The Role Well-Being & Access Play in

Addressing 1st Generation Vulnerabilities

Maureen Barnes
Jennifer Myers

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Context for Presentation

- One day conference – First Generation Students – sponsored by Alice Pitt

- Had being talking to Alice about universal design principles and how they support both students with disabilities and first generation

- Completion of Well-Being Report

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Goals of Post Secondary Education

Critical Thinking

Develop critical thinking skills
Examine issues with critical lens

Purpose

Opportunity to find purpose
Connect purpose with meaning

Flourish

Find ways to flourish regardless of circumstances
Build resilience to flourish

Transformation

Cultivate self-awareness to stimulate transformation

- **In order to thrive, people need to feel safe, have confidence, be grounded, resilient and persist.**

- **These things work together to help people flourish and truly engage in meaningful transformational learning and work and in essence be well.**

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- *"We want students to engage in experiences that are challenging, difficult and complex and even transformational. This is the condition we believe creates the most powerful learning opportunities. However learning under these conditions requires students to utilize qualities typically seen as "essential for human capacity building; the resilience to tackle hard questions; the self-esteem or confidence to challenge oneself; the persistence to fail and try again." These qualities and their effects are the cornerstones of student development and well-being.*

Well-Being as a Function of Learning Well, Ashley Finley (Senior Director of Assessment and Research AAC&U)

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If flourishing is associated with a positive state of mental health and feeling connected and supported, the data we currently have would indicate that many students are struggling to flourish.
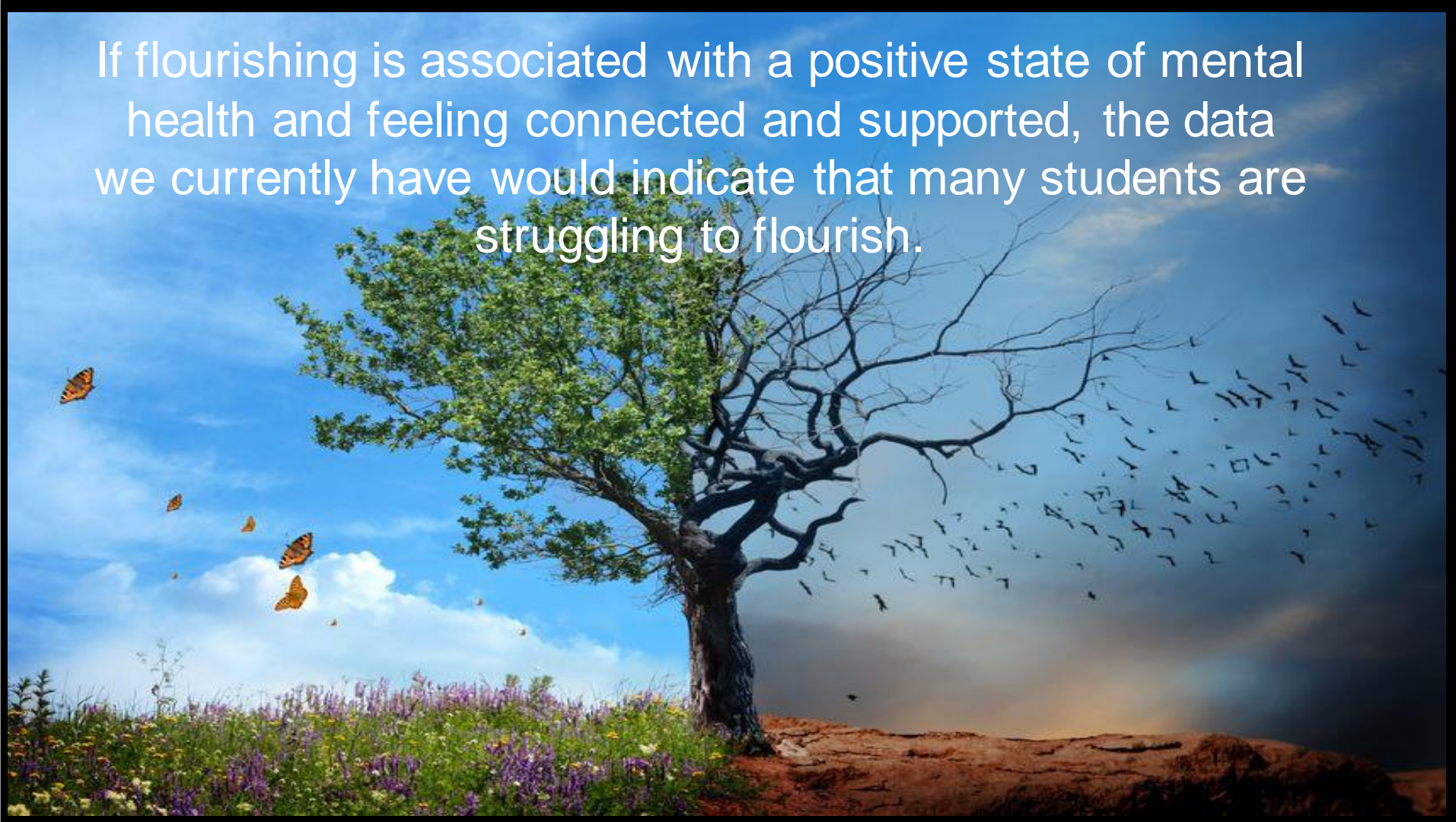
STUDENT PERSONA'S

