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Student well-being matters: Academic library support for the whole student

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Abstract: In response to a marked increase in the prevalence and severity of mental health problems among college students over the last decade, colleges and universities have been expanding their well-being initiatives and programs. No longer limited to health services departments, the support of student well-being has been taken up by multiple campus units, including academic libraries. As well-being has been shown to impact academic outcomes, the well-being initiatives libraries develop fit in with their commitment to enhance learning and student educational experience overall. A comprehensive review of wellness interventions in academic libraries, this article presents findings on student well-being and provides a rationale for institutional responses to the crisis. It describes well-being initiatives across library collections, services, and spaces. It then critiques the trend and includes recommendations for implementing effective and assessable well-being initiatives. The article ends with a brief discussion of library well-being initiatives during COVID-19.

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Introduction

The growing prevalence and severity of mental health problems among students have become issues of critical importance for institutions of higher education. As poor mental health and overall ill-being negatively affect academic outcomes, colleges and universities have been prioritizing campus-wide initiatives that aim to promote student well-being. Academic libraries have been active participants in these efforts either by joining institutional wellness campaigns or developing their own interventions. This paper contextualizes the student well-being crisis and explores the varied ways in which academic libraries have been addressing it. The purpose of the article is to convey the urgency of the problem and to provide a rationale for student well-being interventions in academic libraries. Focused as it is on well-being initiatives in academic libraries, the paper places wellness in the context of higher education. Consequently, a combination of keywords "academic libraries," "college students," "library services," "well-being," "wellness," and "mental health" was used to identify citations in databases whose

content covers education-related research and librarianship: Education Source, Emerald Insights, Library and Information Science Abstracts, Library and Information Science Source, Professional Development Collection, and Google Scholar. Comprehensive in scope, the overview is based on published research and case studies, as well as academic articles in the fields of educational psychology, counseling, and library information science. Trade publications, conference presentations and library websites are also included to report on some newly emerging practices.

The article starts with a summary of recent trends in student well-being and includes an overview of probable causes of the crisis. It then lays out the reasons why colleges and universities have started to identify student wellness as one of their institutional priorities. The second half of the article is a summary of existing LIS literature on well-being initiatives in academic libraries. This section organizes the wide range of well-being interventions into the main functional areas of academic libraries, including resources, services, and spaces. To facilitate the development of effective wellness interventions in libraries that have yet to design theirs, the article includes critiques of existing practices and offers recommendations for implementing future well-being initiatives. The article concludes with a brief discussion of library well-being initiatives during COVID-19.

Note to Reader: While at present "well-being" appears to have supplanted "wellness," the author employs these terms interchangeably throughout this article, reflective of their use in the literature and institutions over time.

Student well-being

Concern about student well-being has grown in recent years as college administrators and researchers have been observing a marked increase in the prevalence and severity of mental health problems among the population. The percentage of students reporting various forms of psychological distress has greatly increased, and more students than ever seek assistance at college counseling centers that struggle to meet the demand (Hunt and Eisenberg, 2010; Byrd and McKinney, 2012; Baldwin et al., 2017; Brown, 2018). Rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide-related outcomes (including self-injury, suicide ideation, suicide plans and attempts) have all grown at an alarming rate (Baldwin, 2017; Duffy, Twenge, and Joiner, 2019; Lattie, Lipson,and Eisenberg, 2019; Linden and Stuart, 2020). Risky health behaviors among college students, drug and alcohol use among them, have been on the rise as well (Castillo and Schwartz, 2013; Baldwin et al., 2017; Brown 2018). Duffy, Twenge, and Joiner's (2019) longitudinal analysis of the National Health Assessment and the Healthy Minds Study, two large national datasets, has shown that the worrisome trend cannot be explained by greater mental health awareness, willingness to seek help, or the availability of counseling services. In other words, the reduced stigma surrounding mental health and improved access to resources do not fully account for the growing numbers of students who seek counseling (Eisenberg, 2019).

Indeed, attending college places unique demands and pressures that may make students more susceptible to psychological distress; students' lifestyles and relationships can change dramatically, as can their eating and sleeping habits, to say nothing about the academic and financial challenges many encounter (Conley, Travers, and Bryant, 2013; Ibrahim, Kelly, Adams, and Glazebrook, 2013). In a related manner, some studies suggest that colleges have not been adequately serving their increasingly diverse and large populations who experience stressors

that may adversely affect their mental health. Growing class sizes, lack of personal connections on campus, and financial stress related to tuition cost have been listed among potential reasons why student well-being is less than optimal (Brown, 2018). Campus culture also matters and affects students' overall mental health. Students who report having experienced discrimination because of their race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation have a higher risk of psychological distress than those who have not had such encounters (Byrd and McKinney, 2012; Castillo and Schwartz, 2013). Similarly, Hunt and Eisenberg (2010) report on findings that particular groups of students are more prone to psychological distress than others, especially students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, those who experience personal relationship stressors, have low social support, or have been victims of sexual violence. Nontraditional students, a growing population across all types of postsecondary institutions, face unique barriers and pressures, which render them vulnerable to mental health crises (Hermon and Davis, 2004). The data on student populations with markedly lower levels of well-being highlight that overall health and wellness are socially determined and related to race, ethnicity, sex, adverse early life experiences, income level, food insecurity, housing, and access to health care, among a host of additional social indicators (Adler, Glymour, & Fielding, 2016; Compton and Shim, 2015; Wilkinson and Marmot, 2003).

At the same time as researchers are looking at campuses to identify possible reasons why students do not fare well, Eisenberg (2019) notes that the troubling trend has been reported in many different countries throughout the world, at college and universities with vastly different organizational structures and learning environments, which makes it improbable that the college context itself is the factor driving the rise in mental health decline among

students. Indeed, Twenge (2020) shows that in the U.S. the rapid growth in mental health issues

has been observed among adolescents in general and is thus not limited to college students.

