
STUDENT WELL-BEING AND RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK 1.0

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BCIT[®]

—
A COMMITMENT TO WELL-
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STUDENT WELL-BEING AND RESILIENCE AT BCIT

A commitment to well-being is at the heart of a **people-focused organization**.^[1] We know that excellence in education goes hand in hand with support of our learners’ **success, well-being, and resilience**.^[1] A growing body of evidence suggests that student learning outcomes and student well-being are related.^{[2],[3]} Moreover, students clearly see their institutions and instructors as playing a vital role in shaping their overall well-being.^{[4],[5]}

Today, there are growing calls for Canadian institutions of higher learning to demonstrate a commitment to student well-being and to becoming health-promoting institutions.^{[6],[7]}

Well-being Defined. The BCIT community has adopted the Eight Dimensions of Well-being Model, which defines well-being as a dynamic state in which a person in their environment has the opportunity to balance intellectual, occupational, physical, financial, psychological, environmental, spiritual, and social needs to thrive and realize their goals. This model highlights the multi-faceted nature of well-being and the many ways in which student well-being can contribute to an optimal learning environment for students.

Resilience Defined. BCIT students undertake challenging academic programs that prepare them for rewarding and demanding employment opportunities. Resilience is the ability to adapt and thrive when confronted with stressful and challenging situations. By equipping students with the right skills and supports, the BCIT community can foster resilience, which in turn contributes to well-being.

THE FRAMEWORK

Commitment one of the BCIT Strategic Plan 2019-2022^[1] is to being a people-focused organization. Initiative one of the people-focus commitment is a call to action for “strengthening support and services for BCIT learners to promote **success, well-being and resilience**”.^[1] This initiative exists alongside, and is complementary to, BCIT’s commitments to maintaining academic standards and academic integrity.

To support BCIT in realizing its commitment to the well-being and resilience of its community of learners, BCIT’s Student Well-being Steering Committee engaged in a process to create the BCIT Student Well-being and Resilience Framework. The Steering Committee has a mandate to advise and to assist in the development of institutional recommendations related to student well-being, as well as to foster a shared understanding in the BCIT community of student well-being needs and best practices. It includes representatives from the following groups:

- Student Life Office
- Counselling and Student Development
- Accessibility Services
- Recreation Services
- International Student Services
- Student Association
- Respect, Diversity, and Inclusion Office
- Indigenous Services
- Registrar’s Office
- Faculty representatives
- Student representatives

The Steering Committee analyzed existing data reflecting the needs of the student population at BCIT. The following information was reviewed:

- 2016 National College Health Assessment for BCIT
- Student Engagement Survey Results
- Framework consultation sessions with campus stakeholders in late 2019 and early 2020
- departmental statistics and unit-level student success statistics
- results of the 2017 Student Success Visioning Session

The committee thematically sorted common issues and themes that many students at BCIT face using the Eight Dimensions of Well-being, as reviewed in the next section. The Three-Pillar Framework to support learner well-being was then created.

EIGHT DIMENSIONS OF WELL-BEING

INTELLECTUAL



OCCUPATIONAL



PHYSICAL



FINANCIAL



PSYCHOLOGICAL



ENVIRONMENTAL



SPIRITUAL



SOCIAL



EIGHT DIMENSIONS OF WELL-BEING: A SNAPSHOT

The Eight Dimensions of Well-being Model allows us to take into account the complexity of the whole student to meaningfully foster student well-being and resilience. Each dimension will be reviewed briefly below to provide a “snapshot” of well-being and challenges to well-being in the BCIT context.



Financial Well-being

Financial stress impacts a student’s ability to be successful in their studies. Financial well-being relates to a variety of resource issues, such as availability of affordable housing options and affordable childcare options. At BCIT, students consistently cite finances as a top reason for discontinuing their studies before graduation. For instance, in the 2017 Full-time Student Engagement Survey, 47% of BCIT students surveyed identified finances as the top factor most likely to prevent completion of the program. We know that past and current financial challenges are associated with increased reports of psychological distress.



