

Student Well-Being at the SIGMA Alliance Universities

— Challenges, Approaches, Good Practices —

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1. Introduction

Higher-education organisations (HEOs) can be a challenging environment for students. The combination of various factors, such as academic demands, financial pressures, transition issues (from school to university, cultural changes in environment, etc.) and, most recently, concerns arising from the COVID-19 pandemic (social isolation, adapting to online classes, anxiety over health of oneself and family members) might lead to poor mental well-being and psychological distress and affect the students' overall academic success. The consequences of these experiences may be reflected in disruptive behaviour, poor academic performance and higher drop-out rates. Student well-being and mental health have therefore become increasingly prominent issues in HEOs.

Although the root causes and observations of these phenomena might be similar in the various HEOs around the world, the extent and gravity of this development, the experiences of the specific universities and especially the approaches and ways in which universities work to promote healthy and fulfilling personal and academic experiences for their students vary a lot.

This paper is a joint effort of seven members of the SIGMA¹ alliance. It will give an overview of the current state of student well-being at these universities, including the challenges faced by students, the initiatives and programmes being put in place to support them and the role that students themselves can play in promoting a positive campus culture. By shedding light on this important topic, we intend to learn from each other and encourage ourselves and other universities to continue to prioritise student well-being in order to help students thrive both personally and academically during their university life.

2. Conceptual Aspects of Student Well-Being in Higher Education Organisations

2.1 The Role of Higher-Education Organisations in Ensuring Student Well-Being

The idea that HEOs should foster students' intellectual and personal development has a long-standing tradition. Yet, the question of how this development can be achieved has shifted considerably over the last decades. Increasingly, the discourse has moved towards an evidence-based humanistic model in the tradition of humanistic psychology (Rogers and Maslow) and its disciple Positive Psychology. Educational approaches, which are informed by these approaches,

¹ SIGMA is a network of nine universities established in 2015 to promote cooperation on research endeavours, teaching innovation and the dissemination of knowledge in management and the social sciences. SIGMA partners embrace a holistic, rigorous and collaborative approach to work in the fields of leadership, social responsibility and sustainability to address societal challenges of today and tomorrow. See <https://www.sigma-alliance.org/> for more information and participating organisations.

give greater importance to students' psychological needs and development. Those educational approaches suggest that students need a sense of safety and that high levels of well-being are crucial not only to learn, but also to develop the capacity for critical thinking, entrepreneurial initiative and creativity, the latter being at the centre of contemporary curricula of business schools.

An indication of this has been an uptake of research on student well-being. Yet, as Rith-Najarian et al. (2019) have suggested, there is a rapid increase in academic interest and a consensus emerges that we need custom-tailored support and health promotion not only for students but also for faculty and service employees, as these groups have different challenges and identities. However, despite the uptake of initiatives, we still lack systemic research on the effects of interventions in HEOs (Rith-Najarian et al., 2019) and are currently in an era of what we might call "informed experimentation", in which we need to share experiences and results.

A critical aspect of health-promoting interventions is that they follow the WHO Ottawa Charter (1986), which stresses the dictum "Prevention is better than cure". This has been extended to health promotion in the higher education context by the Okanagan Charter (2015). These days, well-being also becomes an essential dimension in the strategic goals of HEOs for both students and their (future) alums. This calls for a structured and strategic discussion of the parameters of well-being emerging globally over the last decade, with a spike since the Corona crisis with several national and international networks taking up this issue.

The level of engagement and interest an HEO has for this topic is highly dependent on the following four factors:

- available resources (expertise, funds, willingness, attention)
- the sense of urgency (suicide, crisis, high number of burnouts in specific programmes)
- the organisational culture and
- the overall vision and strategic approach organisations have.

Each HEO will have a different experience and setup, and therefore a broad variation is noticeable and legitimate. This said, due to the pandemic, many HEOs currently pursue, in one way or another, the question of how to both interpret the current situation and foster mental health and well-being in their student population.

2.2 Concepts and Approaches to Student Well-Being

The models of well-being and mental health often remain implicit and unspecified. However, they nonetheless inform decision making at the level of HEO management and are of central importance, as they build the basis of answering the question of the extent to which HEOs should and can foster well-being.

2.2.1 Conceptualising well-being between happiness and chronic mental disorder

Generally, from a theoretical point of view, well-being has been conceptualised and studied extensively within health-oriented disciplines, mainly psychology and medicine but also economics, sociology and, increasingly, management and organisation studies. Following the World Health Organization (WHO), well-being and health are associated with three highly

interconnected spheres: a person's social well-being, physical well-being and mental well-being. To achieve well-being, a favourable condition in all three is desirable. Arguably, mental well-being is a focal point. This is because our mental models and interpretation of our physical health and social relations will ultimately define how we experience our overall life.

Moreover, there are two general approaches to conceptualising well-being: pathogenic and salutogenic approaches. Traditionally, well-being has been defined in pathogenic terms as an absence of physical and mental illnesses and significant stressors. Much attention has subsequently been put on describing clinically significant conditions as, for example, laid out in the ICD-10 manual published by the WHO.

An advantage pathological approaches have is that symptoms are far better observable and objectively measurable compared to the internal experience of well-being and happiness. A salutogenic perspective relies on conceptualising the conditions and processes required to maintain good health (aka resilience) and experience a high quality of life. Owing to a reliance on models instead of observable behaviours, salutogenic models have long been neglected, with a current renaissance due to the positive movement in psychology and medicine (aka positive psychology / positive medicine). A contemporary salutogenic definition of mental health worth mentioning is, for example, that of Hernández-Torrano, et al. (2020, p.3) who see it as "a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community" (Hernández-Torrano, et al., 2020, p.3).

However, even if positive definitions emphasise prevention and a more than pathological outlook on the issues thus becomes mainstream, it must be noted that a central goal of health-promoting interventions should be the minimising of students' symptoms, their inability to work and their inability to build social relations. Students who suffer from depression, anxiety or other mental disorders are often unable to work or build positive (work) relationships and have a very poor quality of life. Acknowledging the needs of these students – even if a university can only partly address them – must be a central aspect of any approach.

Following the emerging trend (see Franken et al., 2018; Keyes, 2002; Reinhardt et al., 2020) to understand mental health as a continuum, both dependent on the extent of well-being and (the lack of) suffering through mental health symptoms, Figure 1 is proposed as a model integrating pathological and salutogenic approaches and preparing the differentiation of types of interventions for specific student subgroups, which will be laid out in the following section.

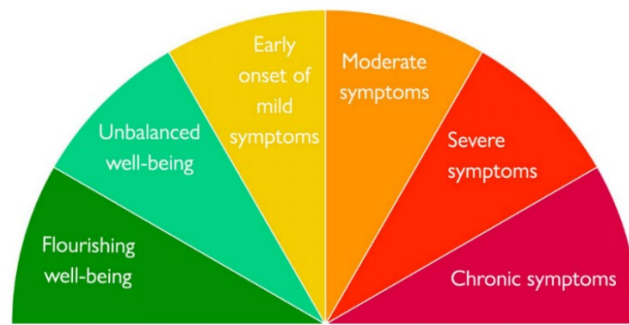


Figure 1: Well-being and mental health continuum
 Florian Schulz (2023), University of St.Gallen

Figure 1: Well-being and mental health continuum

2.2.2 Approaches to fostering student well-being

Following the assumption that mental health – and therefore also well-being – is a continuum, allows to differentiate different forms of interventions, each appropriate to the specific needs of students (see Figure 2).

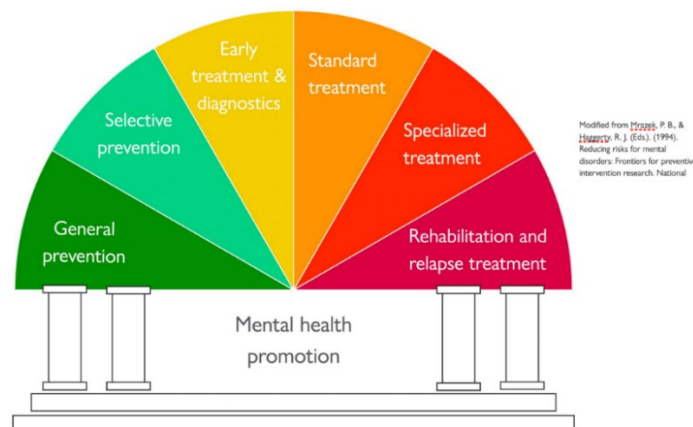


Figure 2: Types of mental interventions in HEOs
 Florian Schulz (2021), University of St.Gallen

Figure 2: Types of mental interventions in HEOs

HEOs will come to different assumptions regarding the question of the extent to which they are responsible for student well-being and what resources to allocate to this question. Yet, there is a general agreement that HEOs cannot engage in the treatment of severe and chronic symptoms, as a high degree of specialisation is needed, which can only be achieved in inpatient and outpatient psychiatric and psychotherapeutic treatments. Moreover, treatment of moderate symptoms generally also requires one-on-one psychiatric and/or psychotherapeutic treatment. These are resource intensive services that, in some form or another, are covered by public health insurance, and are therefore also seen as outside the responsibility of HEOs.

Resilience and well-being are inextricably linked. According to many empirical research studies, there is a mutually reducing relationship between resilience and mental ill-being, such as depression, anxiety and negative emotions (e.g., Miller and Chandler, 2002; Nrugham et al., 2010; Wells et al., 2012; Poole et al., 2017; Shapero et al., 2019). Concomitantly, the mutually enhancing

relationship between resilience and positive mental health has also been established. Resilience has been shown to be positively correlated with positive indicators of mental health, such as life satisfaction, subjective well-being, and positive emotions (e.g., Hu et al., 2015; Haddadi and Besharat, 2010; Satici, 2016; Tomyn and Weinberg, 2016). As such, resilience can be conceptualised as both a protective (i.e., moderating the effects of adversities) and preventive (i.e., enhancing the effects of one's ability to cope) factor that is associated with healthy development and psychosocial stress-resistance.