Given the widespread pattern of psychological distress among young people, Twenge (2020)

points to the use of technology, including smartphones and social media, as a contributing

factor. Eisenberg (2019) also refers to research on technology and social media use, as well as

the resulting changes in face-to-face socialization and sleep patterns, as correlates of the

dramatic uptick in mental health disorders in college students and young people overall. And

yet, as plausible as the relationship between technology and mental health crisis on campuses

may be, it must be understood as just one of many factors negatively affecting mental

well-being of young people today (Twenge, 2020).

       The rise in the prevalence and severity of psychological distress among students alarms

mental health professionals and college administrators alike. Lattie, Lipson, and Eisenberg

(2019) refer to "the epidemiological vulnerability of the college years," or the fact that young

adulthood is known to be a critical period during which patterns in mental health functioning

develop (4). Most lifetime mental disorders develop by the age of 24 (Brown, 2018; Hunt and

Eisenberg, 2010) and such an early onset is associated with "severity, chronicity, and treatment

nonresponse, as well as future suicide attempts and death by suicide" (Duffy, Twenge, and

Joiner, 2019, 596).

       As if the potentially lifelong consequences of college-age psychological distress were not

dire enough, students who navigate academic pressures while experiencing mental health

problems struggle to succeed academically. As well-being and learning are linked, mental health

issues negatively affect educational outcomes (Harward, 2016). As Douce and Keeling (2014)

put it, in order to do well in college "students have to be ready to learn—in a state of physical, psychological, emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual well-being" (1). Mental and behavioral health problems not only limit students' ability to learn, but they also impair their "persistence, retention, and graduation" (Douce and Keeling, 2014, 1). Indeed, studies have shown that mental health problems and multiple academic indicators are connected. Eisenberg, Golberstein, and Hunt (2009) found that, for undergraduates and graduates alike, mental health issues correlate with lower academic achievement. Their analysis of a longitudinal sample of students showed that depression, anxiety, and eating disorders were strongly predictive of lower GPA; co-occurring depression and anxiety was additionally associated with a higher risk of dropping out (Eisenberg, Golberstein, and Hunt, 2009). De Luca et al. (2016) examined how suicidal ideation, mental health and substance use disorders, as well as feelings of social connectedness, affect students' academic performance. Overall, the severity of each was negatively associated with students' educational outcomes, including GPA and retention (De Luca et al., 2016). Similarly, Auerbach et al. (2016) who analyzed the World Health Organization World Mental Health Surveys of college students in 21 countries found a negative association between mental disorders and college completion; notably, students who entered college with pre-existing mental health issues were more likely to drop out than students who developed problems after starting college. All in all, the college years are a high risk period during which lifelong mental health problems first manifest, adversely impacting students' academic success and potentially leading to persistent psychosocial difficulties.

At the same time as college marks a heightened vulnerability to mental health disorders and their detrimental effects, the period also presents a window of opportunity to set a

foundation for overall health and wellbeing across the lifespan (Baldwin et al., 2017; Franzidis and Zinder, 2019; Hunt and Eisenberg, 2010). College, in other words, is "a key developmental period of psychosocial risk versus resilience" (Conley, Travers, and Bryant, 2013, 75). Young adults face the new challenge of independently reconciling the simultaneous demands of studying, working, forming new and maintaining old relationships; with adequate support, during this difficult time, they may learn behaviors and strategies that would ensure their lifetime wellness (Baldwin et al., 2017). "Given the developmental and psychosocial challenges they face," Conley, Travers, and Bryant (2013, 75) argue, "college students are prime candidates for preventive mental health efforts, including mental health promotion." In turn, colleges themselves are uniquely well suited to address and promote holistic wellness among large groups of students (Baldwin et al., 2017; Conley, Travers, and Bryant, 2013; Franzidis and Zinder, 2019; Hunt and Eisenberg, 2010). Campuses operate as integrated environments where multiple aspects of students' lives cohere and where health and other support services are available, which creates an opportunity to prevent mental health issues and promote wellbeing in a variety of ways (Eisenberg, Golberstein, and Hunt, 2009; Hunt and Eisenberg, 2010). Their organizational model aside, colleges are also "structured around developing self-responsibility and new learning," a philosophical underpinning that can provide a springboard for fostering knowledge, skills, and habits known to contribute to lifelong wellness (Conley, Travers, and Bryant, 2013, 75).

Moreover, since overall health and well-being are socially determined, efforts to address and promote student well-being align with higher education's commitment to leveling social inequality and advancing social justice. The Okanagan Charter, an international group of

postsecondary institutions and related organizations that prioritize health and well-being in their communities, argues that because of its "central role in all aspects of the development of individuals, communities, societies and cultures," higher education must "take an explicit stance in favour of health, equity, social justice and sustainability for all, while recognizing that the well-being of people, places and the planet are interdependent" (2015, 5, 4).

Taken together, the above epidemiological, structural, philosophical, and mission-related considerations provide a strong rationale for higher education's involvement in promoting student well-being.

Definitions of well-being

Despite colleges' growing concern about student well-being and active efforts to foster wellness on campuses, there is no unified definition of well-being that all institutions adopt (Travia et. al., 2020). In the last decade, however, there has been a growing understanding that student well-being is not simply the absence of physical and mental health conditions, but a multidimensional concept that encompasses physical, social, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and environmental aspects (ACHA, 2020; BToP, 2013; Franzidis and Zinder, 2019; Okanagan Charter, 2013). In this regard, colleges have been aligning themselves with the 1948 World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of health and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2018) description of well-being as multifaceted, objectively and subjectively measurable, and involving many dimensions of people's lives. Such holistic approach to well-being is at the core of the two models that are referenced in higher education contexts, Hettler's (1984) Six Dimensions of Wellness and Myers, Sweeney, and Witmer's (2000) Wheel of Wellness (Horton and Snyder, 2009; Hinchliffe and Wong, 2010; Franzidis and Zinder, 2019).