Examining functional skills of students

entering post secondary

Functional

44%

At Risk

41%

Dysfunctional

16%

High School Students Achieving A or A+

Functional

63%

At Risk

56%

Dysfunctional
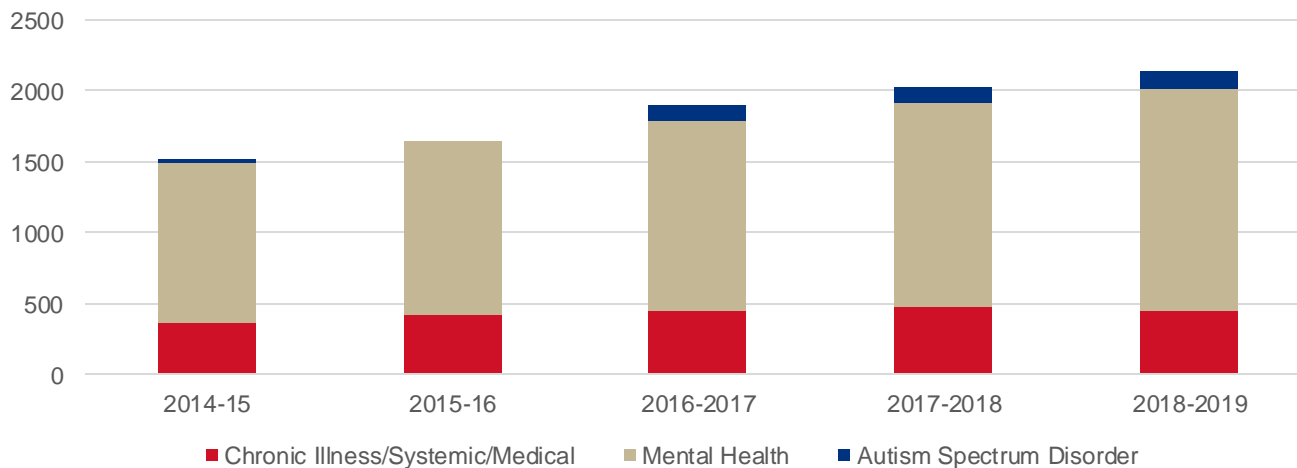
45%

National College Health Assessment 2019
In the last 12 months I have felt
Canada
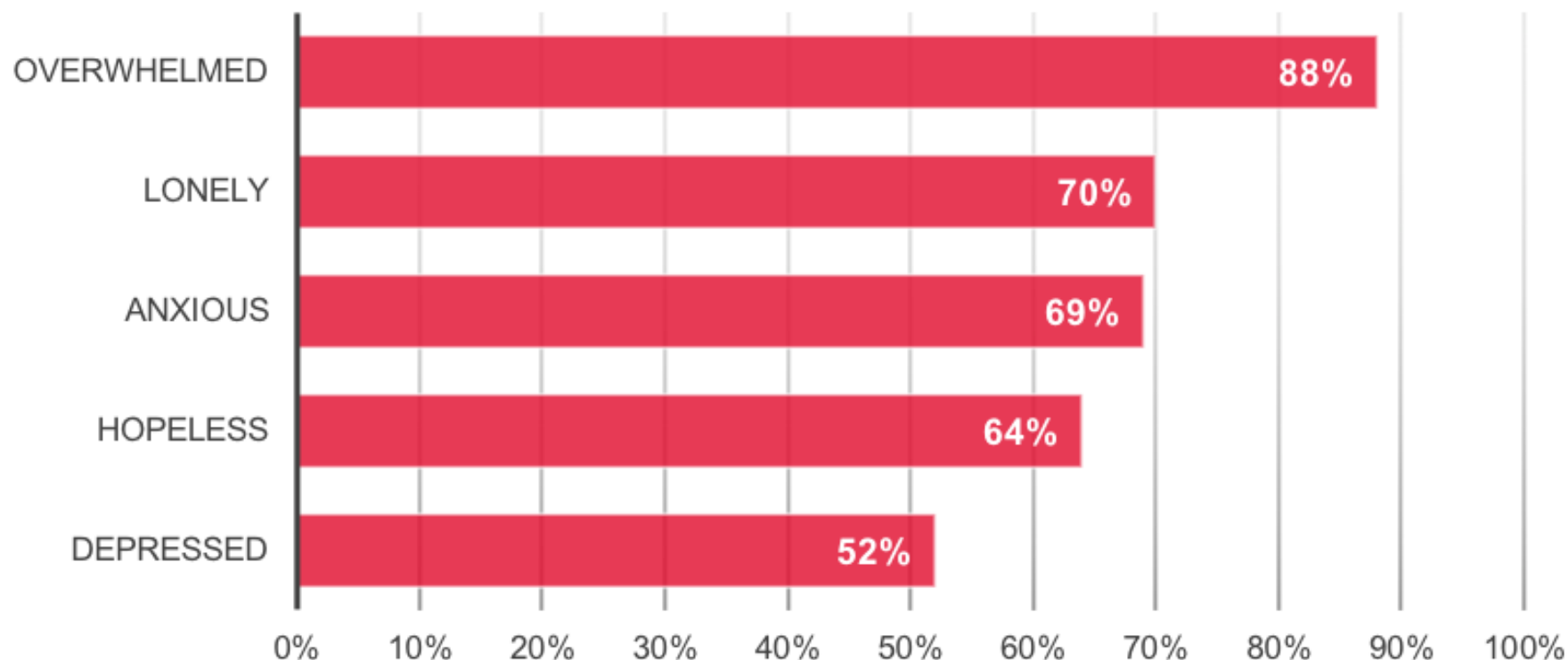
Disability and Wellness

- Mental health and physical disabilities directly affecting health comprise over 50% of total of students registered for support with Student Accessibility Services

Students Register with Student Accessibility Services - Mental Health/Physical Health Disabilities

Legend:
- Chronic Illness/Systemic/Medical
- Mental Health
- Autism Spectrum Disorder

X-axis categories: 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2018-2019
Y-axis: 0, 500, 1000, 1500, 2000, 2500

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What Students Told Us

Struggling to make connections

Lacking foundational skills

No understanding of roles and accountabilities

Lack resources and knowledge to gain assistance

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First Generation Students and Students with Disabilities

5 Challenges – First Gen Students

1. **Lack of knowledge** about the university experience
2. **Guilt**
3. **Finances**
4. **Support from Home**
5. **Fitting In & Social Life**

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Challenges for Students with Disabilities at Post-Secondary

1. Finances – often as a result of their disability they incur additional costs

2. Guilt - accommodations seen as "cheating"

3. Navigating the system – students with disabilities need to navigate not just the university system but the entire system to access accommodations and support

4. Don't have the supports they had in high school

5. Often have difficulties with social skills and have a hard time fitting in

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Challenges

1st Generation	Students with Disabilities
Lack of Knowledge	Lack of Knowledge about specialized system for support
Guilt	Guilt that accommodations are not "fair"
Finances	Finances
Support from Home	Less support than accustomed to
Fitting in & Social Life	Social Skills