If HEOs engage in fostering mental health and well-being, their focus will thus commonly lie on early treatment and diagnostics, selective prevention and general prevention. Furthermore, all forms of interventions need to be brought to the attention of the students. This calls for some form of mental health promotion strategy.

Early treatment and diagnostics

Owing to the high risk of HEO students encountering mental disorders, many HEOs recognise the importance of establishing a low threshold system (Irie, Yokomitsu, & Sakano, 2019). Such a system, hereafter called psychological counselling services, needs mental health experts (e.g., at least MA-level counsellors) who are knowledgeable of:

- differential clinical diagnostics (ICD-10; DSM-5)
- treatment indications and treatment plans
- general psychotherapeutic interventions, including dealing with suicidality, acute crisis as well as depression and anxiety and
- the local health care system, allowing them to make appropriate referrals if necessary.

The objective is to refer people as soon as possible to the right specialised services or to sufficiently active resources so that the person can overcome current stressors, which lead up to symptoms, autonomously in a relatively short time (< 16 weeks) or in a few sessions (< 8 sessions). Psychological counselling services, which are part of the organisation, can additionally provide expertise to faculty and staff, immediate crisis intervention and help develop a contemporary mental health culture.

Selective prevention

Selective prevention is aimed at groups who exhibit vulnerability to unhealthy lifestyles, for example, in the form of initial symptoms, such as nervousness, difficulty falling asleep or self-perceived imbalance in everyday life. Certified health professionals provide selective prevention, and it is targeted towards individuals who already struggle with their current life challenges, who show subclinical stress-related symptoms and who thus often have a low quality of well-being and life satisfaction. Group interventions in semi-structured or open formats are often a resource-adequate form of delivery of such interventions. Challenges are related to convincing people to sign up for these groups, as stigmatisation can cause them to leave services unused. On the providers' side, advertisement, finding attractive titles and visual language to normalise visiting groups and thus creating a low threshold is important. For example, onsite and online group formats are tested for issues like "Staying calm during the exam phase" or "Overcoming procrastination".

General prevention

General prevention is targeted towards all students. It provides general information about well-being and health issues to increase mental health literacy and reduce mental illness stigma (Pinto-Foltz et al., 2011; Crowe et al., 2018). It would appear that two formats are standard in the HEO context: psychoeducation in the form of lectures or workshops, as well as reflective practices as part of teaching curricula or special student programmes such as mentoring or coaching programmes.

Psychoeducation

Psychoeducation can be delivered by anyone with sufficient knowledge of the current evidence-based health insights (unfortunately, this is not always the case, due to the lack of gatekeeping) about physical, mental and social aspects. Psychoeducation can take place through live lectures, interviews with high-status guests, videos, interactive online content, highly structured workshops, etc. Typical topics are, for example, stress management (PMR, Yoga), learning to learn (learn practices, self-management, study organisation) or sleep hygiene.

Reflective practices

Reflective practices open space for the question “how do I want to live” and thus for having the opportunity to think about these issues while talking, for example, in a peer mentoring programme or peer coaching programme or participating in elective courses focused on social skills training.

Online interventions

In these areas, there is currently considerable research with regard to the use of applications and multi-media, though, to date, hardly in the context of HEOs (Bendtsen et al., 2020; Barrable et al., 2018; Keller et al., 2023; Theurel et al., 2022).

Mental health promotion

Bringing services, mental health and well-being to students’ attention is a significant challenge. It requires additional resources, often exceeding the traditional skills that health professionals are trained in (e.g., media and social media skills). Yet, for any intervention to be effective and especially for it to reach relevant target audiences, promotion is essential.

As stated above, we are currently in a state of informed experimentation of fostering well-being and mental illness in HEOs. Furthermore, while we can assume from the research conducted in other fields that general prevention, selective prevention, and early treatment (aka psychological counselling) are efficient and effective interventions, much still needs to be done in terms of finding adequate interventions for HEOs. This leads us to a discussion of the current situation and challenges among the seven contributing member universities.

3. Challenges and the Current Situation

3.1 Challenges

3.1.1 Copenhagen Business School (Denmark)

The key challenges to student well-being are not unique to Copenhagen Business School (CBS), but follow general societal trends that spill over into the educational system (Katznelson et.al, 2022, Wulf-Andersen et al, 2023.). Over the last decade, several reports have been published pointing towards increasing amounts of students (and children) facing mental health problems, such as stress, anxiety and depression ([Danish Evaluation Institute](#)) as well as an overall decline in student well-being. On top of that, the long-term effects of the lockdown due to the pandemic is still unclear.

This development is complex and it is important to address the challenges and understand the underlying causes of these trends. This will help us create structural support and focus on how to build resilience, academic communities and capabilities so that students who experience bumps on the road (larger or smaller) are better equipped to handle the situations when they arise. Katznelson et.al. points to some of the following challenges:

- acceleration
- performance pressure and
- increased focus on diagnosis and mental health.

An additional challenge is “belonging” as well as narratives about what “good students” are (Wulf-Andersen et.al).

3.1.2 ESADE Business School (Spain)

At ESADE, there are four main challenges related to the management of student well-being.

- **Mental health awareness:** although the number of students asking about health problems increases, we must still work on the associated stigma and early identification. The 2021–2022 academic year compared to 2020–2021 saw a 58% increase in demand for counselling sessions. In the 2022–2023 academic year, the number of cases handled (including the extension to law and the executive MBA) continues to increase. In terms of gender, more women than men use the service.
- **Affordability of mental health services:** students do not always have the economic resources to pay for the associated costs of external psychology or psychiatry services.
- **How to foster promotion and prevention strategies:** we are in the process of strengthening the lines of promotion and prevention in mental health and well-being so that the action is as transversal as possible, and we can work before a mental health issue arises.
- **Increasing diversity of problems:** the typology of students' problems and demands (e.g., relationships among peers, family members, addictions, eating disorders, bad sleeping habits, self-esteem, mood) becomes more diverse, mirroring the diversity of students in our programmes.

3.1.3 Hitotsubashi University (Japan)

One of the most important resources Hitotsubashi University has in promoting student well-being is the sense of community nourished by small-size seminars, cooperative learning and exchange partnerships. However, belongingness was thwarted once campuses closed and courses were switched to online delivery after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, uncovering significant challenges to promote student well-being.

The first challenge was **reaching the students who struggled the most**. As other East Asians, Japanese are reluctant to ask for social support from both close others (Hashimoto & Gherghel, 2021; Kim et al., 2008) and professionals (Mojaverian et al., 2013). An investigation into students' lifestyle conducted by Hitotsubashi in 2021 revealed that about 12.1% of undergraduates reported that they hadn't asked for support from anyone pertaining to their interpersonal problems. In contrast, only 1.4% reported using university support services when experiencing interpersonal issues (Hitotsubashi University, 2022). The difficulty of reaching students increases when there is a lack of awareness of the existence of support services on campus: 49% of undergraduate students reported that they don't know much (or at all) about the university's Advising and Counselling Office (the figure jumps to 65% when asked about the Office for Students with Disabilities).

Once campuses were closed due to the pandemic, students encountered difficulty not only in getting informal support from classmates and faculty, but also in getting information about available university support services by word of mouth. Nonetheless, recent years have seen an increase in the number of students who seek help from university support services (e.g., the number of students visiting the Advising and Counselling Office increased from 2018 to 2019; Hitotsubashi University, 2020).

Accordingly, a second challenge was **offering adequate support to students who did reach out to the university for help**. Offering adequate support to an increasing number of students places a burden on existing staff; accordingly, they need to coordinate efficiently with other support services within and outside the university, and to refer when possible. Some of the most prevalent concerns of university students are related to academic issues, such as what courses to register for or how to achieve passing grades. Before the pandemic, the responsibility for helping students with such issues was left to other classmates and faculty. However, once online education started, getting help from other students or from faculty became more difficult. Faculty themselves experienced a great increase in workload and stress when courses switched to online (Kita et al., 2022), and therefore they could have been less emotionally available to support students outside the class. University support services, unable to directly answer students' academic needs, were faced with the challenge of efficiently delegating this type of support to peer advisors. Furthermore, when campuses closed in 2020 and counselling sessions were moved online, counsellors feared that students in need of urgent help might not get the support they need quickly enough. While online counselling sessions proved to have their advantages over face-to-face encounters, such as increasing connectivity with those who would otherwise be unable to make it to the campus, they also lacked one important advantage of face-to-face counselling sessions, that is providing structure and rhythm to everyday life. Offering the right kind of support in the right way continues to pose a challenge to the university.

The third challenge was **supporting and promoting diversity on campus**. Hitotsubashi University welcomes numerous exchange and degree-seeking international students every year, but meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population poses a challenge. Reaching international students, who might experience language barriers when seeking help, is even more difficult than reaching Japanese students. Considering the hurdle to being accepted into the university as an international student and the high costs of living in Japan that parents have to pay for, international students experience great pressure to adapt and perform. The university needs to accommodate the needs not only of students from different cultural backgrounds, but also different socio-economic backgrounds, different gender identities or sexual orientations. Supporting students from the LGBTQ community remains a critical challenge, as the university does not yet have a support service dedicated specifically to students with a diverse sexual orientation and gender.

Minorities are known to have experienced the greatest economic and psychological damage during the pandemic, and therefore university support services had to find ways to deliver appropriate support to students with diverse needs. However, during the pandemic, diversity was actually reduced on campus. Connecting with diverse others became increasingly challenging, as otherness started to be seen as a threat, leading to a spike in xenophobia and ethnic discrimination worldwide. When COVID-19 border restrictions were enforced, many international students had no choice but to give up their dream of coming to Japan to study. Data shows that the percentage of undergraduates who reported having a best friend from a different culture decreased from 15% in 2018 to 5.9% in 2021 (Hitotsubashi University, 2022). Japanese students who wanted to study abroad after admission to Hitotsubashi also had to change plans. These students experienced a loss of purpose and needed guidance in recalibrating their expectations about student life. All things considered, it might be the case that sustaining and promoting diversity on campus during the pandemic was one of the most difficult challenges for Hitotsubashi University.