Hettler (1984) identifies the following core dimensions of an individual's well-being: physical, spiritual, intellectual, emotional, social, and occupational. While the physical aspect includes lifestyle factors such as exercise, nutrition, sleep, substance abuse, etc., the spiritual one refers to a person's search for meaning and purpose in life. In turn, the intellectual dimension involves learning, problem solving, and creativity. The emotional component of wellness refers to one's self-awareness and ability to manage a wide range of positive and negative emotions, and the social dimension has to do with one's ability to feel connected to one's community and environment. The occupational component of well-being is linked to finding satisfaction and fulfillment, or a "good fit," in one's career and profession. Hettler's (1984) multidimensional model is also dynamic as each of the components may be fostered and optimized through changes in mental models, behaviors, habits, and the environment in which one lives and works.

Similarly, Myers, Sweeney and Witmer's (2000) Wheel of Wellness is a holistic model charting "a way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being in which body, mind, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live more fully within the human and natural community" (252). The model identifies five life tasks that are interrelated and interconnected: spirituality, self-direction, work and leisure, friendship, and love. Spirituality refers to one's awareness of transcendence, which fosters a sense of wholeness and connection to the world at large.

Self-direction encompasses a range of factors, including self-worth, sense of control, self-regulation, coping and stress management abilities, intentionality, creativity, and problem solving. Work and leisure involve experiences and pursuits that provide an individual a sense of

accomplishment, engagement, pleasure, and joy. Friendship relates to a variety of social

relations and connections beyond love, or the intimate relationships that revolve around

marital, sexual, or familial bonds. Like Hettler's (1984) Six Dimensions of Wellness, the Wheel of

Wellness provides both a theoretical framework and practical approach in which each aspect of

well-being can be addressed and optimized through modifications at the individual, community,

and environmental levels (Myers, Sweeney, and Witmer, 2000).

Well-being on college campuses

In light of the above definitions of well-being, college initiatives geared towards fostering

optimal functioning among students need to incorporate all the varied facets of wellness.

Moreover, in order to be effective, such programs cannot be limited to specific units within an

institution. Instead, attention to well-being needs to pervade all aspects of campus culture,

including policies, services, curriculum, pedagogy, extracurricular programming, and physical

spaces (Franzidis and Zinder, 2019).

Responding to the worrisome uptick in mental health disorders among students and its

negative impact on academic achievement, colleges have embraced their unique responsibility

and opportunity to provide mental health support and promote well-being among students.

Multiple campus health-oriented organizations, including Bringing Theory to Practice (BT2P),

the Okanagan Charter, American College Health Association (ACHA) and its well-known Healthy

Campus program and National College Health Assessment (NCHA) survey, provide frameworks

and action plans that lay out strategies and practices to foster well-being on college campuses.

In addition, other professional organizations, such as NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in

Higher Education, the American Council on Education (ACE), and the American Psychological

Association (APA) have noted the urgency of the campus mental health crisis (Douce and

Keeling, 2014). The various wellness-oriented initiatives and action plans recognize that, in

order to be effective, well-being practices and policies need to be incorporated into all aspects

of campus culture,including administration, operations, and academics. Moreover, support

services and preventative initiatives ought to be complemented by proactive approaches that

foster behaviors and environments known to positively affect psychosocial health. In other

words, it is not enough that colleges identify at-risk or in-need students and provide them with

adequate assistance. As the brief manifesto issued by professional higher education

organizations phrases it, in order to promote and nurture student well-being, postsecondary

institutions ought to consider "the whole person, the whole educational experience, the whole

institution, the whole community" and work to "establish foundational, proactive, well-being

initiatives for the campus community …. that will allow increasing numbers of students to

flourish and thrive" ("Health and Well-Being in Higher Education: A Commitment to Student

Success," 2019). Travia, Larcus, Andes, and Gomes's (2020) investigatory study explored such

innovative well-being initiatives among colleges in the United States and Canada. Although

traditional health education efforts continue to predominate, programs and practices vary

greatly across campuses, with a noticeable trend toward developing more integrated

approaches that engaged the structural, organizational, financial, and policy-related aspects of

the institution (Travia et al., 2020). Howard's (2016) edited volume provides multiple examples

of well-being projects undertaken by colleges; in addition to the work done through campus

health services and counseling centers, they also include curricular and programmatic initiatives

(e.g., freshman seminars, learning communities, and peer mentoring), reorganization of academic support units, and professional development for teaching faculty.

Student well-being and academic libraries

In line with their institutions' emphasis on student well-being, many academic libraries have been participating in or creating their own wellness initiatives. Indeed, libraries' growing involvement in supporting well-being on campuses has been identified as one of the 2020 top trends in academic libraries by the ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee (Benedetti et al., 2020). Similarly, Llewellyn's (2019) review of recent innovative practices in academic libraries notes the growing interest in promoting well-being as an example of libraries' evolving efforts to enhance student experience and outcomes. The emerging interest in developing library services, programs, and spaces that would facilitate student wellness is an example of what Corrall and Jolly (2019) identify as "the social turn in library innovation," or a shift away "from collection-based to community-oriented service models" (Corrall and Jolly, 2019, 122). In this new framework, libraries take a holistic approach to the student experience, actively seeking partners and collaborators within and beyond the institution.

It was precisely such reorienting of the academic library--from an information commons to a learning commons model-- that Hinchliffe and Wong (2010) advocated in one of the earliest articles on embedding wellness into daily library functions to target and promote "holistic student development and growth using the library's existing spaces and resources" (219). Wellness-promotion, they argued, not only fit with existing student library use patterns, but it also aligned with colleges' and libraries' commitment to meet the needs of "the whole student"

(Hinchliffe and Wong, 2010). Similarly, Brewerton and Woolley (2016a; 2016b) point out that attending to student well-being falls in line with libraries' mandate to create conditions in which students can academically succeed and thrive.

