wrap around support model between faculty, academic units, and student services with systems and policies to facilitate communication and foster integrated and student-centric supports.

### ***Build Connection***

- Expand collaborative partnerships between StFX and health care agencies and community resources to systematize a coordinated approach to supporting wholistic student success and well-being.

### ***Build Connection***

### 3.3 Foster early and on-going engagement with, and recognition of, Experiential and Co-Curricular Learning

#### Goals:

- Facilitate guided learning opportunities for all students that proactively advance common learning goals across living and learning environments and years of study.
- Cultivate agency by engaging students in the process of discovering their strengths and personalized pathways to success. Provide students with learning that expands their adaptability for the future of work, skills that empower them to define their unique pathway for individual success and values that demonstrate social responsibility.
- Strengthen collaboration by leveraging internal and external partnerships – and ensuring ongoing communication and engagement – to create meaningful connections and increase access to the diversity of experiential and co-curricular learning opportunities available at StFX and in their local communities.

#### Priority Initiatives:

- Develop an integrated Experiential and Co-Curricular Learning framework to scaffold intentional student learning and engagement opportunities through all programs and years of study.

##### ***Build Understanding***

- Build clear structures, pathways and supports to more easily enable all students to engage through existing mechanisms such as Nova Scotia Works Career Connections, Service Learning, McKenna Leadership Programs, Student/Career Services and Programming, etc.

##### ***Build Capacity***

- Develop a digital Experiential Learning Catalogue/Co-Curricular Record (CCR) as a tool to help students thoughtfully select co-curricular engagement opportunities, integrate their campus experiences, communicate the development of skills, and reflect on their development in the areas of meaning and purpose.

##### ***Build Connection***

- Cultivate signature spaces and events on campus that engage alumni, the Antigonish community, students, faculty and staff in spirited and sanctioned events that inspire a

sense of connection (ex. Extended Orientation, Homecoming, approaches for higher risk times and substance use). Continue to build upon the Being Xaverian Good Neighbours Strategy to foster stronger town-gown relations.

***Build Connection***

- Strengthen off-campus student housing options, with a particular focus on facilitating off-campus accommodations for international students, in partnership with the Landlord's Association and Town of Antigonish. This could include support for initiatives such as education about tenant rights and responsibilities, promotion of off-campus housing options, income tax support, and At Home in Antigonish for the Holidays program.

***Build Capacity***

- Embed equity, anti-racism and accessibility in the development and execution of special student-facing events, and programming (Extended Orientation Programming, Homecoming, etc.) to be representative of diverse lived experiences and identities present in our university community.

***Build Understanding***

- Develop targeted co-curricular programming and engagement opportunities for students with disabilities, with a focus on university transition, career transition and self-determination.

***Build Capacity***

- Scaffold comprehensive training for students in leadership roles, varsity sport, learning abroad/exchange, etc. that they commit to, and enact, in their roles in our community. Content will be tailored for each role, with a consistent focus on teaching anti-racism and decolonization, anti-discrimination, cultural competency/safety, equity, gender-based and sexual violence, mental health literacy/anti-stigma, resiliency and coping skills, and accessibility.

***Build Capacity***

- Provide and secure financial support and subject-matter expertise to establish meaningful career development programming, with a focus on students from historically-excluded groups.

***Build Capacity***

- Maintain the Student Accessibility Advisory Committee to provide leadership opportunities for students with disabilities and ensure that their voices and lived experiences are reflected in program and service design, development and delivery.

***Build Connection***

- Commit to equitable and inclusive recruitment, hiring, onboarding, retention and offboarding practices that increase the diversity among our student staff complements, in particular representation from Indigenous, Black, minoritized communities and students with disabilities.

***Build Capacity***

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Understanding and evaluating impact is most successful when using many ways of knowing. For this reason, StFX has made the intentional decision to take a mixed methods approach to how we measure, monitor and analyze the impact of our programs and strategic initiatives.

### 4.1 Overview of Continuous Improvement and Assessment Plan

By understanding that learning is: (1) a continuous process and (2) intentionally designed to occur through our immersive learning environment, we will capture data at critical times during the student lifecycle at StFX. This will allow us to create agile and responsive programming that meets the needs of students and allow us to better align the transferrable skills intentionally embedded across our programs, supports and services.

We have designed a Continuous Improvement Plan, that utilizes an assessment cycle and external program evaluation cycle that work on 3 (assessment) and 6 (external program evaluation) year time frames. The data gathered through both our assessment and external evaluation cycles will allow us to understand how our programs, resources and supports are leading students to achieve the learning outcomes we have mapped to all of our programming. We will also be able to monitor and evaluate what types of transferrable skills students are gaining and how these are correlated to their achievement of our defined learning outcomes.