3.1.4 Renmin University (China)

The challenges with regard to the well-being of Chinese students stem not only from their experiences in college or university, but also from the broader education system that shapes their lives from an early age. Owing to fierce competition for limited resources, such as admission to prestigious universities and entry-level positions at desirable companies, parents feel pressure to push their children to excel in their studies and develop specialised talents. Consequently, students must become increasingly utilitarian and anxious, worrying about future employment prospects as early as their first year of college, a concern that was not common for students five or ten years ago.

Similar to students in other countries, many Chinese students are reluctant to seek help for psychological or mental health issues due to the stigma attached to such problems. They experience shame and fear that their privacy may be violated, which often prevents students with severe mental illnesses from being identified and referred for timely assistance, leading to further crises.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, online counselling was proved effective in supporting students' well-being. However, the increasing digitisation and informatisation of society pose

new challenges to students' mental health. Many students become addicted to the internet, including WeChat, small videos, online games and conversing with artificial intelligence (AI), among other activities. They may avoid facing the real world and are often unwilling to seek help when experiencing depression or other mental health issues. Addressing these challenges requires new approaches to support students' well-being and extend assistance to those who need it most.

3.1.5 Singapore Management University (Singapore)

The Singapore Management University (SMU) recognises that students' holistic well-being is important for them to achieve their academic and personal goals, enjoy their time at university and successfully complete their programmes. To improve the likelihood of student success, SMU provides support and assistance to students. Furthermore, SMU also promotes and protects students' mental health by helping them learn valuable life and self-coping skills, which are transferrable to a range of post-university settings including workplaces. The end goal is to help students find their footing to thrive and succeed, providing a pathway to a flourishing life.

Key Challenges

- **Performance and personal relationships.** A vast majority of SMU undergraduates appear to have experienced little failure in their lives up to their entry to university. It would most likely be that their ensuing experiences in SMU would be more personal and perhaps challenging, as they may begin to experience more defining setbacks, such as in personal relationships, not getting coveted internships or community projects or attaining grades that do not meet their expectations.
- **Capable and adequate support.** Not all faculty and staff were equipped to identify and assist or support students who faced challenges ranging from mental health issues (e.g., anxiety, stress, etc.) through to financial and adjustment issues.
- **Awareness of resources.** Faculty, staff and students were not always aware of the resources and support available to them and how to access them.
- **Growing demand** for professional counselling services. From 2015 to 2021, there was an almost three-fold increase in the number of students seeking appointments with counsellors at SMU's Mrs Wong Kwok Leong Student Wellness Centre (Wellness Centre).
- **Perceived versus real needs.** Various units within the Office of the Dean of Students (ODOS) ran programmes, trainings and workshops for students, based on perceived needs rather than actual/expressed needs. This at times resulted in a mismatch between programme offerings and students' needs.

3.1.6 University of St. Gallen (Switzerland)

Even before the pandemic, the mental health situation of students could be considered as tense. A sharp increase in psychological and psychosomatic symptoms among students can be observed in recent years. In the following, solid epidemiological studies, often meta-analyses, will be referenced:

- Students are more likely to exhibit psychosomatic and psychological complaints compared to non-students of the same age (Kählke et al., 2019) and are more likely to exhibit risky health behaviours, such as alcohol, drug, and medication abuse, as well as an increased risk of suicide (Mortier et al., 2018).

- In particular, increased pressure to perform, time stress, and the double burden between studying and working are seen as reasons for the developments mentioned above (Meier et al., 2010; Delannay & Neck-Häberli, 2018).
- A 2018 meta-analysis with 36 international samples (total meta-analysis N=634,662) concludes that college students show a 12-month prevalence of 11% for suicidal ideation, 3% for suicidal plans and 1% for suicidal attempts (Mortier et al. 2018, p.554). Twenty-five percent of undergraduate students show signs of depression, a number similar to the age cohort (Meta-analysis; Sheldon et al., 2021). Twenty-four percent depression among PhD students is higher than for the age cohort (Meta-analysis; Satinsky et al., 2021). Twelve to fourteen percent suicidal thoughts among undergraduates is the same as for the age cohort (Meta-analysis; Mortier et al., 2018; Sheldon et al., 2021)

These symptoms also effect society, with HEOs as educational institutions shaping societal values: The general increase in stress-related symptoms when it comes to knowledge work not only results in long-term effects on alumni's quality of life and financial burdens for organisations and society, but also leads to burnout, pain-related symptoms, psychic disorders, etc. There are also two relatively new challenges, which come on top of the already existing high rates of mental illness among students. We have to understand these challenges, which are interconnected, systemically:

- at the individual level, the general increase in symptoms and especially the mid-term and long-term effects of the pandemic and
- at an organisational level, the lack of attention given to orientate students due to the organisation of BA curricula and the spread of a culture that monothematically bases identity on academic and business performance.

3.1.7 WU - Vienna University of Economics and Business (Austria)

At the WU, we observe the four main challenges related to the well-being of our students:

- **Awareness of mental health / well-being:** Most students contact the Student Counselling Programme when they are already in a difficult situation (e.g., several attempts but still not passing an exam, chronic anxiety), and not at an earlier stage when it is easier to shift back to a balanced state of mind and well-being. Students reach out when they feel they are in an emergency situation, instead of asking for support in time. This occurrence of measures only being taken when the level of personal suffering is already quite high seems, however, not to be a student-specific issue but likely applies to the population in general.
- **Visibility and increasing capacity:** In the past year, WU's Student Counselling Programme has expanded its group offering (workshops, interactive talks, trainings, peer groups). The intention with the expanded offering is to reach students early so that they can build a practical and easy toolbox of self-help measures that helps them build resilience, improve self-regulation in situations of stress and so that they can have a sense of agency and autonomy. The main challenge in this work is to increase the visibility of the offer to reach more students. Within the realm of possibility, the programme offers quite a wide spectrum of group activities and participation numbers are currently not at full capacity.

- **Support students in crisis vs. promotion of well-being:** Within WU's Student Counselling Programme, we try to balance dealing with students who are in crisis (in a one-to-one setting) and developing group formats that promote holistic well-being to prevent students from going into crisis. Since only two coaches (both part-time) are currently employed, our resources to focus on the development of the more future-oriented well-being aspects are extremely limited.
- **Availability of (internal and external) professional support:** WU's Student Counselling Programme currently employs two part-time coaches who offer both group settings and one-to-one coaching. As no internal resources are currently available for long-term support / therapy, we try to build up a strong network with external therapists. In recent months, many of the external therapists contacted could not take in new clients due to the high demand for their services.

3.2 Current Trends in Students' Needs and Issues

3.2.1 Copenhagen Business School (Denmark)

As mentioned above, the key challenges to student well-being at CBS, to a large extent, follows general societal trends that spill over into the educational system (Katznelson et.al.):

- acceleration and performance pressure
- increased focus on diagnosis and mental health and
- belonging.

Performance pressure leading to perfectionism

Students experience an increased pressure to perform, not only in class or at university, but also in multiple arenas of their lives. A large percentage of CBS students are active and ambitious; they are engaged in their studies, have relevant student jobs and do volunteer work in an association or non-governmental organisation (NGO). Furthermore, they usually do sports or go to the gym and also need to prioritise relationships (friends, families) in real life and on social media.

In the Student Guidance Services, we see this increased pressure to perform in students who struggle to balance these arenas and manage their expectations. We talk to perfectionist students and students suffering from an imposter syndrome. The individualisation of these problems and the fact that all their fellow students also "look" like they are doing great, leads to students feeling isolated with their doubts, ashamed to talk about things that are hard, afraid to be struggling and afraid of loneliness. A part of the issue here lies in the narrative around what a "good student", or the implicit student, is (Ulriksen, 2004, Wulf-Andersen et al, 2023)

Reaching out in time

A lot of students are either unaware that CBS has student guidance counsellors and other services available (please refer to the section below) or simply don't believe that these services are aimed at them. Other students either don't want to talk about their problems or don't think CBS is able to help (feeling alone). They struggle alone instead of reaching out – out of fear of failing or showing their weaknesses or since they don't know where to direct their insecurities. There is work to be done in making sure that students know about the options they have, to emphasise that they are not alone and to create strong social and academic communities where

they can talk to fellow students, feel a sense of belonging and normalise some of the issues that they currently deal with on their own.

Post-COVID tendencies

The experience is that students struggle with study techniques including collaboration and group work. This is supported by the research on "[Stress prevention and well-being among students at CBS](#)" by Pernille Steen Pedersen who found that one of the things that students find the most challenging is collaboration and group work. The experience in the Student Guidance Offices is that students who were affected by COVID lockdown struggle with basic study techniques and collaboration skills as well.

We actively work on how to strengthen collaboration and group work in curricula, but also address study techniques. To this end, we have recently launched an online UNIVERSE for study techniques and well-being.

Increase in students with functional disabilities

The number of students who need functional support to complete their studies has increased. Over the past five years, we have seen a 300% increase in students who apply to receive special educational support. Students may apply for support if they have a functional disability preventing them from studying at the same terms as their fellow students. Functional disabilities include:

- dyslexia
- neurological disabilities
- physical disabilities and
- psychological disabilities.

It has become more normal to suffer from anxiety, also in relation to exams and stress (performance pressure). This growing group is challenging in the sense that their situation is often complex, and their needs sometimes need to be tailored. This also poses a challenge to the academic staff when it comes to inclusion in the classrooms.

Support offered to the individual student may differ depending on the diagnosis, and each student will be offered a talk with a special educational support counsellor to clarify their needs. *"The support is adapted to you and your studies to help you in the best possible way, e.g., you can get a computer with special programmes if you are dyslexic or visually impaired, or you can get a mentor if you need support during classes."*

3.2.2 ESADE Business School (Spain)

At ESADE, the following issues are the most relevant:

- The impact of social networks on the perception of the world and of others is something that was already present but continues to have a very high incidence. On the one hand, there is the misuse of social networks as consumers (e.g., the permanent need to be connected and view the content, which ends up becoming a biased perception of the world) or as creators (e.g., students' self-image on social networks ends up being very important and is part of who they are).
- The presence of addiction problems, either to substances (mainly cannabis and alcohol, but there are other cases) or behavioural (e.g., video games, social networks) is, in some

cases, something common in the students' circle of friends and therefore it has become normalised. Relatives are not always knowledgeable.