The academic library's unique place in student lives, as well as its positioning on campus, are offered as key reasons why well-being initiatives belong in the library. As a provider of credible information and a safe communal place where students spend long hours, an academic library is a good fit for promoting and fostering student wellness (Brewerton and Woolley, 2016a; Brewerton and Woolley, 2016b; Ramsey and Aagard, 2018). In turn, with their information seeking and reference skills, librarians are well placed to offer initial referrals and reach out to campus partners directly engaged in student wellness (Brewerton and Woolley, 2016a; Brewerton and Woolley, 2016b). Walton (2018) points to the library's critical role in student learning and suggests that well-being initiatives, when well planned and executed, may be an important part of the effort to improve student outcomes. Sparks (2017) argues that by incorporating wellness and related complementary practices into their services, programming, and spaces, libraries may further enhance student educational experience. Ramsey and Aagard (2018) note that through their core functions academic libraries by default support student intellectual wellness, while the library's central campus location, extended service hours, and physical space offer additional opportunities for promoting other dimensions of well-being among students.

The number of academic libraries that engage in well-being initiatives has been growing in recent years. To capture the wide range of these innovative practices within and beyond traditional library functions, the following section provides an overview of wellness-oriented

undertakings as presented in the LIS literature since 2010. This overview aims to serve as a

blueprint for libraries that have yet to consider how their resources, services, programming, and

spaces, may contribute to student well-being. In recognition that few libraries are able to obtain

additional funding to support their own well-being interventions, It starts with a brief survey of

collaborations between libraries and other campus units. Such partnerships allow libraries to

actively participate in institutional well-being initiatives within their own budgetary and staff

limits. The review then moves on to discuss libraries' efforts to promote well-being through

their collections, services, and spaces.

Well-being and library partnerships

Despite the attention well-being has been receiving on college campuses, there is rarely

additional funding available to support libraries' own wellness programs. With no dedicated

budget, academic libraries have actively sought to join larger institutional initiatives or partner

with campus units already offering well-being services and resources. Without means to create

its own programming, the library at Teesside University hosted events offered within the

campus-wide Festival of Wellbeing (Porritt, 2019). Library space was made available for yoga,

mindfulness workshops, and related activities; although these initiatives did not originate from

the library, by hosting them, the library signalled its commitment to foster student wellness

(Porritt, 2019). Similarly, when student well-being was identified as a strategic priority, the

library at Keele University partnered up with the campus Sports Center to accommodate a

"pop-up gym" in the library during times when the athletic facility was closed and the library

was open (Smith, 2019). In the absence of institution-wide wellbeing mandates, libraries have

formed partnerships with campus Health Services to publicize related resources. The Albertsons

Library at Boise State University regularly offers its space for services such as seasonal flu shots, nutrition counseling, and stress management workshops (Ramsey and Aagard, 2018). With help from Health and Student Services, the Grenfell Library at Memorial University hosts regular yoga classes, with the instructor and equipment provided by the Wellness and Recreation Coordinator (Rose, Godfrey, and Rose (2015).

Well-being and library collections

In addition to inserting the library into college-wide well-being initiatives or joining forces with other campus units, libraries have worked to incorporate wellness into their existing functions, such as providing access to information. Although academic libraries generally collect and provide access to health-related information, not many of them sufficiently publicize the fact. Hallyburton, Kolenbrander, and Robertson (2008) argue that as trained information professionals college librarians ought to take a more active role in assisting students in finding and evaluating consumer health information. As health problems affect student academic performance, libraries would do well to publicize and promote their health-related resources, including print and online resources (Hallyburton, Kolenbrander, and Robertson, 2008). When Bippley (2014) surveyed undergraduate students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) to assess their awareness and use of health and wellness resources at the UNC-CH libraries, she found that few students knew about them and never used them. Whitmer et al. (2019) describe just how a library may endeavor to highlight their wellness-related collections. In alignment with Texas Woman's University's well-being and health initiative, the library added a search scope in their online catalog that allowed for more effective retrieval of relevant resources; in addition, a new subject guide provided a convenient starting point for exploring

and accessing health and wellness information within and beyond the library's collections (Whitmer et al., 2019).

While their wellness and health collections provide access to information on health matters specifically, libraries have also sought to promote their leisure collections -- and reading in general -- as a relaxing and communal activity that fosters student well-being. Porritt (2019) writes about adding a fiction collection in order to encourage students to view the library not only as a place to study but also as a place where they can unwind and curl up with a book. To publicize the collection and to invite students to see the library as a relaxing space, the library organized a talk on the therapeutic value of leisure reading; this workshop resulted in an informal reading group that now meets monthly over coffee and cake (Porritt, 2019). Similarly, the Edinburgh Napier University Library created a bibliotherapy collection, gamely named Shelf Help (Ennis, 2018). Librarians consulted with the university's Student Wellbeing and Inclusion Team to curate a collection that includes fiction, graphic novels, music, podcasts, films, documentaries, and relevant apps (Ennis, 2018). Clark and Robinson (2015) report that a new reading room at the Whitworth University Library gained in popularity after the library started hosting author talks and offering refreshments; to encourage the room's use among students, the library was planning to add a fireplace. Rather than focusing on the therapeutic or relaxing aspect of reading, the Marymount California University Library sought to contribute to the intellectual dimension of student well-being by actively participating in the One Campus, One Book program and organizing activities during the Banned Book Week (Hinchliffe and Wong, 2010). As the varied examples above demonstrate, academic libraries turn to their collections to support student wellness in ways that are either quite traditional (author talks, reading groups,

and thematic book events) or more innovative (adding a curated self-care collection). It is important to note that engagement with the collections may lend itself to therapeutic, intellectual, communal, and social effects, all of which have the potential to positively impact student well-being.

Well-being and library services

Just as libraries have looked to their collections to find opportunities to promote well-being, they have also been focusing on modifying, extending and adding services that would contribute to student wellness. At the basic level, to improve student well-being, libraries should identify and remove barriers to library use that negatively affect students (Walton, 2018). Besides prioritizing access, libraries ought to assess which services most benefit students (Walton, 2018).