#### Three-Year Assessment Cycle

The development of a three-year assessment cycle to inform the continuous assessment of all programs, resources and supports. By 2027, we will have assessed our signature programs and have continuous data about their effectiveness and impact on StFX students.

#### Six-Year External Evaluation Cycle

The implementation of a six-year external review cycle for all departments in Student Services using national/international standards to advance and innovate departmental operations. These developmental reviews will follow international standards, established by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) and the National Standard for Mental Health and Well-being for Post-Secondary Students. These standards will allow us to evaluate our departments using externally validated measures, and external review committees. These evaluations will be both internally and externally driven, increasing the robust data that we will acquire. The results of these evaluations will be used to innovate our programming and adjust when necessary, allow us to remain agile and proactive.



## Three-Year Benchmarking Cycle

The identification and participation in key national/international benchmarking studies on a regular reporting cycle will allow us to track our relative process against peer institutions, in key areas including campus climate, sexual violence, health and wellness, student engagement and student success and well-being.

The **Canadian Campus Wellness Survey (CCWS)** is a Canadian Assessment Tool to help colleges and universities collect the data they need to support student health and well-being. CCWS helps post-secondary institutions better assess student health and well-being on campuses, identify priorities for intervention, and increase capacity to link research with policy and practice.

**National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)** provides educators with an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending university. The survey asks students to report how much time and effort they give to empirically confirmed practices in undergraduate education. StFX participates in NSSE every three years, with the most recent data from 2020

**Canadian Post-Secondary Alcohol and Drug Survey (CPADS)** contributes to Health Canada's substance use surveillance strategy, which provides the Government of Canada with vital information on the use of drugs and other substances by Canadians. Surveys like the CPADS provide governments and non-governmental organizations, including StFX, with valuable information that can inform policies and programs that support students' health and wellbeing.

The **EAB Campus Climate Survey** assesses students' perceptions of and experiences with diversity and inclusion and campus sexual violence. This is an essential benchmarking survey which will allow our portfolio to better understand if our collective efforts to produce programs and supports to utilize an intersectional lens have worked to shift StFX's student experience to be one shaped by equity and diversity.

## 4.2 Overview of Benchmarking

Following best practices in the field of Student Affairs, we will utilize benchmarking to understand how our programs, resources and supports are shaping the dynamics of students at StFX. These studies will allow us to understand how our programs are impacting the institution over time, and at the scale of the institution. Benchmarking studies are most powerful when

paired with more nuanced evaluation processes such as Continuous Improvement and Assessment because we can drill down into specific sub-populations and programs to understand if the impacts that we are seeing at the institutional level are correlated with programmatic level data. Benchmarking studies also allow us to compare StFX to similar institutions, both nationally and provincially.

#### 4.3 Overview of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Within the StFX Student Services portfolio, we will set and use KPIs at the department level as a measurement tool to ensure that:

- 1) The work of each department is connected to the strategic goals of the StFX Student Experience and Opportunity Plan
- 2) There is connection between the operations of each unit (within each department) to the strategic goals of the StFX Student Experience and Opportunity Plan
- 3) The goals and vision of the departments are tracked and most importantly achieved.

Cumulatively, the KPIs are one tool that allow us to understand and measure the collective success of our efforts. We will use the following KPIs in order to understand the impacts we are making through our strategic initiatives:

Strategic Initiative	Sample KPIs
First Year Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of faculty, staff, students who engage in EDI-A programming each year. Number of events held, and attendance at each event.</li> <li>• Number of students who have taken disclosure training, Positive Space Training, Sexual Violence Policy Training, Mental Health Literacy and Resilience Training etc.</li> <li>• Number of students completed intake assessment and development plan</li> </ul>
Mental Health and Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of annual visits to Health &amp; Counselling</li> <li>• Number of unique vs. recurring patients</li> <li>• Wait time from triage to first appointment</li> <li>• Number of times a student is referred by other units/departments</li> <li>• Number of visits for physical health vs. mental health concerns</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Percentage of students who access physical care/mental health care more than 6x/year</li> </ul>
Experiential and Co-Curricular Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of courses and programs with an EL component</li> <li>Number of co-curricular EL experiences offered</li> <li>Percentage of students who graduate with one or more WIL experiences</li> <li>Number of students who participate in community-based volunteer opportunities.</li> <li>Number of students using multiple EL services</li> <li>Number of targeted employment opportunities for historically-excluded students</li> <li>Total number of dollars available to hire students from historically-excluded groups for on-campus jobs.</li> <li>Number of students from historically-excluded groups employed on campus.</li> </ul>

## References

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