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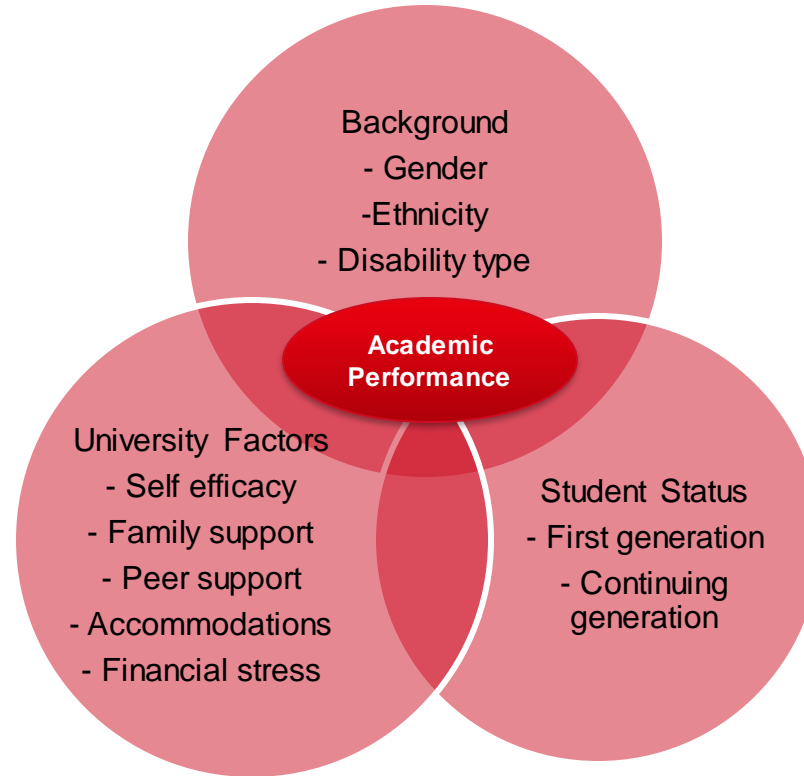
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Intersectionality of Challenges

- There is a dual challenge or cumulative risk when a student has a disability and is a first-generation student*

- Have lower retention rates

- Take longer to complete

*(Lombardi, Murry, and Gerdes, 2012)

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# Success Factors : First Generation Students with Disabilities

- 2 main factors that lead to success
  - Ability to be independent
  - Advocacy and self-advocacy

- The freedom to connect with a wide range of students lead to greater independence

- Strong indicator that a mentor was a crucial support

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Background
- Gender
-Ethnicity
- Disability type

Academic Performance

University Factors
- Self efficacy
- Family support
- Peer support
- Accommodations
- Financial stress

Student Status
- First generation
- Continuing generation

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Adapted from Lombardi, Murry & Gerdes

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If a student is worried about

- Finances
- Not knowing how to navigate
- Not having a support system
- Fitting in

- How can they fully participate?
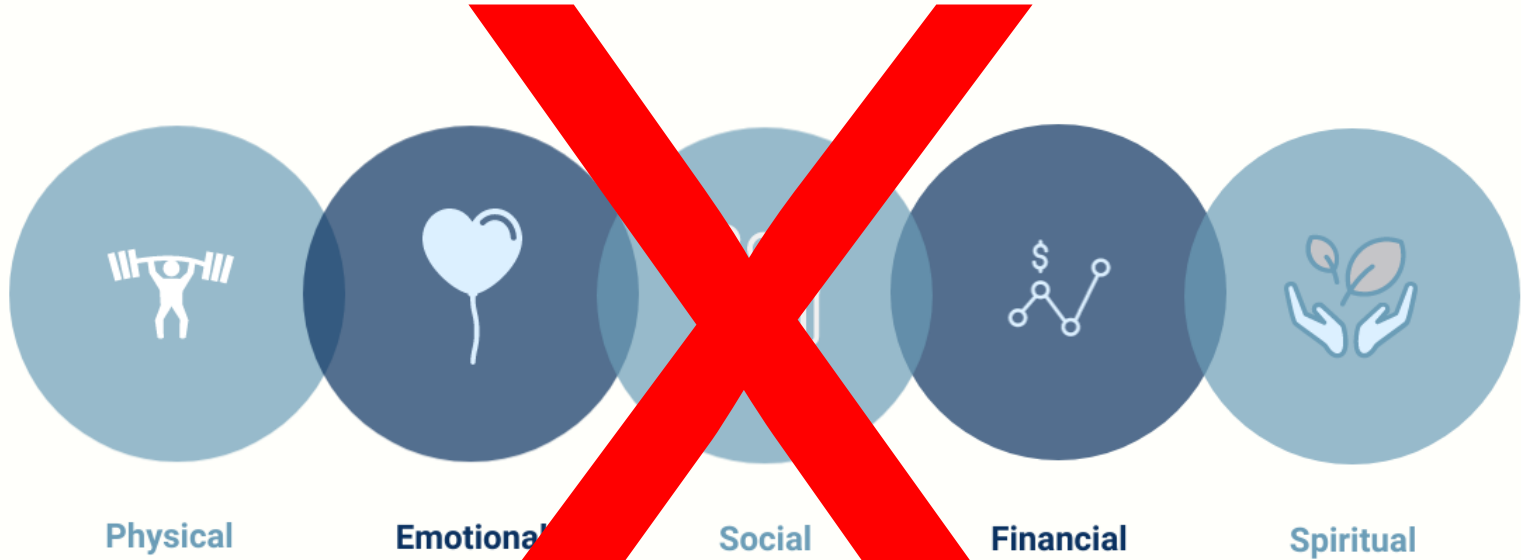
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Foundational Elements of Well-Being