The special services and programming offered during finals weeks, by far the most common well-being intervention in academic libraries, illustrates libraries' ability and eagerness to address the priorities Walton (2018) sees as the guiding principle of all wellness initiatives. Popular with students, final weeks library services aim to make the library a place well suited for both intense study and relaxation during the high-stakes period of the semester. Henrich (2020) suggests that libraries' readiness to explore unconventional stress-relief offerings during final speaks to the fact that librarians are more comfortable tackling final-related stress than they are with addressing other aspects of student well-being. When reviewing the range of final activities libraries undertake, Meyers-Martin and Borchard (2015) found that extended service hours, pet assisted therapy sessions, a variety of games, as well as arts and crafts activities were the most common offerings.

Keeping the library open late or even overnight provides students with a place to focus and study for long periods of time. When libraries extend their hours, they effectively remove at least one stressor, the limited availability of study spaces, and allow students to do their work without the impediment of an inflexible library schedule. In recognition that long study sessions take a toll on students, libraries accompany their extended hours with a host of special services and events to relieve exam-related stress and help students work more efficiently. At the same time as they offer an opportunity to take a break from studying, these final activities indirectly teach students how to manage stress and workload during high-pressure periods.

Readily embraced by libraries and popular with students, pet assisted therapy (PAT) sessions have become common during final weeks. Jalongo and McDevitt's (2015) include stress reduction, the increase in oxytocin levels and the corresponding decrease in cortisol levels, self-reports of mood improvement, homesickness relief, and a greater sense of calm among the many demonstrated benefits of interacting with therapy animals. After ensuring compliance with their institution's legal and health services departments, libraries coordinate these events with local organizations that connect them with trained animals and their volunteer handlers (Bell, 2013; Brewerton and Woolley, 2016; Henrich; 2020; Jalongo and McDevitt, 2015; Keller, 2007; Lannon and Harrison, 2015; Reynolds and Rabschutz, 2011; Rose, Godfrey, and Rose, 2015). Dogs are the most frequently featured therapy animals, but libraries have also hosted PAT sessions with baby goats (Flynn, 2017), guinea pigs (Rose, Godfrey, and Rose, 2015), kittens (Clark and Robinson, 2015) and owls (Houghton, 2019). In some libraries, the therapy animals proved to be so popular that their visits are no longer limited to the final exams period and have become part of regular library programming (Jalongo and McDevitt, 2015); Keller, 2007; Lannon

and Harris; 2015). In addition to high student turnout, positive impact on mood and stress, as self-reported by the majority of participants, has further encouraged libraries to host PAT sessions during finals (Jalongo and McDevitt, 2015; Lannon and Harrison, 2015).

Whereas therapy pet events require planning and put extra time demands on staff, other types of de-stressing activities, such as games, and arts and crafts, present an alternative to libraries not equipped to host therapy animals. Board games, puzzles, and various arts and crafts can be adopted for a group or solitary activity; as an unobtrusive invitation to take a break from studying, they can be placed on individual tables, in specifically designated rooms or in social areas of the library (Brewerton and Woolley, 2016; Casucci and Baluchi, 2019; Mourer and Karadjova, 2017; Resi, 2018; Rose, Godfrey, and Rose, 2015; Smith, 2019). Some libraries choose to offer more elaborate games and arts activities than the relatively low-key and low-cost classics such as backgammon, checkers, chess, jigsaw puzzles, and coloring books. The library at the State University of New York Potsdam's added mini golf, bean bag toss games, a small sandbox with Matchbox construction vehicles, and a bead jewelry making station to their more typical games and crafts collection (Newton, 2011), while the Keele University library built a coloring wall (Smith, 2019).

Just as animal therapy visits, games, arts and crafts invite students to break up their long study sessions and recharge, the beverages and snacks that libraries distribute during finals target student fatigue and hunger. During the long hours students spend studying, proper nutrition tends to become an afterthought. Often, students prefer to stay in the library rather than go outside to eat. Consequently, libraries allow food on premises or offer snacks themselves. Among the refreshments libraries provide are fruits, savory and sweet snacks,

cakes, donuts, pizza, coffee, and other beverages (Bremer, 2019; Brewerton and Woolley, 2016; Clark and Robinson, 2015; Flynn, 2017; Hinchliffe and Wong; 2010; Rose, Godfrey, and Rose, 2015; Smith, 2019).

All in all, the special services during finals weeks exemplify libraries' efforts to recognize and affirm the library's central role in student learning. Extended service hours, stress relief activities, and refreshments effectively lessen the pressures and stress students experience during this time of the semester. Consequently, these initiatives foster student well-being by creating a learning environment responsive to student needs. Untraditional and innovative as some of the finals weeks interventions may be, they are all driven by libraries' commitment to support and enhance students' educational experience.

Well-being and library spaces

Academic libraries are not only readily associated with their collections and services, but also with their physical space, both its central campus location and sheer size. Not surprisingly, library spaces figure prominently in discussions about the library's contribution to student wellness. As they consider their role in fostering student well-being, libraries have been rethinking how their spaces are designed and used. As is the case with collections and services, wellness-centered initiatives involving space must contend with limited resources, whether it is the unavailability of extra space that could be dedicated to wellness practices, insufficient funds to refurbish existing areas, or the prohibitive cost of a major library renovation. Reflective of these limitations, well-being initiatives involving the library spaces include hosting wellness-related programs and workshops, temporarily allocating a space to health-related services or events, undertaking small-scale space improvements (i.e., redesigning study areas or

adding equipment and furnishings), and, in rare cases, adding a new space dedicated to wellness.