- Students who show difficulties in social skills and who may be in isolated situations experience ambivalence regarding the need for socialisation and the preference for participation in individual activities.
- There are difficulties related to self-concept. The need for high performance is a reality and when expectations are not met there is frustration and demotivation, problems related to self-esteem and negative perception of oneself and difficulties in relating or participating in certain academic activities.
- There are adaptation difficulties in international profiles. International students find it difficult to adapt to a different culture and language. This is aggravated by sharing academic spaces in a multicultural environment, which can make it difficult to socialise at the beginning and it can hinder the process of adaptation. This casuistry is more visible among first-year students. This can be explained by factors such as age and the fact that, quite often, it is their first international experience outside the family nucleus.
- There are problems related to eating behaviour, from skipping meals due to lack of time to difficulties with body image acceptance and associated maladaptive behaviours (e.g., restriction of food, vomiting, excessive exercise).

3.2.3 Hitotsubashi University (Japan)

Since 2005, Hitotsubashi University conducts a biennial survey investigating students' lifestyle in order to provide appropriate support. A comparison between the results of the survey conducted before the pandemic (2018) and that conducted after (in 2021, with a one year delay) revealed not only the negative effects of the pandemic, but also some positive trends (Hitotsubashi University, 2022). The main negative effects were due to social distancing. In 2021, 21% of Japanese student respondents and 33% of international students reported that they worried about not being able to form friendships. This was the third most frequently mentioned concern after economic issues and career choice issues. Furthermore, although there were no changes in time spent on leisure activities compared to 2018, the percentage of undergraduates who reported never going out for lunch or shopping with a friend increased from 6% to 22% in 2021 (Hitotsubashi University, 2022).

Another survey conducted by the university in fall 2020 revealed that 77% of first-year students felt anxious because they had no friends among classmates, this being the most frequently mentioned disadvantage of online education (Yasuda et al. 2021). Besides affecting interpersonal relationships negatively, the pandemic also affected students' well-being by increasing anxiety and worry about an uncertain future. The percentage of undergraduates who said they didn't have any concerns dropped from 29% to 19%, while the percentage of undergraduates who worried about their future career increased from 41% to 54% in 2021 (Hitotsubashi University, 2022).

However, the pandemic also led to some positive changes. For example, the percentage of undergraduates who reported being satisfied with the educational content increased from 79% to 90% in 2021. Study time also increased, probably due to asynchronous online classes, which involved a lot of homework, as well as less time spent on club activities and part time jobs. Students who reported spending more than ten hours per week studying increased from 14% to

34%, and students reporting that they attended all the classes they had registered for also increased from 75% in 2018 to 92% in 2021. Furthermore, although both faculty and students were unprepared for emergency online education, students' course evaluations improved after shifting to online education, mainly because of greater freedom to choose which courses to register for (Kashima & Yamamoto, 2021). Despite the limitations and pitfalls of emergency online education, faculty and students managed to overcome it. Research reveals that by overcoming one major disadvantage of online education, which is the lack of sufficient communication and interactivity, online education can foster learning engagement, which, in turn, promotes self-directed study outside the online class (Gherghel et al., 2022). Currently, Hitotsubashi is looking for ways to incorporate online courses into the post-pandemic curriculum so that students and faculty can benefit from the flexibility of online education.

3.2.4 Renmin University (China)

During the epidemic, one of the main concerns that has emerged among students is anxiety due to the uncertainty brought about by the pandemic. As health and safety was the top priority for Chinese authorities, a dynamic zero-COVID policy has been implemented since 2020. Consequently, if positive cases are detected, universities adopt closed or semi-closed campus management measures, requiring students not to leave the campus unless necessary and not allowing off-campus personnel to enter without an appointment. The uncertainty has intensified students' anxiety, particularly for senior students who are concerned that various job interviews and exams will be affected.

Currently, the epidemic situation in China is very mild, and the policies are relatively lenient. Students have transitioned from online to offline courses and from studying at home to studying at school. However, college students who have been affected by the epidemic for three years have a significant need for interpersonal relationships. Our survey last year found that the students' most significant psychological need is to adapt to the environment.

In addition, a meta-analysis conducted by Chinese scholars on college students' mental health during the past ten years shows that the detection rate of sleep problems among college students is the highest, reaching 23%, including sleep delay, insomnia and early awakening. These sleep problems gradually lead to students' depression, low cognitive efficiency and other related issues.

3.2.5 Singapore Management University (Singapore)

In a university-wide student pulse survey done in October 2022 with more than 6,500 respondents, about 25% of the students indicated that their mental health had improved compared to a year before when many movement restrictions were in place due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The majority (45%) indicated that that mental health was about the same as the year before. The remaining 30% stated that they were in a worse state of mental health than the year before. This suggests that with the gradual stand-down of Covid-related restrictions, non-Covid-related stressors were negatively affecting a proportion of students.

From the survey, amongst the undergraduates, the top three mental health challenges identified were: 1. Anxiety, 2. Trouble concentrating, and 3. Difficulty managing commitments. The top three resilience dimensions they felt they needed strengthening were: 1. Emotional, 2. Physical

and 3. Career. Amongst postgraduates, the top 3 mental health challenges identified only differed slightly, 1. Anxiety, 2. Trouble sleeping, and 3. Trouble concentrating. To them, career was the top resilience dimension they felt needed strengthening.

Together with the qualitative comments collected, various offices across the university collaborated to address existing gaps and to meet students' needs. This included running programmes or initiatives to support the students as well as examining how existing services, infrastructure and processes can be improved. The student pulse survey is run every semester to ensure that the University is aware of students' sentiments and shifts in their concerns and needs. This then enables the University to respond appropriately and in a timely manner.

3.2.6 University St. Gallen (Switzerland)

Pandemic effects

For many students, the pandemic has had a disruptive effect. It diminished routines and structures as well as social and personal resources, causing students to adopt dysfunctional patterns, sometimes leading into addiction, and ultimately catalysing mental disorders and low quality of life. Some recent studies highlight certain disruptions:

- significantly less exercise, greater weight gain (Flanagan et al., 2021; USA, normal population, N= 7,753)
- significantly more substance abuse as a dysfunctional coping strategy (Taylor et al., 2021; USA and Canada, average population, N= 307)
- increase in feelings of stress, anxiety and loneliness, and depressive symptoms (Elmer et al., 2020; Switzerland, undergraduate students; N=54 before the pandemic and N=212 during the pandemic)
- doubling of the experience of anxiety in the normal population (Flanagan et al., 2021; USA, normal population, N= 7,753)
- more than 70% have high-stress scores, with 59% meeting the criteria for clinically significant anxiety and 39% having moderate depressive symptoms. Poor sleep, lower resilience and loneliness significantly mediated the associations between stress and depression and stress and anxiety (Varma et al., 2021, p.1; 63 countries, normal population, N=1,653)
- adolescents and young adults, as well as those with previous mental illnesses, were disproportionately stressed (Varma et al., 2021, p.1; 63 countries, normal population, N=1,653) and
- college students have more attention problems and problems with self-control and emotion control (irritability, aggression, impulsive behaviour) (Copeland et al., 2021, p.134; USA, first-year students, N=675).

Even when the pandemic had come to an end for the time being, the effects, due to the lack of socialisation of students but presumably also because of post-COVID symptoms, will remain to play a role. Indeed, it becomes evident that some students fell through social networks and only delayed their precarious mental condition becoming visible. Finally, there is also a general sense of post-pandemic fatigue and stress, not least due to the new crises that had emerged just when things were returning to normal.

Performance pressure

Young adults are in a phase of developmental transition in which they need to cope with forming a stable identity, find their role in a community, establish interpersonal relationships and form a professional identity (Barrable, Papadatou-Pastou, & Tzotzol, 2018, p. 1). Indeed, during early adulthood, individuals generally need to become more autonomous, generate a sense of professional mastery, build a stable identity, find their role in a community and connect with others in a meaningful way, all developmental tasks that can need considerable personal resources to accomplish. If the challenges outweigh the resources, symptoms and low well-being are oftentimes a consequence.

With overly crowded performance-driven curricula, the main challenge becomes finding both inner/emotional space as well as sufficient attention not only to pursue academic performance goals but also to find space for trying out and developing oneself. This process has to take place through experience with others, and needs a variability of different contexts and situations to be sound.

While many students, by the time they begin their higher education, are already well equipped to deal with its specific challenges, a significant number already struggle or begin to struggle when starting at an HEO. This is a time which often allows more freedom of choice compared to school, requiring students to organise and self-structure to a greater extent both in their private as well as in their academic lives, which can be experienced as a burden.

3.2.7 WU - Vienna University of Economics and Business (Austria)

Since WU's Student Counselling Programme was only launched in 2019 and the first year mostly served for the initial installation of services and the development of the programme framework, no general comparisons or statements can be made regarding trends and issues in pre-pandemic times compared to after. Generally, it seems as if the issues of students have not necessarily changed – very few students stated COVID-19 as the main issue of their concern when contacting the programme. The issues they addressed that were side effects of the pandemic had to do with increased isolation, loneliness, inability to meet fellow students and inability to make new friends when starting university. Students have also struggled with finding motivation within themselves when a normal campus life was not possible.

Most coaching sessions in the last months dealt with general life issues, different stressors and fears. Our coaches' observation is that these issues came to the surface more strongly or faster as an impact of the pandemic. Topics students come with in broad terms are:

- stresses and fears (including recent developments, such as the war in Ukraine, the high inflation – which lead to reactions like procrastination, overactivity/inability to slow down / inability to take breaks, anxiety, panic, blackout in exam situations)
- lack of confidence: challenges of a performance-driven world, that seems to be especially prevalent in business schools; issues: comparing yourself with others and feeling a lack of self-confidence, not being good enough, not meeting expectations of parents/lecturers/peers
- sleep problems
- addictive tendencies (especially social media) and
- less tangible issues that reflect collective global tendencies, for example, loss of idealism, loss of trust in systems; for instance, some students avoid completing their degrees or

struggle towards the end, partially because there is lots of insecurity regarding future possibilities and having a fulfilled work life. They may be afraid of the unknown world outside the known education system or they might be discontent with degrees when they chose a course of study just to please parental expectations. Furthermore, some students have work experience and are already disillusioned by the reality of existing systems.