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Engagement

Connections

RESILIENCE

Confidence

Foundational Skills

SUPPORT

Navigation

Access

Need

- Connections
  - Engagement
  - Community
- Foundational Skills
  - Resilience
  - Confidence
  - Understanding of expectations of the environment
- Support
  - Navigating systems, services and support
  - Access

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Framework for Major Areas of Focus

Personal Well-Being

Mental Health & Resilience

Physical Activity & Reduction of Sedentary Behaviour

Emotional Well-Being (financial, sexual, food security and nutrition, spiritual)

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Intersection of Well-Being Framework

- Personal Well-Being
  - Mental Health
    - Finding ways to access services
    - Personal strategies
  - Physical Activity
    - Being active
  - Nutrition and Food Security
    - Ensure a wide range of food options for students that are affordable and culturally appropriate.
    - Consider the creation of a place on campus where staff and students can prepare food.

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Institutional Well-Being

	Sustainability
	Policies & Governance
	Built & Natural Environment

Intersection of Well-Being Framework

- Institutional Well-Being
- Policies and Governance
    - Well-Being lens applied to academic policies on petitions and appeals.
    - Creation of policies and framework to implement supported learning for all students, reducing the need for accommodated exams.
    - Examination of financial policies and additional support.
    - Consideration of university deadlines to create flexibility.

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Creating Communities & Connections

- Peer Mentorship
- College System
- Community Engagement
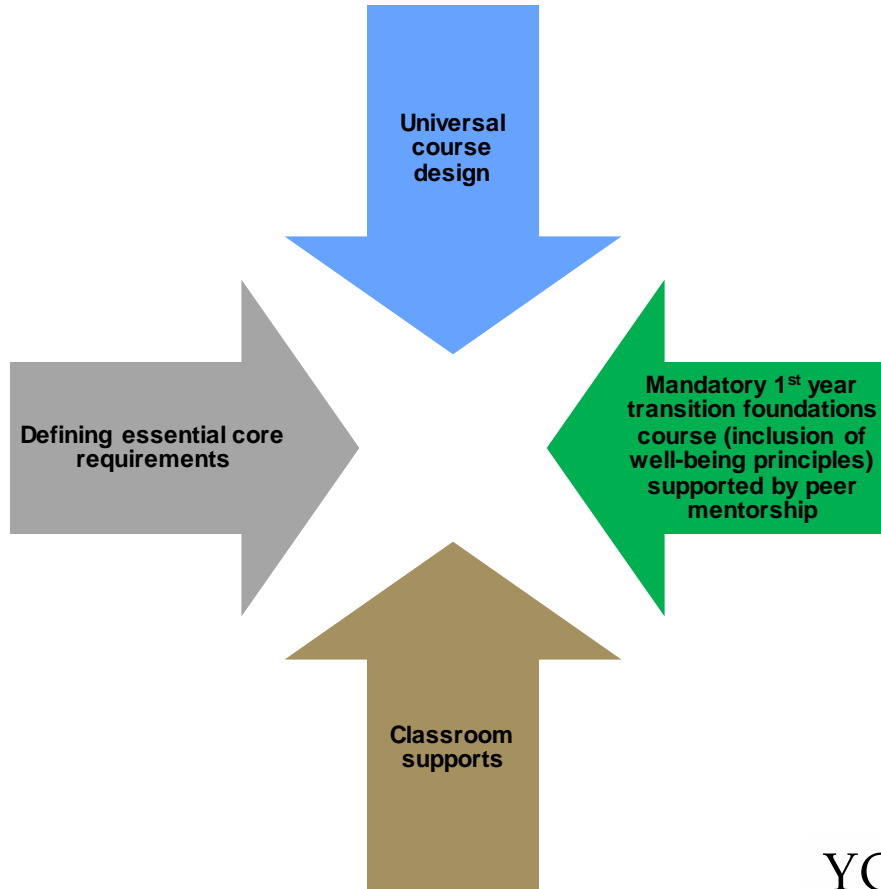- Leadership
- Employee Engagement