Ramsey and Aagard (2018) describe the multiple ways in which a library space can be used to promote well-being without the cost associated with space improvements. The Albertsons Library at Boise State University regularly invites practitioners from the campus health services to use the busy lobby where they set up informational tables, offer nutritional counseling, and even administer flu shots (Ramsey and Aagard, 2018). In addition, peer educators use library space for workshops on stress management and informational sessions about support services available on campus; the library further publicizes health-related resources by advertising them on their "Toilet Talk" flyers places inside bathroom stalls and on screensaver slides installed on library computers (Ramsey and Aagard, 2018). Another example of using library space as a wellness promotion site comes from Michigan State Libraries that at the outset of the cold season distributed hundreds of cold and flu packets with hand sanitizer, tissues, and cough drops, among other items to students gathered in the library (Flynn, 2017).

In turn, Bohuski (2020) suggests that a small-scale redesign with well-being as the guiding principle is a viable alternative to libraries unable to afford a remodelling that would earn them the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification. Wellness, Bohuski (2020) points out, is an aspect of going green that many academic libraries may readily achieve, despite their modest or non-existing renovation budgets. Allowing in more natural light provides a scalable example of one such redesign initiative that is known to support well-being; it can be achieved simply by shifting stacks, relocating reading areas, or replacing old windows (Bohuski, 2020). If adding natural light is not an option, Reis (2018) recommends that libraries

purchase SAD therapy lamps known to imitate sunlight. Another green wellness initiative may involve adding live plants in select areas is an affordable alternative for libraries that are unable to offer green outdoor spaces to students (Bohuski, 2020).

Other well-being oriented space redesign initiatives cited in the literature focus on student study areas. Designating silent and communal study areas is a longstanding practice that libraries have adopted to create a stress-free learning environment and accommodate students' preferences, but more recently libraries have also started modifying the sedentary setup of individual workstations. To counterbalance the physical inactivity during long periods of computer work and study, standing or active workstations are being added (Clark and Robinson, 2015; Clement et al., 2018; Reis, 2018; Whitmer, Cox, Rumohr, Wards, and Reeves, 2019). In their review of such initiatives, Clement et al. (2018) list standing, treadmill or cycling desks and balance chairs as the most popular active learning equipment added by libraries. Although students tend to be initially confused about these additions, long term assessment has shown that they regularly use the new equipment and report positive impact of active learning areas (Clement et al., 2018).

Whereas active workstations allow for physical activity while reading or studying, embedding walking opportunities into the space of the library allows for movement while taking a break from intellectual work that tends to be sedentary and device-centered. The Bizzell Memorial Library at the University of Oklahoma (OU) and the W.E.B. DuBois Library at the University of Massachusetts Amherst used the same SPARQ digital installation system to project a walking labyrinth design onto the library floor (Cook and Croft, 2015; Zucker, Choi, Cook, and Croft, 2016). Given their long history as a tool in guided meditation and their

documented impact on improving mental state, reducing stress, and increasing focus, SPARQ-projected labyrinths appeared well suited and appropriate for academic libraries (Cook and Croft, 2015; Zucker, Choi, Cook, and Croft, 2016). Indeed, Cook and Croft (2015) found that most of the users who engaged with the labyrinth reported a marked reduction in stress and anxiety. In addition to similar self-reported evidence of the positive impact of labyrinth walking, Zucker, Choi, Cook, and Croft (2016) measured participants' systolic blood pressure and pulse rate before and after they engaged with the labyrinth; as measured, the changes were significant, demonstrating the beneficial effect of walking meditation.

The growing interest in mindfulness practices, including meditation, and their proven contribution to overall well-being has led many libraries to designate areas where users can pursue a wide range of contemplative activities. This relatively new trend illustrates not only the emerging pattern of library use but also libraries' ongoing commitment to reassess and redesign their spaces in response to students' needs and expectations (Riehman-Murphy and Mross, 2019). For example, Riehman-Murphy and Mross' (2019) found that, in response to the observed demand or direct requests from student organizations, libraries have started to designate non-denominational prayer rooms and welcome student religious practices in their reflection rooms (Riehman-Murphy and Mross, 2019).

Grouped under the term "reflection spaces," these newly allocated areas include meditation, contemplation, non-denominational prayer, or wellness rooms, stress-free or relaxation zones (Wachter, 2018). Some of these started as temporary spaces offered during high stress exam periods but have since become permanent (Bremer, 2019; Mourer and Karadjova, 2017). The Briggs Library at the University of Minnesota-Morris that moved its

temporary reflection space to a repurposed study room provides an illustrative example

(Bremer, 2019). The new Meditation Room features a meditation mat, bean bag chairs, calming

lighting and music, a Zen Garden, a moving sandscape display, a Zen garden, and aromatic oils

(Bremer, 2019). Similarly, the Humboldt State University Library created the Library Brain Booth,

a space with multiple stations offering tools and activities to encourage the exploration of

various forms of relaxation practices and techniques, including biofeedback, coloring, light

therapy, reading, board games, meditation, gratitude, and virtual reality immersion (Mourer

and Karadjova, 2017). The sheer variety of reflection spaces--ranging from open areas simply

designated as distraction-free, previously underused offices that have been remodeled, to fully

furnished rooms--shows that libraries strive to foster mindfulness within their space and budget

constraints.

Most recently, academic libraries have been allocating technology-free areas where

students can put aside their devices, disconnect from their social media feeds, relax, or even

nap, in a distraction-free environment. Together with the increasingly common digital

well-being workshops and programs, these spaces, also called social-media free, unplug, or

digital detox zones, signal libraries' interest in promoting digital wellness among students (Loos,

