

Wellness Strategic Plan 2023-2026



MCLA Student Affairs

Wellness Strategic Plan

Vision

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) will lead the way for wellness within the Commonwealth by seamlessly integrating holistic wellness into all aspects of the student experience building an inclusive, thriving, and resilient campus community.

Mission

To develop, promote, and support robust opportunities, programs, and resources that enable students to achieve a holistic sense of health and well-being and create a campus culture where holistic wellness is centered within every aspect of our community.

Values

The values which guide our work in providing exceptional care and wellness experiences to MCLA students in the context of a safe and welcoming campus community are:

Advocacy: The ability to appropriately communicate one's needs and necessities and make informed decisions about the supports needed to achieve them

Belonging: Creating communities where everyone is accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others

Dignity: Celebrating and honoring the inherent worth and potential for growth of all individuals

Engagement: Meaningful interactions with others, as well as the amount of involvement in and effort directed toward activities supporting persistence and completion

Prevention: Actively addressing root issues that lead to negative health and wellness outcomes individually and as a community

Respect: Honoring and caring for others

Reflection: Exploring one's growth and learning, how it's changed, and how it may relate to future experiences

Social Justice: Health care is a human right, and social justice is a public health issue. Racism, transphobia, homophobia, antisemitism, islamophobia, sexism, and all forms of bias impact health and wellness. Sexual and reproductive health exist at the intersection of justice and healthcare.

Underpinnings of the Plan

Holistic wellness among college aged students is a complex social problem, comprised of what students bring to campus from family history, educational and life experiences, campus culture in the wake of COVID-19, concerns about the impact of technology and social media on young people, national climate, economic concerns, and shifts in student expectations about what a college education entails. A holistic socio-ecological model of wellness recognizes that individual and community health are impacted by intrapersonal dynamics (family upbringing, life experiences, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and skills), interpersonal dynamics (peer circles, faculty/staff to student relationships) and institutional dynamics (campus climate, policies, and social and cultural norms). As one study eloquently asserts: "Healthy people need healthy communities to thrive, and healthy communities need healthy people to thrive" (NASPA 2004, 6).

Complex social problems require complex solutions, which can be well addressed through collective impact strategies. Kania & Kramer describe collective impact strategies as "long-term commitments by a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific problem. Their actions are supported by a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, and ongoing communication, and are staffed by an independent backbone organization" (Kania and Kramer 2011, 39). To this end, this plan seeks to engage the broadest assemblage of individuals across the college to develop a cohesive, collaborative, community wide approach to student wellness, focusing on educational, proactive, and preventative strategies to promote holistic wellness.

An institutional definition of well-being that is holistic and inclusive. No shared definition for "wellness" or "well-being" exists in the literature or on college campuses nationwide. The following working definition rooted in our student population and the context of MCLA grounds our work moving forward: Wellness is an active, intentional process of personal and communal choices that foster flexibility and thriving. Holistic wellness begins with discovering individual and community needs and strengths. Wellness is cultivated by exploring and growing the physical, spiritual, intellectual, emotional, relational, and culturally diverse aspects of a whole person in a safe, just, and supportive environment.

Wellness Model

Wellness is both a personal and community practice. It is the active process of developing a healthy and fulfilling life where we live, work, and play. Wellness is incumbent upon having basic needs met (such as shelter, safety, nutritious food, access to quality healthcare and education, etc.) in an environment and community where everyone can engage and thrive. Individual wellness is affected by behaviors, relationships, communities, and the national and international climate that we live in.

We believe that wellness encompasses many intersectional dimensions. The 8 dimensions below frame our work around wellness and thriving.



Intellectual: Engaging in academic, nonacademic, or work-related activities that stimulate our minds. Taking time to discover and enjoy passions, hobbies, and interests. Take pleasure in learning about things that are separate from our day-to-day experiences out of desire to gain new knowledge and skills. Developing resources that work together with the other wellness dimensions leading to a more balanced life.

Aspirations:

- Embrace new experiences and ideas in all areas of your life

- Expand your ability to create, develop, analyze, critique, concentrate, understand, evaluate, problem solve, predict, comprehend, etc.
- Continually improve academic skills, studying, time management, stress management, note taking, listening, and public speaking
- Develop a love for learning and personal philosophy around “life-long learning”
- Remain open minded when facing ideas that challenge your understanding
- Practice active listening

Emotional: The ability to successfully handle life’s stresses and adapt to change and challenges. An acceptance of emotions and working through those emotions in a positive and healthy way and creating fulfilling relationships.