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Intersection of Well-Being Framework

- Communities and Connections
  - Fostering a sense of belonging
  - Opportunities to build supports
  - Leverage faculties and colleges in building engagement
  - Strengthening peer mentor opportunities to assist students in navigating services and supports

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Teaching & Learning

Universal course design

Defining essential core requirements

Mandatory 1st year transition foundations course (inclusion of well-being principles) supported by peer mentorship

Classroom supports

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Intersection of Well-Being Framework

- Teaching & Learning
  - Supported Learning
    - Training and assistance to faculty on how to recognize students at risk
    - Identify ways to incorporate holistic pedagogy/education for transformative learning
    - Making access to support and services easier to navigate

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Intersection of Well-Being Framework

- Teaching & Learning
  - Universal Design for Learning
    - Create the imperative to rethink course delivery and methods of evaluation that target the broadest population, decrease workload and provide the largest number of students with the ability to manage course expectations.
    - Fully implement the COU Ontario Universities Accessible Education guidelines.

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Intersection of Well-Being Framework

- Teaching & Learning
  - Mandatory First Year Foundations Course
    - Focus on preparing students, managing expectations, providing them with tools to succeed.
    - Setting personal expectations around accountability
    - Include safety, consent, bystander training
    - Include elements of personal well-being, self care, mental health strategies, finance and budgeting

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Addressing Access is the first step to reducing multiple stressors and barriers for 1st Generation and Students with Disabilities.

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ACCESS can include:

- General access to higher education
- Supports and services
- The physical environment
- The inclusiveness of nonacademic programming
- Course design and evaluation

- Is often seen as a disability related issue

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Accessibility Before Accommodation

- Increasing the accessibility of the classroom materials and learnings can reduce the need for individualized accommodation

- Looking at Access with a disability lens can support and inform the learning of all students, especially other at-risk groups like first generation students.

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Accommodation vs Accessible Approach

Accommodation	Access
Access issues are addressed on an individual basis between the person requiring accommodation and the service provider	Access issues are addressed at the design stage for broadest possible reach
Access is achieved through special accommodation and/or retrofitting existing requirements	As much as possible, the system or environment is designed to be used by all
Access is reactive	Access is proactive
Access is often provided in a separate location or through different treatment	Access is inclusive
Access must be reconsidered each time a new individual uses the system (i.e., is consumable)	Access as part of the course design and curriculum is sustainable

Top Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

- Flexibility with deadlines (3-5 days)
- Additional time for tests/exams (25%)
- A separate room

Top Accommodations for General Students

- Flexibility with deadlines (3-5 days)
- Additional time for tests/exams (25%)
- Option to drop worst mark – test or assignment.

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Questions?

Maureen Barnes

Director, Student Accessibility Services

maureen@yorku.ca

Jennifer Myers

Executive Director, Athletics and Recreation

jmyers@yorku.ca

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References

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Tevis, T. and Griffen, J. (2014) Absent voices: Intersectionality and first-generation college students with disabilities. *Journal of Progessive Policy & Practice*, 2(3), 239-254

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