2017; Feerrar 2020). As the rise in the prevalence and severity of mental health problems

among young people has been linked to the excessive use of technologies, devices, and social

media, it is important to promote good digital hygiene among those most prone to overusing

technology (Lattie, Lipson, and Eisenberg, 2019). Digital well-being is the ability to navigate the

overabundance and omnipresence of technologies without compromising one's mental,

physical, and social health (Feerrar, 2020). It involves the understanding of how technology use

affects people and mastering specific skills related to online time management, account settings, sharing, and other aspects of digital life (Feerrar, 2020). The American Library Association's Center for the Future of Libraries includes "Unplugged" among the trends most relevant to libraries today, arguing that the ubiquity, overuse, and overload of information and technology requires that individuals periodically unplug and recharge (n.d). As places traditionally associated with quiet and focus, libraries are uniquely suited to offer refuge from the digital world (American Library Association, n.d). Indeed, in a departure from their touted reputation as technology-rich environments, some academic libraries have been rebranding their silent study areas as unplugged zones that allow students to take a much needed break from technology and the internet. The University of Colorado Colorado Spring Library adopted a measured approach by designating eleven computer workstations that block access to social media sites and thus make it easier for students to stay focused on their work (Fitz, 2011). At the Davis Family Library at Middlebury College, the Unplug and Recharge Room, initially available only periodically during the semester, had been so popular that it became permanent (Macfarlane, 2016). In turn, the Wake Forest University Library added a "ZieSta Room" where students are urged to turn off their devices and relax on one of the provided recliners ("Time for a ZieSta?", n.d.). Noting that sleep deprivation is prevalent among students, Wise (2018) argues that libraries can counteract its deleterious effects on psychosocial functioning and academic achievement by incorporating nap areas in their space. Libraries that provide nap accommodations designate napping stations, located in the quiet part of the library, or separate nap rooms; their furnishings include beanbags, cots and lockers, and the more sophisticated "nap pods," or half-enclosed recliners with music, light, and vibrations to enhance relaxation

(Wise, 2018). With the addition of these device-free and relaxation spaces, libraries seek to become an environment in which students can both engage with technology and disconnect from it, achieving a balance that optimizes learning and well-being alike.

Well-being initiatives in academic libraries: important considerations

Whereas public libraries have long promoted community health and well-being through a wide range of services (the provision of consumer health information, embedded health professionals, visiting health services, mental health support, and wellness-oriented programs) (Elia, 2019), academic libraries' foray into well-being promotion is a relatively recent trend. Accordingly, this emerging interest in supporting student wellness raises some important questions that need to be considered. Are there particular professional competencies that academic librarians need to develop in order to support student well-being? What exactly should librarians' roles and responsibilities be within their institutions' wellness framework? How can libraries ensure that their well-being interventions are appropriate and effective?

In their pointed critique of well-being initiatives in UK academic libraries, Cox and Brewster (2020) argue that such interventions should be informed by approaches and solutions "within the professional knowledge base of librarianship" rather than simply following the latest trends (1). And yet, the literature on well-being initiatives in academic libraries does not explicitly address the professional competencies librarians need to possess in order to plan or participate in effective wellness interventions.

Still, a useful framework for acquiring relevant professional competencies can be found in the Reference and User Services Association's (RUSA) guidelines on health and medical

reference (2015). Applicable to all kinds of libraries, including academic ones, the guidelines

emphasize that librarians are not trained health professionals and thus should never "interpret

or make recommendations regarding diagnoses, treatments, or specific health care

professionals or health care facilities" (2015). Instead, in line with their professional roles,

librarians ought to assist users in locating and accessing health-related information, and, if

appropriate, offer information referrals (RUSA, 2015). Further, RUSA's guidelines encourage

libraries to develop health collections and programming that meet the specific needs of their

communities (2015). Librarians, in turn, "should participate in continuing education and

professional development opportunities to enhance knowledge of resources" (RUSA, 2015).

Indeed, professional development opportunities related to student health and wellness

are increasingly available. The ACRL Access Services Interest Group's (ASIG) 2019 Fall Virtual

Forum featured a presentation, now freely available online, on "Dealing with mental health

issues as front line staff" (Ho and Kasch, 2019). The talk offered library staff strategies for

recognizing and reacting to potential mental health issues in students; the presenters

emphasized that familiarity with local campus counseling and other support services was

necessary for making appropriate referrals and emergency notifications. Similarly, in late

December of 2020, the ACRL hosted a webinar on "Student wellness and libraries," featuring

contributors to the recently published edited collection on *Student wellness and academic*

libraries: Case studies and activities for promoting health and success (Holder and Lannon,

2020). The webinar contextualized the need for well-being interventions in academic libraries

and described a variety of student wellness initiatives hosted or developed by academic

libraries.

While the webinars listed above point to emerging professional development opportunities for librarians interested in learning about student well-being, leaning on the expertise of colleagues from health and counseling services is another option librarians may consider. Ennis (2018) writes about a collaboration between librarians and trained counsellors whose combined expertise resulted in a unique bibliotherapy collection called Shelf Help. In turn, Ramsey and Aagard (2018) suggest that libraries designate liaisons to campus health and counseling units. Such formalized relationships may facilitate partnerships between the library and those units; no less importantly, regular communication with colleagues working in health and counseling services can afford librarians a better awareness of and familiarity with the kinds of assistance to which students may be referred (Ramsey and Aagard, 2018).

Librarians' professional roles and competencies are not the only issues that need to be considered as libraries increasingly seek to promote student well-being. To ensure that their efforts to foster student wellness are appropriate and effective, academic libraries ought to engage in careful planning and critical evaluation of their initiatives.

Walton (2018) recommends that libraries developing new wellness services perform a local needs assessment first. Learning about well-being services already offered on campus, reaching out to colleagues in health services, and identifying student well-being needs that the library could adequately meet should inform the planning process from the very start (Walton, 2018). Related considerations include determining the library's role as either the leader or participant in the new initiative, calculating the cost and allocating necessary resources (Walton, 2018). In light of the budgetary and staff constraints most libraries face, it is critical that all of the above factors inform the development of new well-being initiatives (Walton, 2018).

