SENATE QUALITY OF LIFE FORUM

STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND OPPORTUNITY PLAN

NOVEMBER 2021

StFX's Brand:
Building A University As It's Meant To Be

## and then to ask...meant to be for whom?

What We Have Heard

- Embed equity, diversity, inclusion, anti-racism, Truth and Reconciliation, and accessibility throughout our culture, environment, policies, programs, practices and services,

- Foster a positive campus culture with healthy community connections built on empathy, civility, mutual respect and authentic relationships,

- Cultivate a flourishing campus environment that supports wholistic student mental health and well-being,

- Extend summer transition, orientation, and co-curricular programming with activities and events that promote student engagement and success,

- Offer every student guided opportunities to engage in community service, internships and other forms of experiential learning,

- Develop and facilitate environments where domestic and international students can learn and connect across experiences and cultures,

- Empower our campus community by enhancing pathways and communications around student engagement opportunities, resources and services.

What the Research Tells Us
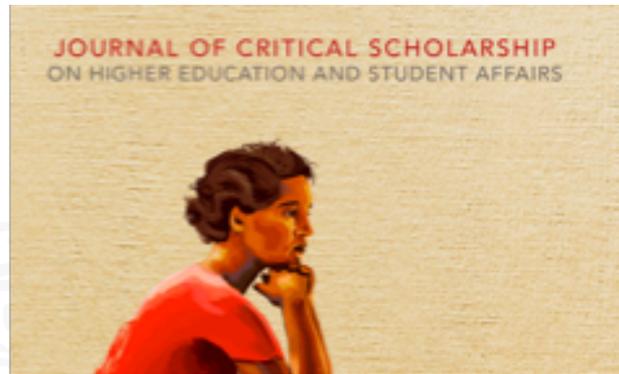
Evidence-Informed Research & Practice

Our work is grounded in contemporary and well-established frameworks of post-secondary student learning and development. Our theory and practice model allows us to be informed by best practices in the field.

All programs, resources and supports provided by StFX Student Services will be intentionally-designed and grounded in the following evidence-informed frameworks to support student success and well-being:

- Cultivate a Flourishing Campus
- Support Mental Health as a Continuum
- Recognize and Respond to Social Determinants of Health
- Promote Agency through Wholistic Student Engagement
- Harness a Developmental and Proactive Approach

FIVE GUIDING IDEAS

INTEGRATING RESEARCH & PRACTICE
(FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION)

Cultivating a Flourishing Student (and, student success)

Flourishing students are engaged in the learning process, connect in healthy ways with other people, invest effort in achieving their goals with competence and confidence, are optimistic about their future, and committed to making a positive impact on their community and those around them.

Schreiner, L. A., Louis, M. C., & Nelson, D. D. (2012). *Thriving in Transitions: A Research-Based Approach to College Student Success*. National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. University of South Carolina, 1728 College Street, Columbia, SC 29208.

<u>ALL</u> Students Flourishing

- StFX must design initiatives to meet the unique needs of diverse communities.

- StFX will be guided by the principle that **<u>ALL</u>** students can confidently bring their authentic selves and flourish.

- StFX celebrates that post-secondary education is enriched by equity, diversity and inclusion: **equitable inclusion is critical to excellence and flourishing for ALL students** (Scarborough Charter, 2021).

- StFX will inquire, listen, learn and act, informed by and with our communities.