Psychological Well-being

Mental health is a key aspect of well-being that is closely associated with all eight dimensions of well-being. While mental health is an important issue for anyone, supporting the mental health of students is particularly important for the following reasons:

- post-secondary studies often coincide with the age of onset of mental health conditions^[8];
- the majority of post-secondary students in Canada report experiencing overwhelming anxiety or being too depressed to function at some point in the past 12 months^[9];
- in Canada, suicide is the second most common cause of death among young adults aged 15 to 24.^[10]

It is important to note that mental health impacts us all and that people can flourish or languish with respect to their mental health regardless of whether they have a diagnosable mental illness. ^[3]



Physical Well-being

Physical well-being is closely connected to mental well-being. Exercise, sleep, nutrition, sexual health, and general health are important to ensuring that BCIT students can thrive in their studies. At BCIT, sexual and reproductive health was the top reason for visits to on-campus health services. Sleep difficulties were a commonly cited concern for Canadian students in recent data.^[9] Lastly, 2 in 5 Canadian post-secondary students report that they experienced some degree of food insecurity in the past year.^[11]



Intellectual Well-being

Academic stress is the most common challenge cited by BCIT students as being difficult to handle, with course workload and program difficulty frequently identified as factors most likely to prevent program completion. Students come to BCIT because they are looking for challenging programs that will help prepare them for a career. At the same time, students must feel that they have the supports that they need to meet the challenges.

OCCUPATIONAL



Occupational Well-being

The data is clear that pursuit of exciting and meaningful careers is a top reason why students come to BCIT. Given those results, it may not be surprising that career issues were reported as a factor impacting student well-being at BCIT.^[9] While the relationship between stress and occupation is unclear in the data, anecdotal observations at BCIT suggest that student anxiety about the potential disruption of their career trajectory due to threats to academic completion may be a major source of career-related stress for students.

SPIRITUAL



Spiritual Well-being

In the Eight Dimensions of Well-being Model, spirituality is defined as the process of developing and connecting with a sense of purpose and meaning in life, and may or may not be associated with an established religious or spiritual practice. Research suggests that many post-secondary students do report that the spiritual dimension of well-being is personally significant to them, and spirituality can be an important protective factor against distress and mental health impacts.^[12]

SOCIAL



Social Well-being

At a recent Student Success Visioning Session at BCIT, participating students described feeling isolated. They indicated that feeling connected with a group and experiencing social bonding around collective stresses and challenges helped them to be resilient and to maintain a sense of well-being. This internal data supports findings in research literature that students endorse social connection and belonging in their campus community as extremely important to their well-being; further, they indicate that institutions and instructors have the power to facilitate or create barriers to this connection.^{[4][5]} Respect for diversity, access, and inclusion are pre-requisites for social well-being. These shared values make it possible for all people at BCIT, including under-represented or historically marginalized groups, to feel a sense of belonging.

ENVIRONMENTAL



Environmental Well-being

Environmental well-being refers to the design and creation of safe, supportive, inclusive, and sustainable spaces and facilities that promote well-being. Access to nature and natural light, as well as availability of spaces for social connection, private study, engaged work, or simply a place to be, to belong and to be fully accepted, respected, and included all help to foster student well-being. BCIT's value of **Championing Diversity and Inclusion**^[1] speaks to the BCIT community's affirmation of its commitment to fostering an accessible and inclusive environment, both on campus and in the classroom, that supports the well-being of all of its members.

THREE-PILLAR FRAMEWORK

After examining the critical issues facing students at BCIT through the lens of the Eight Dimensions of Well-being, a strategic framework emerged to address those priorities. To support flourishing mental health and well-being for members of its community, BCIT must act at several levels simultaneously, from attending to individuals in crisis or in need of treatment to enacting health-promoting institutional structures, policies, and practices. This multi-level framework is consistent with the framework and guidelines for supporting mental health adopted by the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services [CACUSS] and Canadian Mental Health Association [CMHA].^[6] A working group was established to set priority strategies and initial goals for each pillar and to advocate for implementation of these goals. The working groups sought to align the framework's strategic priorities and goals to those of BCIT's Strategic Plan. To respond to emerging wellness needs in the community and to the outputs of framework initiatives as they are accomplished, additional goals can be added to the framework on an annual basis.