Aspirations:

- Embrace your feelings and accept them as valid indicators of what you are experiencing
- Experience and appropriately express a wide range of emotions such as humor, joy, fear, anger, frustration, appreciation, sadness, etc.
- Develop assertiveness and appropriate confrontation skills
- Nurture positive feelings about yourself by internalizing healthy self-esteem and self-concepts
- Develop a toolkit to handle stress, irritations, crises, etc.
- Explore and inform your own sexual identity
- Develop, establish, and maintain intimate and loving relationships as appropriate

Occupational: Finding joy, enrichment, purpose, and satisfaction in your vocation. Enjoying what you do, balancing work and leisure time, building relationships with peers, and managing everyday stressors. Understanding that every person has value and a unique set of skills and experiences that should be shared for the benefit of all.

Aspirations:

- Educate yourself around the multitude of major/career opportunities available to you
- Challenge societal roles and other barriers that limit major/career opportunities
- Explore your interests, skills, values, and needs as they relate to your major/career choice
- Choose a major/career direction that reflects your values, preferences, interests and skills
- Understand the relationship between your major/career choice and other parts of your life such as family, significant other, leisure activities, and friends.

- Develop effective job-related skills in assertiveness, confrontation, feedback, time management, active listening, motivation, electronic and in person communication etc.
- Understand how many people change their major in college and their career directions many times throughout their lives

Environmental: Your ability to connect with the world around you to live a life understanding that actions have positive or negative consequences affecting the people around us. Feeling as though you are in a safe and stimulating environment enhances successes and supports our overall sense of well-being. Understanding the positive benefits that nature provides to our mood, mental and physical health, and overall success.

Aspirations:

- Become aware of how your external environment affects you
- Redesign your environments to more effectively support and reinforce your needs
- Be concerned about the future of the local, national and world ecology and climate
- Contribute to the health of the planet and a sustainable lifestyle
- Work to ensure fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, or income in environmental decisions and actions

Financial: Managing expenses, understanding loan structures, and having a basic appreciation of your financial standing are important steps to help attain a level of satisfaction with current and future finances.

Aspirations:

- Learn how to gain control of your finances so they work for you
- Understand how to manage a budget, credit cards, checking and savings accounts, investments, retirement funds, etc.
- Handle personal finances without too much stress.
- Set and make progress toward short- and long-term financial goals
- Know the resources available to you on and off campus to help if you are experiencing a financial issue such as food insecurity, homelessness, economic crisis, or financial management

Spiritual: Being connected to something greater than ourselves and searching for our purpose in life. Using values, principles, morals, and beliefs to guide actions and decisions. Spiritual wellness has the power and capability to make decisions and choices easier, ground us during periods of change, and gives us the resiliency to thrive with grace and inner peace in the face of adversity.

Aspirations:

- Explore your personal principles and values
- Regularly question and clarify your principles and values
- Understand how values develop and change from life experiences
- Become aware of the differences in others' values
- Develop an understanding of meaning in your own life
- Behave in ways that are consistent with your values
- Practicing acceptance of self, others, and circumstances
- Looking for a spiritual practice that aligns with your values

Physical: Striving towards peak mental and physical health, balancing exercise, sleep habits, nutrition, and listening to your body. Positive habits around physical wellbeing can help decrease stress, lower the risk of disease, increase energy, and lead to greater academic and personal success, as well as prevent illness and injury or help manage chronic health conditions.

Aspirations:

- Understand how and why your body works
- Embrace your physical appearance
- Make informed choices about your body and sexuality
- Develop well-balanced and healthy eating habits
- Understand your relationship to alcohol and other drugs
- Become aware of how a lack of sleep, stress, and non-activity affect your body
- Engage in regular activity to improve flexibility, strength, aerobic, and cardiovascular health.
- Develop and cultivate leisure activities
- Seek medical care when needed for illness, injury and preventative care
- Know the resources available to you on and off campus around physical wellbeing, exercise, and nutrition
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Social: Nurturing positive relationships with the people in our lives, building caring relationships and support systems. Forming positive and regular interactions with a wide range of individuals, connecting to our larger communities. Stepping outside our comfort zone leading to a broader perspective, and stronger sense of social connectedness, belonging, and acceptance.

Aspirations:

- Create and maintain meaningful friendships
- Feel comfortable interacting with diverse individuals and groups
- Become aware of your responsibilities for the wellbeing of diverse communities

- Understand and honor those with a different sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, life experience, etc.
- Understand the concepts of sex and gender role stereotyping
- Recognize the interrelatedness of cultural, global, and national issues and needs
- Become a responsible MCLA community member

Adapted from SAMHSA's 8 Dimensions of Wellness model with input from Yale University and Thomas Jefferson School of Medicine

Strategic Goals

1. Reorient the MCLA community to prioritize and center equity based holistic wellness in all systems, practices, services, and policies to create a culture of thriving and advance student persistence and success.
2. Invest in facilities, staffing, and technological innovation that support student wellness, efficiency of operations, electronic health records, quality of care, as well as internal, external, and cross divisional communication.
3. Center the work of holistic wellness around culturally responsive and trauma informed practices and build equity-based resources and services that support the health and wellness needs of racially minoritized, LGBTQ, First Generation, and other student populations.
4. Lead in wellness education, promotion, and literacy through expanded resources, communication, engagement, stress reduction opportunities, and institutional and peer-based programming.
5. Build and sustain collaborative opportunities with campus and community partners to increase programming and infrastructure around holistic wellness at MCLA.