1. Cultivate a Flourishing Campus

A Strengths-based Approach to Wellbeing

A flourishing framework highlights the contexts and environment that optimize emotional, psychological and social well-being (Keyes and Haidt, 2010). It identifies five key factors educators can foster to maximize student success and wellbeing: **connectedness, capability, purpose, culture and resourcefulness**.
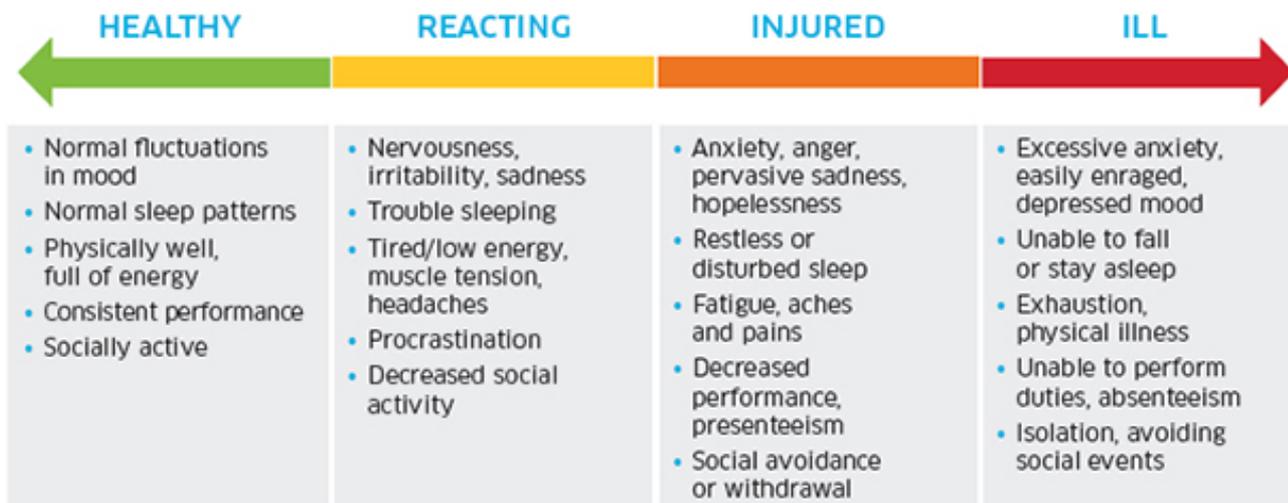
This framework is useful because it:

- focuses on student transition as a process that takes place over time,

- is grounded in the concept of wholistic student development, and

- it recognizes and focuses on the development of student strengths.

2. Support Mental Health as a Continuum

At StFX, we understand that mental wellbeing exists on a spectrum, or continuum, and that the state of one's health can move back and forth. This means we need to integrate effective **upstream, midstream and downstream** approaches to support wholistic student success and well-being. We recognize that an individual can have a diagnosis of mental illness but can flourish if the proper environmental conditions and supports are in place.

HEALTHY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
• Normal fluctuations in mood • Normal sleep patterns • Physically well, full of energy • Consistent performance • Socially active	• Nervousness, irritability, sadness • Trouble sleeping • Tired/low energy, muscle tension, headaches • Procrastination • Decreased social activity	• Anxiety, anger, pervasive sadness, hopelessness • Restless or disturbed sleep • Fatigue, aches and pains • Decreased performance, presenteeism • Social avoidance or withdrawal	• Excessive anxiety, easily enraged, depressed mood • Unable to fall or stay asleep • Exhaustion, physical illness • Unable to perform duties, absenteeism • Isolation, avoiding social events

Source: Mental Health Commission of Canada (2014)

3. Recognize and Respond to Social Determinants of Health

Applying an Equity Approach to Student Well-being

- Our approach 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.

- Our approach must be aligned with our values to ensure that our programs, services, policies and processes are **culturally relevant** to all members of our university community.

- Further, we recognize that at StFX, our diversity also includes students with specific needs such as mature, distance, student athletes, and off-campus learners.

- "One size no longer fits all."

4. Promote Agency through Wholistic Student Engagement

- Our work recognizes the relationship between academic success and quality of life outside of the classroom, across all dimensions of wellness.

- Learning can be intentionally programmed across all of the places where students engage at StFX. This includes cultivating spaces of belonging, with the objective of creating and sustaining equitable student flourishing.

- Through intentional engagement opportunities, StFX Student Services seeks to create **personalized** pathways to student success and well-being and provide students with the tools to be engaged, positive citizens.

- Intentionally planned learning must be accompanied by articulated learning goals. The learning goals that Student Services considers critical to foster **wholistic student success** will align with the goals of a StFX education.

- "Our students develop into analytical, creative and critical thinkers – global citizens who adapt and engage in an ever-changing world with integrity and curiosity" (StFX Academic Plan).

5. Harness a Developmental and Proactive Approach

Moving towards an integrated, multi-year framework for student transition and development

- By initiating **early and frequent connections** with students, StFX can support student transition and persistence, especially among students from historically-excluded groups.

- StFX recognizes that student development needs change over the four years of the undergraduate experience

- The importance of **facilitated and guided transitions** – entering the university and through to graduation – can build student capacity to flourish and succeed.