Post-assessment of well-being interventions is no less important than the planning process. Brewster and Cox (2020) suggest that student turnout, self-reports, and social media reach--the very measures libraries tend to rely on when evaluating their efforts--are inadequate indicators of an initiative's impact. Libraries need to investigate more appropriate methods for capturing and measuring the effectiveness of their well-being interventions to make sure their resources are well spent (Brewster and Cox, 2020). Clement et al.'s (2018) assessment of the active learning space created at the Hodges Library at the University of Tennessee Knoxville provides one example of an innovative approach to evaluating a wellness intervention's impact. While the researchers included survey responses in their assessment, they complemented students' self-reports with ethnographic observations of how the active space was used (Clement at al., 2018). When combined, these different modes of assessment not only allowed the library to demonstrate the benefits of adding such a space but also identify the ways in which it needs to be improved to serve students better. As libraries seek to add services, spaces, and programming that would promote student well-being, carefully designed post-assessment is key to securing institutional support for these initiatives. Popularity with students shows that library wellness interventions are well liked and appreciated, but additional impact indicators that measure how these efforts affect students' overall well-being and educational outcomes are also needed.

Conclusion

As the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered campuses, access to library spaces and in-person services was severely curtailed. At the same time, concerns about student well-being only intensified. Data from student campus health services, mental health organizations and

advocacy groups show that college students have been struggling to manage the stress, anxiety,

isolation, and related pressures brought by the pandemic (Anderson, 2020). In October of 2020,

the CDC reported that, in response to COVID-19, three quarters of young people between the

ages of 18 and 24 have reported at least one negative mental health symptom, about one

quarter sought relief in substance use, and about one quarter has considered suicide (Czeisler et

al., 2020). While the CDC data did not distinguish between students and those who do not

attend college, it raised alarms in the higher education community. Similarly, through interviews

with 195 students at a large public university, Son et al. (2020) found that almost three quarters

of them experienced an increase in stress, anxiety, and depressive thoughts during the

pandemic. A great majority of students also worry about their own and their families' physical

health, and contend with the negative effects of social distancing (Son et al., 2020). Disrupted

sleep, the inability to concentrate, and negative coping strategies amplify students' concerns

about their academic performance (Son et al., 2020). The online survey Wang et al. (2020)

administered among Texas A&M University students confirm the worrisome trends found by

Czeisler et al. (2020) and Son et al. (2020). Almost three quarters of students indicated that the

COVID-19 crisis had led to an increase in their stress and anxiety and about half exhibited

depressive symptoms (Wang et al., 2020). Furthermore, students reported heightened levels of

anxiety (38.48%) and suicidal thoughts (18.04%) (Wang et al., 2020). Taken together, these

alarming findings add even greater urgency to higher education's commitment to support

student well-being. Student health services and counseling centers are straining to meet higher

demand, at the same time as they adapt their services to a remote environment (Anderson,

2020).

The pandemic's adverse impact on students' physical, mental and social health has not been left unattended by libraries either. Similarly to campus health and counseling services, libraries have been adjusting their wellness efforts to better meet student needs during COVID-19. Their prior experience with online resources and virtual reference services meant that libraries were well positioned to navigate the transition to fully online learning. However, library well-being initiatives were not as easily transferable because they depend on student in-person participation and often involve the physical space of the library. And yet, in response to the prolonged crisis and its negative effects on student well-being, academic libraries have continued to promote wellness in the new challenging COVID-19 context. Cox and Brewster's (2020) survey of UK libraries indicates that library efforts related to student well-being center around ensuring barrier- and stress-free access to online resources through expanding online collections and redesigning websites. In addition, libraries highlight their leisure or wellness collections, suspend late fees, publicize campus-supported well-being services, produce uplifting or humorous content for their social media channels, and offer online workshops and consultations addressing research hurdles students may experience (Brewster and Cox, 2020). While such an overview for U.S. libraries is not yet available, the author's informal Internet search for library wellness interventions during COVID-19 brought up guides, blog posts and virtual events announcements addressing student well-being, with a focus on mental health and stress management during final fall 2020 exams. Operating predominantly in the remote environment, libraries highlight their virtual reference services and online resources that would help students navigate the pressures of the high-stress exam period. In addition, library finals stress relief guides include information on and links to health and counseling services on

campus and beyond. Besides directing students to academic resources and mental health

services, library guides provide some of the de-stressing activities normally offered on site. Links

to online workshops, games and puzzles, coloring pages, animal and nature live streams, recipes

for healthy snacks, meditation playlists, and yoga classes aim to replace the in-person offerings.

Among the more innovative examples of well-being efforts libraries have been undertaking

during COVID-19 is Humboldt State University Library's virtual Brain Booth that replaces the

experiential room where students were able to engage in a variety of relaxation activities (*Brain*

booth in the HSU library, 2020). While the library remains closed, the Brain Booth is hosted live

on Instagram by student assistants who answer questions and provide advice on stress

management (*Brain booth in the HSU library,* 2020). In another attempt to stimulate the on-site

library experience, the UC San Diego Library organizes virtual study rooms where groups of

students could join their peers for two-hour long study sessions run by a librarian (*Library*

de-stress activities, 2020). Pet therapy sessions, always popular during finals, have also moved

online; the University of Minnesota Libraries held therapy pet sessions over Zoom (*End of*

semester support, 2020), while the University of Massachusetts at Amherst libraries offered

virtual office hours with a librarian and their six cats (Vadnais, 2020).

Academic libraries' ingenuity in providing student well-being support during the

pandemic suggests that libraries remain committed to serving the whole student despite the

unprecedented disruption to their resources, services, and spaces. While the long-term effects

of COVID-19 are not yet known, the pandemic has exacerbated many of the mental, physical,

and social health problems students had been struggling with prior to the pandemic. Already a

prominent trend prior to 2019, student well-being is likely to gain even greater urgency. As this

article shows, there are very important reasons why colleges and universities ought to promote and support student wellness. Academic libraries are uniquely placed to undertake well-being efforts, either as contributors to campus-wide initiatives or organizers of their own library-based interventions. The range of well-being support libraries offer is impressive; it demonstrates libraries' responsiveness to institutional priorities and evolving student needs. At the same time, critiques of the wellness trend in libraries are well founded. It is imperative that current and future well-being practices are developed, conducted, and evaluated in ways that ensure their effectiveness and impact on students.

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