These are the **underlying issues** that our coaches would subsume as the underlying causes of the issues the students have:

- **overexcited (exhausted) nervous systems** – a lack of practical, embodied knowledge of how to self-regulate (or co-regulate) when stressed
- **a lack of embodied self-awareness** – and thus a lack of a sense of self and what (behaviours, goals, actions) is good for each student individually – priority is given to metrics and status only (this is aggravated even more through competitive measures by universities, e.g., through competitions, best-of lists, etc.) and
- general critique of the education system: still mostly **top-down teaching** instead of bottom-up approaches that facilitate learning and offer more experiences of being self-efficient.

4. Services and Resources to Support Student Well-being

Regardless of the existence of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects for campus life, even before there have been services and resources in place to support student well-being and resilience.

4.1 Copenhagen Business School (Denmark)

CBS offers university-wide services supporting student well-being. The services are primarily based in the Study Administration, but spread across different sections:

Student Guidance Services:

All students at CBS are welcome to contact the Student Guidance Services in order to get confidential counselling. The service is structured in different teams:

Student Hub: The Student Hub helps students navigate through their studies and can be considered to be the main gateway to the study administration at CBS. The office consists of ten full-time guidance counsellors who help students with guidance and information on all things study related. Accessibility is important and the Student Hub has broad opening hours: Monday–Thursday from 10:00 to 15:00 (at their walk-in on the main CBS campus, via phone and e-mail).

CBS student guidance counselling: CBS student guidance counselling offers study-specific guidance and personal guidance and helps students address their specific needs, but can also play a role as conversation partner and sparring partner when things become critical. Conversations may be about rules that apply to the specific programmes, study planning, study techniques as well as well-being and personal/private and social matters that affect the student and her/his studies (e.g., loneliness, stress, illness, relationships or life crises).

The student guidance counsellors consist of both full-time employees and student counsellors and offer guidance over the phone two to three days a week and, if needed, students can book a session.

CBS Special Educational Support (SPS): this offer is special support and aids for students who have a functional disability. The SPS counsellors can help students with:

- an overview of options for aid and support
- answers to questions about application and case processing and
- sparring, guidance and advice on the challenges students might have in relation to their studies and having a functional disability.

Harassment: CBS offers help to students who have experienced harassment. CBS has specially trained employees who may provide support and guidance and who have experience in talking with students who have experienced offensive behaviour or harassment.

Students can contact one of the three counsellors if they:

- want someone to talk to about their experiences
- have some doubts about what they have experienced
- have doubts about what to do
- need help to move on and
- want to report someone for offensive behaviour or harassment.

Offers aimed at graduate students

Graduate students may also book coaching sessions with one of the three certified coaches. Coaching sessions are based on the student's specific situation, and the goal is for the student to figure out what she/he wants, and what she/he can and must act on. If graduate students need aid on their master's thesis (in addition to the supervision they receive), they can contact the master's thesis counsellor. She helps students address questions, such as choosing a topic, academic writing, and uncertainty about the process. The counsellor also gives webinars/seminars, develops materials and tools and offers consultancy for the master programmes in relation to the master's thesis.

Additional support functions:

International programme managers: the international office advises students on the process of selecting which university to apply for, and is also a point of contact once the students have been selected for exchange.

Career counselling: students may book an individual career counselling session if they have questions regarding skills clarification, job search or future career.

Online UNIverse: In spring 2022, an online platform focusing on study techniques and student well-being was launched. The platform covers topics (text, videos and exercises), such as work-life balance, study groups, loneliness and breathing

External partners:

All higher educational institutions in Denmark collaborate with national external partners funded by the Ministry. Students may contact the partners themselves or we may refer students to the different offerings (all free of charge). Partners include:

Studenterrådgivningen: Student counselling consists of psychologists, social workers and psychiatric specialist consultants. They offer free social and psychological aid to students who attend further and higher education and can help with everything from psychological issues to more practical concerns about finances, maternity leave or illness.

Student counselling also offers Special Pedagogical Support (SPS) to students with psychological functional impairments, as well as competency development for those who support students with psychological functional impairments – and work in close collaboration with *CBS Special Educational Support (SPS)*.

Campus pastors: CBS has two campus pastors who offer informal talks or personal conversation about everything that touches on the student's everyday life as well as student life. It can be stress, student crises, loneliness, sadness, illness, loss and grief, problems in relation to family, friends and lovers, existential considerations and much more. Everyone is welcome, regardless of religious beliefs. A popular offering is the pastor's grief support groups.

Working strategically with Student well-being

In 2021, the strategic initiative, Student Life Transitions and Well-Being, was approved by senior management. The initiative's objective and end goal are to:

"Improve student well-being. Improving well-being for students who are vulnerable in different contexts as well as improving the well-being for the entire student population at CBS. In addressing student well-being, the initiative aims to give the students competencies to better handle transitions and collaboration – not just as students at CBS, but throughout their entire lives. Furthermore, an improvement of student well-being is important in order to strengthen diversity at CBS as well as all students' learning experience".

CBS's Initiative: Student well-being consists of two main projects: *"Stress Prevention and well-being among students at CBS"* and *"Student Life Transitions and Well-being"*.

The *"Stress Prevention and well-being among students at CBS"* project is an action research project and is a local strategic initiative by [Pernille Steen Pedersen, MPP](#). The objective of the project is: *"to explore the reasons behind the increasing number of students that experience severe stress, anxiety and lack of well-being – and on this basis, develop new ways to do something about it, collectively"*

(<https://wellbeinglab.cbs.dk/>).

The results from the project are included in the overall research on student well-being. The *"Student Life Transitions and Well-Being"* project, consists of a range of projects with six themes: transitions, academic identity and belonging, curriculum, social communities, motivation and compassion. The projects may be pilots or experimental and can focus on different areas and/or different groups of students. They may involve different partners across CBS (and beyond). (Pilot) projects that prove to have a positive effect will be developed further

and will be implemented. Each project will, by themselves and together, have great effect on the overall well-being of students at CBS.

Most projects in the initiative have (until now) been focused on COVID-19 (for examples of pre-COVID and post-COVID activities, see section below), but the focus has now shifted to longer term focus areas concerning how lecturers can support student well-being (integration of student well-being in curricula) and collaboration and group work as key competences students should have as part of their education. The initiative will run until 2024.

4.2 ESADE Business School (Spain)

ESADE addresses the main challenges related to student well-being through the Psychological and Counselling Service (PACS), previously known as Student Counselling Service. PACS aims to promote the well-being of the students by deploying strategies for promotion, prevention and intervention in psychological, physical and social health. This service is expected to have an impact on students' academic performance and in their personal lives at the university and also in the future of their professional careers.

We have worked on a four-year strategic plan that includes 15 projects integrated into three lines of work –

- establish the foundations of the service: define transversal projects that build the basis of the service.
- transversality of the service and giving personalised attention: since last year, the service has been extended to programmes, such as the EMBA and programmes offered by the law faculty, and in this expansion it is crucial to understand the specific needs of each area in order to give personalised attention to each programme and collective.
- enhance communication: publicise the service inside and outside the ESADE community.

4.3 Hitotsubashi University (Japan)

Hitotsubashi University has the following services to support student well-being: a Health Centre, which also includes an Office for Students with Disabilities; a Student Support Centre, including a Student Advising and Counselling Office and a Career Support Office; an International Student and Study Abroad Advising Office; a Harassment Consultation Office; and a Diversity Promotion Office.

The Health Centre at Hitotsubashi University provides yearly medical check-ups as well as counselling services for mental health problems for students and staff. Although counselling services are also provided by the Student Advising and Counselling Office, severe cases needing medical treatment are referred to the counselling office within the Health Centre. However, when students in need of medical treatment are already referred to an off-campus medical institution, the Student Advising and Counselling Office may coordinate with the attending off-campus physician. The Office for Students with Disabilities provides support with learning for students with physical, developmental or mental disorders. The Career Support Office provides information on job hunting and career counselling to students. International students, as well as degree-seeking students who plan to go study abroad, can ask for support from The

International Student and Study Abroad Advising Office. The Harassment Consultation Office provides counselling on any type of harassment issues, including academic or sexual harassment. Finally, the Diversity Promotion Office helps students and staff maintain work-life balance by offering information on childcare support programmes, as well as a Research Assistant Programme for faculty raising children.

Another form of support provided by the university is financial support. The need for financial support increased after the onset of the pandemic. The university offers information on different scholarships and financial support programmes provided by the government or other institutions, and also by the university. For example, starting in 2020, Hitotsubashi established a student support payment system to help students facing difficulties due to COVID-19. The university also provides small loans to students in urgent need under the Student Treasury programme, and the maximum amount a student can borrow has been raised after the onset of the pandemic. The money provided under both these programmes come from donations to the university fund. In addition to direct financial support, the university also provides information on part-time jobs that students can apply for.

Through these services, Hitotsubashi University is ready to offer support to students who encounter difficulties and are willing to ask for support. However, what these services can actually do to support student well-being is limited and tackling a problem once it occurs is not enough to support the development of student resilience. Therefore, besides these dedicated support services, a few other resources the university has in promoting well-being among students are also worth mentioning. One of these resources is university dormitories.