- The student lifecycle must be considered as the <u>transitioning in</u> and <u>transitioning through</u> and <u>transitioning out</u> stages, highlighting the importance of focusing on the first-year experience and intentionally scaffolding student learning through all years of study.
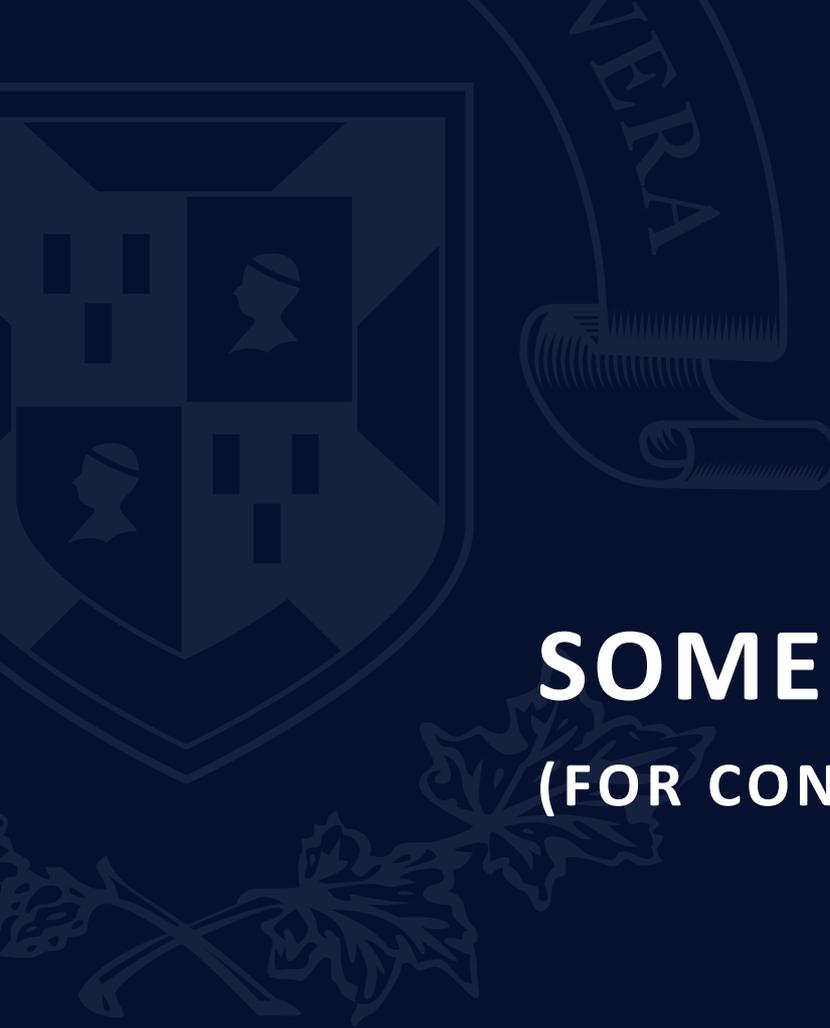
SOME APPROACHES

(FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION)

Strategic Principles

In development...

We must make the story we want to have told about the StFX student experience true in every action, communication, and relationship.

The following principles will guide the development and implementation of our programs, supports and services. The principles are informed by the conceptual foundation for our work and consultation with faculty, staff and students.

- Equitable

- Proactive

- Wholistic

- Integrated

- Developmental

- Personalized

Strategic Initiatives

We can advance a Whole Campus Approach to student flourishing by **building understanding, capacity and connection** across the StFX community.

We will leverage the values of equity, accessibility and student flourishing to guide our work. We will embrace our strengths and develop systems and processes to support wholistic student success and well-being with a focus on the needs of historically-excluded students.