The three pillars of the BCIT Student Well-being and Resilience Framework address different levels of intervention:

Pillar I: Policy and Procedures

Policies and processes shape the learning environment and have a broad impact on student well-being. By **redesigning processes, systems, and structures**^[1], we can **embed sustainability**^[1] into the learner experience and into our well-being initiatives.

Strategic Priority #1: Develop people-focused policies that support students dealing with health concerns, distress, transition, or unexpected emergencies.

To be a people-focused organization, the BCIT community must be willing to re-examine existing policies and practices by asking the question, "How does this policy or practice impact well-being?" or "Are there changes that could be made to this policy or practice to better support well-being?"

Strategic Priority #2: Foster a compassionate, people-focused response to students who are at-risk academically.

BCIT strives to give every student the opportunity to succeed. We also recognize that each student's educational journey is different and that students can run into difficulties along the way. Students who are experiencing academic difficulty are in particular need of compassion and support, which can support and complement their internal resilience in the face of challenges.





Pillar II: Training and Education

Enhanced awareness of existing services and health-promoting attitudes and behaviors for all community members, including students, faculty and staff, is central to this pillar. By **investing in faculty and staff development**^[1] and providing these employees with the training and resources that they need to support students, we are leveraging the power of a familiar, personal, and trusted presence on campus for many students.

Strategic Priority #3: Enhance faculty, staff and student awareness of existing services and supports.

It is critical to ensure that both students and employees are aware of the systems and resources that are in place to support student well-being. Our data shows that students are not always aware of the services that are available to them. We will empower our community with just-in-time information about how to refer to, access, and use the student services available to them.

Strategic Priority #4: Invest in training faculty and staff to equip them to support student well-being.

Faculty and staff are often a first point of contact for students. Once their programs begin, many students will experience BCIT's commitment to their well-being most directly through their relationship with faculty. A key strategy of this framework is to empower faculty and staff in their capacity to support student well-being.

Pillar III: Support Services

The BCIT Strategic Plan 2019-2022 commits to **strengthen supports and services for learners to promote success, well-being, and resilience**.^[1] An institution must support learners commensurate to the degree to which it challenges them. BCIT will build upon the strong foundation of existing student supports to promote intellectual, occupational, physical, financial, psychological, environmental, spiritual, and social well-being.

Strategic Priority #5: Strengthen access to student support services across multiple campuses.

BCIT is faced with the challenge of providing students studying at geographically distinct campuses with convenient access to centralized support services. BCIT spans five campuses and multiple satellite locations. However, many student support resources are physically located at the Burnaby Campus. The Framework affirms the importance of enhancing equitable access to support services that meet the unique needs of each of the specialty campuses.

Strategic Priority #6: Expand availability and accessibility of mental health supports and early assistance for students.

Canadian post-secondary students report high rates of anxiety, depression and other mental health concerns. Students indicate that academic stress contributes to distress. By expanding the availability and accessibility of mental health supports, BCIT will continue to support the psychological well-being of its learners.

FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

The working groups associated with each of the three pillars of the framework are tasked with monitoring progress toward deliverable goals corresponding to the strategic priorities within each pillar. These working groups will report to the Student Well-being Steering Committee and to appropriate deliverable leads for the BCIT Strategic Plan on a bi-annual basis. As implementation of the Framework progresses, new deliverables goals will be identified based on stakeholder input and alignment with the BCIT Strategic Plan.

STUDENT WELL-BEING AND RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK

Pillar	Priority Strategy
POLICY AND PROCEDURES	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Develop people-focused policies that support students dealing with health concerns, distress, transition, or unexpected emergencies2. Foster a compassionate, people-focused response to students in academic distress
TRAINING AND EDUCATION	<ol style="list-style-type: none">3. Enhance faculty, staff, and student awareness of existing services and supports4. Invest in training faculty and staff to equip them to support student well-being
SUPPORT SERVICES	<ol style="list-style-type: none">5. Strengthen access to student support services across multiple campuses6. Expand availability and accessibility of mental health support and early assistance for students



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AN INSTITUTION MUST
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