In the Hitotsubashi dormitories, both Japanese and international students can live together and participate in exchange activities. Residence and community assistants who live in dormitories are ready 24 hours a day to help other residents with everyday problems. Dormitory residents organise welcome and farewell parties every semester, as well as regular floor parties, sports events and exchange activities with the locals. Dormitory life allows students to feel safe, connected and never alone. Another resource for promoting well-being is university clubs. Many Japanese undergraduates are members of at least one university club, such as a sports club (e.g., aikido) or a cultural activity club (e.g., orchestra). Participating in a university club is a central part of student life in Japan. Students look forward to participating alongside other club members in the annual university festival, where each club shows their best performance to attendees from within and outside the university. Through club activities, students can pursue their hobby and also make long-lasting friendships, learn social norms as well as group work, coordination, time and stress management and leadership. However, due to the pandemic, club activities and dormitory parties were prohibited on campus and an important part of student social life was thus taken away. Fortunately, through discussion and cooperation between student leaders and the university, permissions for activity were granted to clubs (however, indoor club activities remained prohibited until spring 2021), and exchange events were allowed in dormitories if participants abided by infection prevention rules. In 2022, the university festival was finally held on campus after two years of online participation. It reminded students, staff and the locals that university life is not only about studying, but also about exchange, art, shared emotion and self-actualisation.

4.4 Renmin University (China)

To address the main challenges, promoting students' ability to cope with uncertainty, such as resilience, has become a crucial aspect of programmes aimed at enhancing student well-being. It is necessary to guide students in facing uncertainty, reducing anxiety and unnecessary worries, as well as developing alternative plans (plan A, plan B or plan C). Mental health courses and optional courses, such as emotional management, are provided to enhance students' resilience and well-being. Every freshman is required to take mental health courses, and other students may take more than ten courses related to mental health as part of general prevention to promote students' well-being. Advisers are assigned to every class of students to cater to their growth and development needs. Annually on May 25th, Chinese universities hold an event promoting mental health, which is known as the "I Love Myself" event due to the similar pronunciation in Chinese. The event includes knowledge competitions, psychological drama shows, campus mental health garden parties and thematic essay contests.

Furthermore, every university has a mental health education and counselling centre, which organises various activities to enhance students' well-being and resilience. In addition to one-to-one and one-to-many counselling sessions by full-time and part-time psychological counsellors, there are other activities in various forms. A prime example is peer counselling, which is based on the training system of Stanford University's "Bridge" peer counselling programme, and has been running for eleven years.

Suitable peer mentors are selected from applicants and given comprehensive training. Each undergraduate student is assigned a peer mentor to assist them during their college adjustment period. Besides peer helping, we have expanded the team of full-time counsellors and group counselling programmes.

These are some of the practices adopted to improve students' well-being. To enhance research on mental health education, we have launched the "Interdisciplinary Intersection Platform for Mental Health Education". The platform focuses on strengthening applied research on mental health education. We conducted a meta-analysis on the mental health of Chinese students, and a series of papers have been published.

4.5 Singapore Management University (Singapore)

SMU has adopted a proactive holistic wellbeing approach for students through operationalizing the SMU Resilience Framework, where students are empowered to take charge of their own wellbeing; where the focus is on fostering holistic wellbeing instead of just mental health per se. The SMU Resilience Framework aims to build resilience in students in six distinct yet inter-related dimensions of wellbeing (adapted from Hettler,1976):

Dimensions of Well-being	Related Scope
Physical	body, exercise, nutrition, healthy habits
Intellectual	mental challenge, critical thinking, commitment to learning, study and time management
Social	relationships, interaction, conflict-management, respect

Emotional	self-awareness, management of feelings, emotions, reactions
Career	employability, skills, self-value, relevance
Financial	financial literacy, expense management, financial health, security

Some of the support services and activities that SMU has are:

- a) Online learning resources such a range of wellness-related modules, videos and podcasts. For example, the university has developed the online module “Mental Health and You” which aims to help students understand why mental wellness matters, teaches them practical strategies to look after their mental wellbeing and provides advice on when and how to seek help. This is a mandatory module which all students are required to complete in their freshmen year.
- b) Workshops, Roadshows and Campaigns to engage with students, creating awareness of and destigmatizing mental wellbeing issues, imparting skills and knowledge on how to manage the different stressors they are face with, as well as creating awareness of the different avenues where they can seek help. For example, the THRIVE workshop series offers specially curated workshops that equip students with knowledge and skills related to personal success, team success, learning success and wellbeing. Examples of past workshop topics include “Managing Personal Finance”, “Managing Difficult People” and “Study Stress and Study Skills Management”. These complimentary workshops are held throughout the year and students are encouraged to participate in workshops that they find relevant to developing their resilience in wellbeing dimensions they have identified as priority areas.
- c) Professional counselling services offering both individual counselling sessions as well as group therapy or wellbeing circle sessions.
- d) Professional case management and support services for cases of harassment, bullying and discrimination.
- e) Disability support services which provide assistance for students with special needs, promotes disability awareness and inclusivity.
- f) Professional career coaching services offered to all students.
- g) Peer support through SMU Peer Helpers, a group of students trained as para-counselors, peer mentoring and peer tutoring programmes.
- h) First Responders, who are staff, trained to observe and look out for students in distress

In addition, the dimensions of the SMU Resilience Framework are also intentionally weaved into the conceptualisation of various university events and activities for students. For instance, engaging students on the six dimensions of resilience through online games during the University’s Patron’s Day as well as curation of photo exhibitions during the SMU Arts Festival depicting real-life stories of individuals exemplifying mental, physical and emotional resilience.

4.6 University of St. Gallen (Switzerland)

Like many HEOs, the University of St.Gallen has a differentiated portfolio of specific services, many of which cater directly or indirectly to students’ needs. Importantly, we take a holistic understanding of support services and emphasise supplementing each other and attempting to refer students to relevant other services, such as is commonly the case. Referrals can, for

example, be between special needs and psychological counselling or pastoral care and the HSG care team, which provides psychological first aid.

Figure 3 illustrates the various services at HSG and attempts to order them along the different needs of students. Furthermore, and connecting to the previously described notions of general prevention, selective prevention and early treatment, different services currently support different forms of prevention, with the psychological counselling centre also offering early treatment and diagnostics. Psychological Counselling Services (in the following abbreviated as PCS) currently hold three full-time positions. The team is integrated into a counselling centre and the Vice President’s Board of Studies and Academic Affairs.

The PCS offers a range of services, from psychological counselling, supervision for staff and crisis intervention to conceptual work for the organisation and is, together with university sports, a driver in being a health-promoting university.

Mapping of Services@HSG



Figure 1: Mapping support services at the University of St.Gallen
Florian Schulz (2021), University of St.Gallen

Figure 3: Map of HSG Support Services

4.7 WU - Vienna University of Economics and Business (Austria)

WU has built a comprehensive student support infrastructure to meet students’ needs. Complementary to the centrally organised programmes, peer support initiatives have also been established.

Mentoring@WU and **Starting@WU** are both programmes to support students during their start into WU’s bachelor’s programmes. Whereas Mentoring@WU offers support for first-year students (mentees) by second-year and third-year students regarding the organisation of their studies, Starting@WU enables first-year students to deal intensively with a social or green project within their first-year communities.

The **Student Counselling Programme** supports students through emotionally challenging stages in their studies and offers various counselling formats and activities to strengthen self-efficacy and to tackle demanding situations. The intention of the programme is to find a good

combination of sharing knowledge about well-being as well as offering practical experience so that they can integrate their insights into daily student life. Within one-to-one coaching for students with a personal issue, the team of the Student Counselling Programme tries to encourage the students' agency and autonomy. They work with a body-based approach and – depending on the situation and constitution of the student – teach exercises. Each semester, the programme has a focus subject and offers a variety of group formats that students can participate in to develop and strengthen their study and life skills (meta skills that they can apply in any life situation).

In addition, the initiative **Learning Ergonomics** offers an easily accessible programme for students, which can be integrated into their daily student life to help them study more efficiently. The programme includes a regular newsletter with suggestions for effective and healthy studying, a free exercise programme with active breaks (specifically designed for stress relief, to activate the brain, and assist concentration) and an online collection of tips and suggestions for effective studying.

As an arbitration board for conflicts and a contact point for complaints or other study-related concerns, WU's **Ombuds Office** advises students and mediates in disagreements with teachers or service facilities. The ombudspersons act neutrally and seek amicable solutions. Contact is confidential and can also be made anonymously. Furthermore, there are different programmes and initiatives focusing on specific target groups, such as the programme **BeAble**, which accommodates students with disabilities or a facilitated peer group for students with a child (or children). Moreover, WU's **Student Association** (ÖH-WU) supports students in social and study-related matters and provides special advisory on issues, such as taxes, family allowances and international exchange studies.

5. Good Practices and Initiatives

The following chapter describes the various approaches, evidence-based practices and innovative solutions to address and foster student well-being among the university environments.

5.1 Copenhagen Business School (Denmark)

5.1.1 Study Start and the How to Uni

CBS continuously works on the study start programme, including study start at individual programmes, as well as a mentor programme. In 2022, CBS's new online How to Uni course and study start test now supplement the First Year Experience activities and help newcomers gear up for becoming university students.

How to Uni comprises videos, texts and graphics in four categories: from pupil to student, learning habits, motivation and mindset and cooperation and educational communities. Students can also chat together and network with fellow students before they begin at CBS. As the students could access the How to Uni course in August before setting foot on campus, many are already familiar with study techniques and how high school and university differ.

The course was developed in cooperation between the University of Southern Denmark (SDU) and the Student Counselling Service (Studenterrådgivningen), an organisation that offers counselling to all students at institutions of higher education. CBS was one of several universities that was offered a space in a reference group last year to give feedback on the course, which can be adapted to suit specific university needs. CBS runs the course on Canvas – and in both Danish and English

<https://cbswire.dk/how-to-uni-new-online-course-prepares-new-students-for-university/>.

5.1.2 Grade-free first year at HA (psyk)

“Reports of rising stress levels and a more hostile, competitive environment prompted the study board to implement a gradeless first year. The initiative was initiated by student representatives, and the aim was to emphasize learning over performance, thereby also reducing stress and increasing student well-being. Once institutional support had been granted, the programme’s management collaborated with a pedagogical consultant to design an intervention, slated to start in fall 2018, in which all first-year grades would be substituted with pass/fail assessments and written and oral feedback from educators and student peers. All educators were invited to workshops on how to give students feedback and to hold gradeless exams, and regular meetings were held with educators to discuss challenges and ensure the removal of administrative obstacles. To provide solid ground for evaluation of the gradeless initiative three researchers—the authors, followed the initiative closely with the second author also more directly involved as part of the teaching team”. Kjærgaard, A, Mikkelsen, E. N and Buhl-Wiggers, J. (2022).