Build Understanding

Build Connection
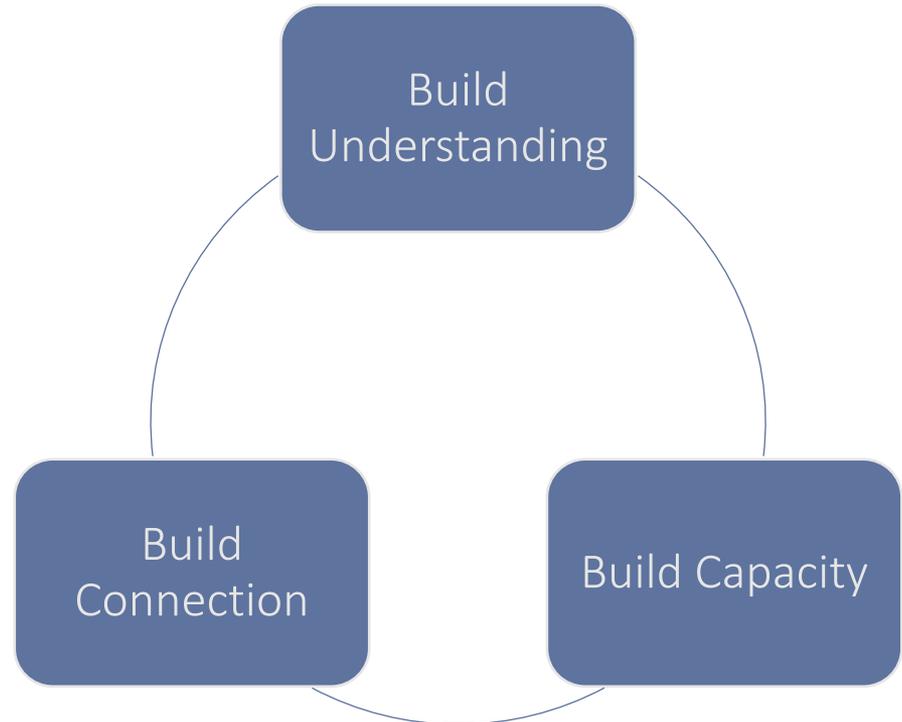
Build Capacity

Build Understanding

Embed an equitable wellness focus in policies, processes, practices, systems, structures; foster a culture of belonging through engagement and communication.

Build Capacity

Enhance the knowledge, skills and resources to build individual agency and the capacity to support others.

Build Connection

Foster relationships with campus and community partners to improve awareness and access to appropriate resources, supports and programs for students; create opportunities for meaningful collaboration and connections within our university community.

STRATEGIC FOUNDATION

A Whole Campus Approach

Cultivate a Flourishing Campus	Recognize & Respond to Social Determinants of Health	Support Mental Health as a Continuum	Promote Agency through Wholistic Student Engagement	Harness a Developmental and Proactive Approach

STRATEGIC VISION & PRINCIPLES

Strategic Vision

Equitable	Proactive	Wholistic	Integrated	Developmental	Personalized

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Build Understanding	Build Capacity	Build Connection

Discussion

- What actions, strategies and initiatives should StFX prioritize to **build understanding**, **capacity** and **connection** across three priority areas in order to enhance the student culture and experience:
  - Cultivate a Flourishing Campus
  - Promote Agency through Wholistic Student Engagement
  - Harness a Developmental and Proactive Approach

- Are there any gaps in our approach that we should consider before moving forward with the planning process? Do you have any additional feedback that you would like to contribute?

Next Steps

- Continue departmental consultations and research into evidence-based approaches to articulate collective learning goals for students and approaches to align with the learning outcomes identified in the StFX Academic Plan.

- Develop an Implementation Matrix, to identify priority actions and determine resource allocation.

- Build stronger relationships and connections with supportive colleagues across the university to champion this approach and collective work across the institution.

Endnote

[1] Wholistic is spelled throughout this document with "*wh*" to affirm it is derived from the concept of wholeness. This is a decolonial concept derived from the research of Kathleen Absolon.

See:

Absolon, K. (2019). Decolonizing Education and Educators' Decolonizing. **Intersectionalities: A Global Journal Of Social Work Analysis, Research, Polity, And Practice, 7**(1), 9–28.

Absolon, K. (2016). Wholistic and ethical: Social inclusion with Indigenous peoples. **Social Inclusion, 4**(1), 1–13.

Sources

Active Minds. (2020). *Student Mental Health Survey.* Retrieved from https://www.activeminds.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Student-Mental-Health-Data-Sheet-Fall-2020-1.pdf

Statistics Canada. (2020). *Impacts on Mental Health.* Retrieved

from https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/2020004/s3-eng.htm