High Impact Actions

1. Reorient the MCLA community to prioritize and center equity based holistic wellness in all systems, practices, services, and policies to create a culture of thriving and advance student persistence and success.
 - Establish an advisory committee of students, faculty, and staff to work in partnership with the Dean for Title IX, Equal Opportunity, and Student Wellness.
 - Integrate and articulate holistic wellness core concepts and values into college decision- and policymaking
 - Train campus community (staff, faculty, academic advisors, etc.) on the dimensions of wellness and how their work intersects, e.g. how to respond to a crying student so that it doesn't automatically result in a referral to counseling, how to properly report and refer students to campus supports, how poor academic advising results in more time and money for students, why suggesting students carry multiple minors and majors is not in the best interest of their wellness (emotional, financial, academic).
 - Ensure that holistic wellness is interwoven within MCLA's next strategic plan.
 - Integrate campus wellness needs into the capital campaign and other ongoing fundraising efforts.
 - Develop a comprehensive wellness calendar for the campus.
2. Invest in facilities, staffing, and technological innovation that support student wellness, efficiency of operations, electronic health records, quality of care, as well as internal, external, and cross divisional communication.
 - Invest in an electronic medical records platform for Health Services and introduce online patient portal that includes health form submission.
 - Identify local, regional, and national funding partners for projects and explore opportunities to generate funding to support new and existing program and services with the goal of creating long-term sustainability.
 - Aggressively pursue grant opportunities related to behavioral health, mental health, and holistic wellness.
 - Refresh the Counseling Center physical space with new furniture, artwork, and updated technology.
 - Modernize Health Services facilities with updated equipment, furniture, and technology.
 - Open satellite counseling locations across campus to support drop-in sessions and increase access to counseling staff.

Pilot evening and later afternoon hours in Counseling Services to determine need and interest.

Develop a Counselor on Call rotation system to address mental health crises after hours and support Residence Life staff dealing with student mental health issues.

- Outfit and open a wellness space in Hopkins Hall.
3. Center the work of holistic wellness around culturally responsive and trauma informed practices and build equity-based resources and services that support the health and wellness needs of racially minoritized, LGBTQ, First Generation, and other student populations.
 - Partner with the Senior Advisor for Institutional Equity and Belonging, Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Initiatives, Multicultural Education Resource Center and Identity & Gender Equality Resource Center to remove systemic barriers, promote health equity and uphold social justice in wellness related services and programs.
 - Develop and distribute a comprehensive list of campus, local, and national health, wellness, and counseling resources that support historically excluded campus populations.
 - Develop evidence-based practices in Counseling Services and Wellness education and expand the services offered.
 - Train Counseling, Health Services, Student Affairs and other staff in culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices.
 4. Lead in wellness education, promotion, and literacy through expanded resources, communication, engagement, stress reduction opportunities, and institutional and peer-based programming.
 - Develop robust portfolio of health and well-being content that can be shared with all community members through existing networks such as student organizations, classes, residence life, and leadership programs.
 - Engage the MCLA community in Green Dot Bystander Training to develop a culture of support and respect.
 - Train faculty and staff on Mental Health First Aid.
 - Hire a Wellness Educator for the campus.
 - Invest in a campus subscription to Headspace or similar wellness app.
 - Expand Peer Health Educators and develop opportunities for student led wellness programs and workshops.
 - Develop a broad portfolio of campuswide wellness programming that encompasses every aspect of the holistic wellness model.
 - Utilize Mindwise on Campus with all MCLA students to encourage suicide prevention and help seeking.
 5. Build and sustain collaborative opportunities with campus and community partners to increase programming and infrastructure around holistic wellness at MCLA.

- Partner with First Year Seminar courses and instructors to weave wellness throughout courses.
- Engage with local spiritual and religious communities to grow awareness of opportunities that support spirituality as an essential dimension of wellness.
- Engage with Aramark to develop and support healthy eating initiatives and opportunities including cooking classes and nutrition education.
- Expand opportunities for outdoor recreation, play, relaxation, and contemplation by partnering with students, Athletics and Recreation, Student Engagement, Facilities, and other campus partners.
- Interweave holistic wellness throughout new student onboarding and orientation.