5.1.3 Mindset interventions:

The objective of the project was to support students in transition and teach them to master life skills. A full description is available at: <https://srg.dk/en/til-uddannelsesinstitutioner/samarbejde-om-studietrivsel/> -> Mindset intervention. This pilot project was conducted in 2022 (two programmes participated). A continuation of the interventions will be implemented in one of the two programmes in 2023.

5.1.4 Support for study boards and lectures on collaboration and group work/study groups

Three workshops for Study Boards were held in September 2022. Based on inputs from the workshop, Teaching and Learning developed a support package for Study Boards and lectures deliverables include:

- webinars and workshops
- collaborative learning
- design tools for inclusion in the classroom
- understanding and supporting student well-being: how to integrate well-being in teaching, using tools to improve collaborative capabilities
- learning about the students and generation lockdown
- memo and recommendations on working with study groups administratively and
- action cards – harassment, group work, etc.

5.1.5 Lockdown initiatives

The lockdown initiatives consisted of a range of activities/projects initiated in February 2021. During the lockdown period, the focus of the projects was easily implemented activities that may improve student well-being during the lockdown period:

- well-being ambassadors
- motivation in online teaching and
- outreach programme.

By study start 2021, the focus shifted, as we needed to address how to welcome the students back and reintegrate them into student life on campus. The traditional study start was expanded to include not only newly admitted first-year students, but also second-year and third-year students, as well as employees. Furthermore, reintegration and the reboot of the campus study environment was funded by the Ministry of Higher Education and Science who awarded all higher education institutions funding to this end. CBS received DKK 5,8 million to be used in autumn 2021–2022. The reboot project in 2022 consisted of four initiatives:

- outreach initiative (continuation of the 2021 initiative)
- well-being ambassadors (new format)
- online universe (student well-being and study technique) and
- add-on courses.

5.1.6 Outreach initiative

From 2020–2022, the outreach project has been in contact with more than 700 individual students. The main purpose is to reach out to bachelor and graduate students (chosen based on specific parameters, e.g., not having passed the expected ECTS, or issues identified by their study programme/student counsellors). When in contact with the students, we show them that CBS cares, we counsel them and, if needed, we refer them to further guidance counselling at CBS or to our external partners (e.g., student counselling). At the end of the semester, patterns are identified and knowledge on student well-being is gathered, analysed and recommendations are communicated to the organisation.

Feedback from students contacted through the outreach project has been overwhelmingly positive. They are happy that CBS is reaching out. The students who needed help talked to someone earlier, than if they would have reached out themselves (win-win for the students and CBS). New knowledge on student well-being has been created, but do we have a better understanding of what challenges the students face and what strategies they use?

5.1.7 Well-being ambassadors

The well-being ambassadors (WBAs) were created to improve student well-being and initiate social activities (student-to-student) during lockdown. WBAs created a range of activities every week during lockdown in spring 2021. Post-lockdown, the WBAs' objective was to help reboot the social aspects of student life. WBAs (and individual students) could book activities together with their fellow students and thereby have the opportunity to do something together. In spring 2022, 30 WBAs were active and created different social activities for their fellow students. Twenty-five WBAs received student citizenship for their efforts. The programme was closed in winter 2022.

5.1.8 Intro for all / reboot

The project has defined a range of academic and social activities/ideas that study boards / programme directors may choose to use / be inspired by when planning a reboot for second-year and third-year students. As a result of COVID-19, a lot of our students (especially first-year and second-year bachelor's as well as graduate students) never actually started their student lives at CBS. Through this project, we offered students a reboot and reintroduce them to student life, their academic programmes and CBS through a range of social and academic activities.

5.2 ESADE Business School (Spain)

At ESADE, we currently work on the resilience of our students through a series of transversal projects where we deploy health promotion and prevention strategies. Below, we present three of the initiatives:

5.2.1 First-Year Experience Programme

This programme offers co-curricular activities that help first-year students adapt to the academic and cultural environment at ESADE. There are four aspects of the programme: face-to-face workshops that focus on training in the most difficult, critical areas of a welcoming and incorporation process; off-campus day trips; peer groups among first-year students for accompanying and personal development; and additional resources, such as the spirituality service, individual counselling and the e-buddy project that is organised by the student association.

5.2.2 Examination Itinerary

The Exams Itinerary focuses on accompanying students in exam preparation, giving strategies for time management, stress, planning and concentration. It is organised in three areas:

- The Irrational beliefs and stress management workshop: a one-hour session focused on helping identify irrational thoughts and how to replace them with rational ones. This workshop also teaches relaxation techniques.
- A Mindfulness workshop: mindfulness focused on exams.
- Individual sessions for time management: individual sessions of 30 minutes where time management and concentration tools are given.

5.2.3 ESADE Well-being days

Campus Life organises these days for which activities related to health promotion are developed (e.g., yoga, meditation, nutrition, physiotherapy).

5.3 Hitotsubashi University (Japan)

5.3.1 Workshops on popular topics

In an effort to overcome the stigma associated with support-seeking, as well as making student support services more visible, Hitotsubashi University support offices regularly organise workshops on topics such as career choice and social skills training. Students find it easier to participate in workshops that deal with job hunting or improving communication skills than workshops focused specifically on mental health issues. By participating in such workshops, students can find out more about the services provided by the university, and gain confidence to seek help for more personal issues. Increasing visibility of support services can also be achieved

by closer cooperation between faculty and student support offices. For example, at the beginning of the pandemic, when students and staff experienced the greatest distress, faculty members invited counsellors as guest speakers to their course to let students know about the available support services on campus. This way, student support offices managed to overcome the challenge of offering help to those who needed it most.

5.3.2 Empowering faculty and students

To overcome the challenge of offering adequate support with limited resources, university support services learned to empower faculty and students to take the responsibility of helping those in need. When the pandemic struck, faculty development seminars, pertaining to the best ways to support students through those difficult times, were held to offer guidance to staff. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, student support offices can only offer limited support concerning academic issues. Consequently, the university is debating whether to launch a peer advising system through which students in need of help with academic issues can receive support from other students on campus. Currently, an online tutoring system for international students and students with disabilities is underway. As informal support has become scarcer after the start of the pandemic, expanding the tutoring system to include peer support for any student in need of academic help is crucial.

Although the pandemic posed significant challenges to promoting student well-being, it also brought several opportunities to light. For example, before the pandemic, student support offices offered only face-to-face counselling. After switching to an online-only counselling service, the advantages of online counselling were uncovered e.g., flexibility and privacy, and currently both face-to-face and online counselling are provided.

5.4 Renmin University (China)

5.4.1 Double reduction policy

China advocates quality-oriented education as a solution to the problems arising from exam-oriented education, but it is a time-consuming process. One of the major steps taken towards this goal is the "double reduction" policy. Chinese authorities have introduced guidelines to reduce the burden of excessive homework and off-campus tutoring for students undergoing compulsory education. The document, jointly issued by the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council, prohibits local authorities from approving new tutoring institutions for academic course training. In addition, in primary and secondary schools, authorities advocate for labour education, encouraging students to learn by doing so that they can experience real-life situations and appreciate the beauty of life.

5.4.2 Collaboration and linkage

As a higher education institution, we collaborate with high schools to help students understand universities and majors. We also promote orientation education for college freshmen, guide them to understand academic competition, develop effective study strategies, strengthen academic planning and enrich extracurricular activities. In terms of colleges and universities, we take the linkage mechanism of universities, families and hospitals to deal with psychological crisis events. This treatment is mainly aimed at students with moderate or more severe

symptoms, in order to find the crisis in time and conduct a timely referral and intervention. We advocate that we are very responsible when it comes to our students' mental health. Therefore, we have also introduced some practical activities to promote this idea. For example, we also try to use the WeChat official account to launch the popular science content of mental health knowledge, hoping to improve students' mental health awareness and self-regulation ability so that students' well-being can flourish.

5.5 Singapore Management University (Singapore)

SMU launched the SMU Sustainability Blueprint in September 2022 of which one of the four strategies is to foster resilient communities through adopting a holistic wellbeing approach for the entire SMU community. To achieve this, operationalisation of the SMU Resilience Framework was strengthened for students, staff and faculty.

The SMU Resilience Framework (Figure 4) was first developed and adopted as the whole-of-University approach towards promoting students' holistic wellbeing. Launched on 18 October 2021 at the opening of SMU's Mental Health Awareness Week 2021, the SMU Resilience Framework seeks to foster holistic wellbeing through the development of resilience in students in six inter-related dimensions: physical, intellectual, financial, career, social and emotional (adapted from Hettler's dimensions of wellness). Using the three-pronged approach of Education, Encouragement and Experiences, the SMU Resilience Framework has been adopted as an approach in health promotion where students are empowered to take charge of their own wellbeing; and where the focus is on fostering holistic wellbeing instead of just mental health per se. The framework is also aligned to SMU's Graduate Learning Outcomes (GLO), where resilience and positivity are identified as desired outcomes under 'Personal Mastery'.

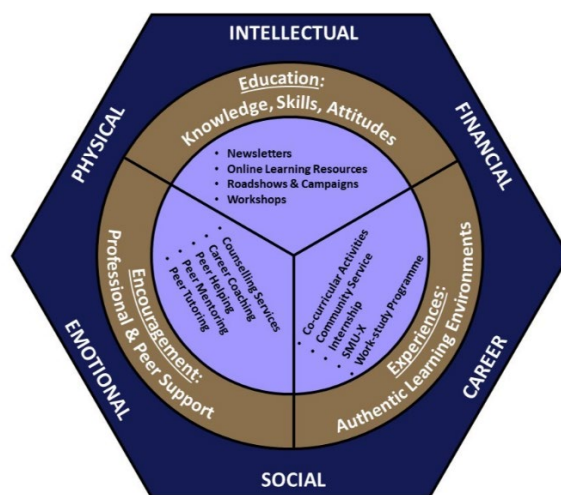


Figure 4: The SMU Resilience Framework

The Framework was also developed to provide a coherent unifying structure for the various activities and programmes already offered to students and to guide future ones. Activities and programmes planned by the various units within ODOS aim to equip students with skills and knowledge to develop their personal resilience in one or more of the resilience dimensions.

SMU also recognises the importance of a community-based approach in supporting students, especially in mental health. The mental health support pyramid adopted is shown in Figure 5 below.



Figures 5: Mental Health Support Pyramid

To strengthen the operationalisation of the Framework in the endeavour to proactively boost the overall well-being of students, SMU has initiated the following:

5.5.1 Strengthening education efforts

- Steps to increase awareness amongst faculty, staff and students of issues pertaining to mental health through a range of platforms, including workshops, online modules, newsletters and roadshows.
- From academic year 2021 onwards, all incoming freshmen have to complete the online module *'Mental Health and You'*, which helps students understand why mental wellness matters and gives practical strategies for looking after their mental wellbeing and advice on when and how to seek help. The module will remain a resource accessible to students throughout their time in SMU.
- To broaden our education efforts to faculty and staff, an online module *'Supporting Students' Mental Wellbeing'* for staff and faculty has been developed and is in the pilot phase. This module will equip all faculty and student-facing staff with baseline mental health literacy (e.g., identification of early warning signs, skills to provide appropriate support and referral). It will also serve as a handy resource which faculty and staff can refer to on demand.
- Self-help app named *Resilience@SMU* available to all faculty, staff and students was launched on 18 October 2022. Amongst other features, the app allows users to track their wellbeing and provides users resources to each of the resilience dimensions
- The **SMU Resilience Framework website**, launched on 18 October 2022, also serves as a repository of resources and tools for faculty, staff and students. The website is customised to cater to the needs of the different segments of the SMU Community, and upon identification as a faculty/staff or student, corresponding tailored information and resources will be displayed. In particular, the SMU-developed Resilience Dimensions Self-Check quiz on the website enables users to identify the areas where they can consider strengthening. The website also contains reflections of students who share their personal resilience journeys.

5.5.2 Strengthening encouragement effort

- Professional Counselling Support – the recruitment of an additional 2 full-time and 1 part-time counsellor has enabled the Wellness Centre to better meet the demands for counselling services. Group counselling or therapy sessions have also been introduced to students who feel they can benefit from sharing similar experiences, giving and

receiving affirmative feedback, and trying of new interpersonal behaviours in a safe, controlled environment.

- **Student Care Officers** – the recruitment of 2 full-time Student Care Officers (SCOs) to partner Schools in providing socio-emotional support to students. The SCOs play an important role in the mental health support pyramid, acting as an intermediate intervention point to triage various student cases. They work within the school community to understand the unique needs of the students at each School and to work with faculty and staff to run targeted wellbeing support, initiatives and programmes.

5.5.3 Towards an evidence-based approach

- **Student pulse surveys** - conducted every semester to keep abreast of student sentiments and to be able to react very quickly to concerns that arise. The Survey provides relevant data on the University's operationalisation of the SMU Resilience Framework, enabling an evidence-based approach to be adopted in designing appropriate intervention measures and helping the University identify and curate relevant programmes.
- **Measurement of programme effectiveness** – SMU has started measuring the effectiveness of, for a start, selected programmes using the validated Resilience Index developed by SMU's Centre for Research on Successful Ageing (ROSA). The Resilience Index has also been incorporated in the Student Pulse Survey allowing us to track how the students' resilience, as a cohort, has changed during their time with SMU. The University also intends to obtain qualitative inputs from students before they graduate, on how the whole SMU experience had helped them cultivate resilience. These inputs would aid SMU in measuring the impact of the Resilience Framework.
- **Monitoring trends in students' needs post-covid** - In a recent survey (June 2022) conducted by SMU's Student Association, students have indicated the following key concerns: Academic performance, internship opportunities and employment, as well as mental wellness (relationships, Covid-19 and physical health).

SMU recognises that resilience is an active process where one develops the ability to withstand and adjust to difficult situations, and to bounce back from perceived failure, disappointment, or rejection. Through active engagement with students, continuous reviews and a ground up approach, SMU aims for the operationalisation of the SMU Resilience Framework to equip students with skills that have a lasting impact in their future careers and relationships, enabling them to make choices towards a more successful life, even when faced with challenging circumstances. This Framework has also since been adopted and adapted for faculty and staff of SMU.

5.6 University of St. Gallen (Switzerland)

5.6.1 Early treatment and diagnostics

Psychological Counselling Service

The Psychological Counselling Service good practices involve the following:

- a team of at least two to allow intervention and stand-in arrangements during absence and vacation
- continuous supervision and advanced training of staff
- a low threshold self-referral system, for example, via e-mail, phone or online booking system
- onsite and online counselling options.

Psychological First Aid

In 2016, the HSG Care Team was established to provide members of the university with psychological first aid and to coordinate aftercare following potentially traumatising events. The HSG Care Team closes a gap in care in the case of acute events. It is structurally located between the existing psychosocial counselling services of the university and the professional blue-light organisations. Sadly, the most common case of the HSG Care Team is a response in the aftermath of suicide attempts or suicides and takes care of affected students and their relatives.

Coordination of procedures in the event of the death of HSG family members

In addition to psychological first aid, the HSG Care Team coordinated the Procedure after the Death of HSG Relatives, which was developed under the mandate of the Corona Task Force in 2020. As part of crisis management, the procedure structures the communication channels transparently within and outside the organisation. It thus contributes to a professional and respectful process flow in the event of the death of students or employees of the university. Since 2021, the PBS now also functions as the official reporting office for deaths of HSG relatives.

5.6.2 Selective prevention

Special counselling services

Special counselling services aim to reduce the inhibition threshold for initial contact with the PBS and give people seeking advice an initial orientation regarding their health behaviour. For such counselling offers to be used, sufficient advertising is required, which is why it makes sense to integrate the counselling sessions into a more significant event, such as HSG Health Days. In 2021, we offered two counselling formats.

Health check

The Health Check, which was organised with the Medical Students Association of the Joint Medical Master, offered HSG members advice on the topics of stress, blood sugar, high blood pressure and skin cancer. In addition to an initial measurement and feedback on the results, participants received further information and were informed about treatment options.

Stress counselling

The stress counselling consisted of two parts. In the first part, the participants were given a self-report questionnaire, the so-called Distress Thermometer, which allows a quick assessment of the professional stress level and existing psychosomatic complaints. In the second part, the questionnaire results are taken up in the context of personalised consultation and possible stress-reducing measures are discussed. Participants also receive further information and references to free offers within and outside the university.

Workshops

Workshops are offered through the semester on a wide range of topics. Examples include redirecting exam anxiety, increasing meaning in life, reducing procrastination, etc.

Primary Prevention

Psychoeducational events belong to measures of primary prevention. They convey, in the form of interactive lectures, scientifically sound information about a behavioural approach that is

tailored to psychological, social and physical needs and provide space for the critical examination of the individual's action-guiding assumptions.

5.6.3 Health promotion

HSG Health Days 2021

With HSG Sport and a team of student assistants, the PBS held the HSG Health Days for the second time in 2021. In addition to offering primary and secondary preventive services, the Health Days aimed to raise awareness of the topic of (mental) health and to publicise existing services. The motto of the Health Days, "think health differently – rethink performance", was intended to reflect critically on the often one-sided focus on performance and to supplement it with other aspects, such as sustainable physical, mental and social health. At the centre of the considerations was the idea that the individual must continuously devote time, attention and energy to her/his own mental, physical and social health and energy, and this is a prerequisite for well-being and sustainable performance. Thus, the HSG Health Days were also concerned with communicating to the HSG community and external parties that sustainable living is an essential value of the university.

5.7 WU - Vienna University of Economics and Business (Austria)

WU currently works on a broad variety of support programmes and initiatives to improve student well-being. Here we present a selection of our learnings and current approaches:

- To further improve the **onboarding** for our incoming bachelor's students, we currently work on an even stronger integration of the related programmes (Mentoring@WU, Starting@WU) with WU's welcome days for first-year students and the introductory lectures.
- Within WU's Student Counselling Programme, our coaches gained experience with an **embodiment approach** as a simple and practical approach to foster agency, self-awareness and autonomy. Enabling students to apply embodied practices and teaching them relevant tools improve their **self-empowerment**.
- **Facilitated peer groups** (e.g., for students seeking motivation, students with child/ren, students with ADHD, students with dyslexia) are a wonderful way of supporting the development of peer-to-peer exchange and support. Furthermore, this approach does not require too many resources (staff/time) once the initial set-up works well and becomes established.
- **External network:** With the Student Counselling Programme, WU chose to implement an easily accessible support service. To ensure long-term support for those in need, building up a strong network of experts (e.g., therapists, psychologists, coaches, psychiatrists) outside the university is an essential key for the Student Counselling Programme to succeed.

6. Summary

The paper addresses the challenges and opportunities available to universities in promoting and ensuring student well-being, given academic demands, financial pressures, the stigmatism associated with seeking help, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its prime objectives are to learn from each other to create a broader understanding of student needs and to share

experiences and practices to better address them. While each SIGMA university faces unique challenges, we all share the common goal of promoting student well-being and creating structural support to build student resilience, and to increase the awareness and use of available support.

The experiences point to the importance of early treatment and diagnostics, selective prevention, general prevention, and mental health promotion in HEOs. To better address student well-being needs in the future will require more holistic, collaborative institutional approaches that include peer counselling and faculty engagement.

As CBS pointed out, many challenges students face today are general societal trends that spill over into the educational system. Supporting students to face uncertainty, reduce anxiety and to develop alternative plans will not only help to boost student success during their studies but also prepare them be more resilient to handle challenges in their future careers and contributions to society.

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