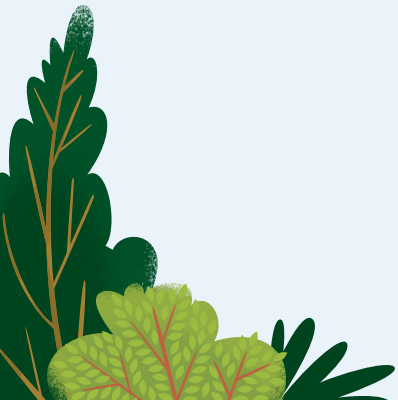


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# Rethinking Wellbeing in Higher Ed

Your guide to holistic support for students,  
faculty, and staff



“For my first two years as a college student, I lived the privileged life. At the end of my junior year, however, everything changed when my father died suddenly. Finishing that semester was a challenge. I felt completely overwhelmed trying to manage my emotions, my schoolwork, my job, and my relationships. In an effort to take back control of my life, I began to seek out campus and community resources. By taking things day by day and focusing on being grateful, I am able to persevere and I believe that I can handle whatever comes next.”

**Roxanne**  
**California State University, Long Beach**



## Introduction

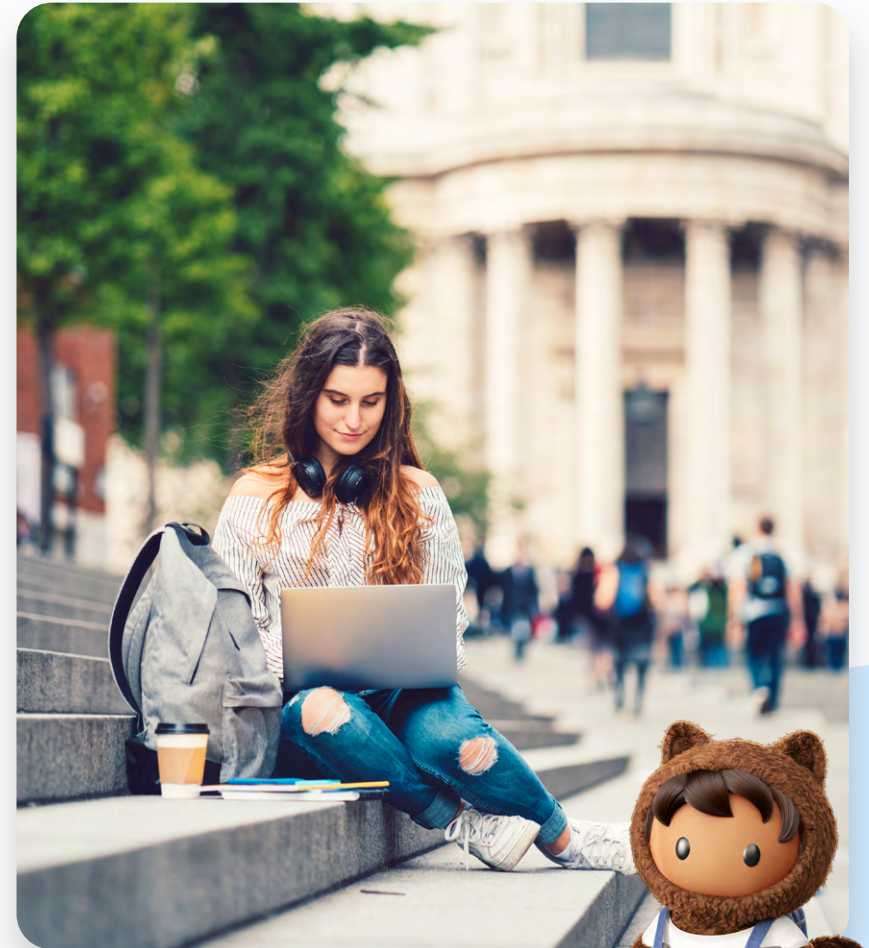
# Mental health and wellbeing

Our students are struggling. Whether it's a death in the family, financial difficulties, isolation, or anxiety, mental health and wellbeing issues on college campuses are on the rise. And while higher education leaders have put measures in place to help stem the tide, there's much more to be done.

In just six years, student anxiety in higher education institutions jumped from 17% to 31%, according to [a study](#) by the Healthy Minds Network and the American College Health Association. But it's the COVID-19 pandemic that's brought the issue to the forefront. In 2020, college students reported rapid spikes in anxiety and depression, with 60% of students saying the pandemic has made it harder to access mental health care, according to the study.

College applications from disadvantaged students [fell 20%](#), according to the Common App, worsening the equity gap in higher education, particularly among Black and Latino students. And high school seniors said the pandemic made them feel less motivated in their college search, missing application deadlines due to mental health issues, according to a [student survey](#) by SimpsonScarborough.

Students aren't the only ones experiencing mental health and wellbeing challenges. While 70% of university presidents say their most pressing issue is student mental health, they rank the mental health of faculty and staff right behind it, according to [ACE](#). Hiring freezes, furloughs, and layoffs have caused burnout, with faculty stating that the pandemic has caused them to think about retiring early or leaving teaching altogether.





To give students what they need to thrive throughout their college journey, leaders agree that they should promote individual wellness and foster a campus culture that prioritizes wellbeing as a value. But it isn't easy. Campuses dedicated to helping students achieve a state of wellbeing across multiple dimensions of wellness can help increase academic performance, retention, and graduation.

Although most institutions are taking action, [50% of university executives](#) say they need more tools to address student mental health on campus. In addition, [global research by Salesforce.org](#) shows that 32% of students want more wellbeing and mental health resources from their institution.

To help meet the growing need for holistic student support, we've talked with higher ed leaders and gathered best practices for institutions of all sizes around culture, staffing, and technology. By taking wellbeing strategies to the next level, you'll be on your way to making a real difference in the success of your students.



"Over the last five years, the student mental health crisis created a challenge on campus. Schools couldn't hire enough counselors to address clinical needs. So, to address higher levels of wellbeing among students, we suggest upstream solutions — like teaching students resiliency, stress management, and other behavioral changes — to help prevent more concerning downstream problems."

**Kevin Kruger**  
President, National Association of Student  
Personnel Administrators (NASPA)

## What is Wellbeing in Higher Education?

Organizations like NIRSA, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) define wellbeing in different ways. But all agree that wellbeing is a holistic concept — one that integrates a person's social, personal, and physical capacities.

Some student wellness centers, including those at [Wake Forest University](#) and [Ohio State University](#), have developed models that break wellness down into multiple dimensions, including the following:

**Emotional:** Managing your feelings and knowing when to ask for help.

**Physical:** Getting enough sleep, diet, and exercise, and staying safe and healthy.

**Social:** Building and maintaining strong relationships, and being aware of other people's feelings.

**Spiritual:** Seeking harmony and balance by exploring meaning and connection.

**Financial:** Managing finances to achieve your goals.

**Occupational:** Finding purpose and fulfillment in your work.

**Intellectual:** Valuing lifelong learning and seeking to learn for the sake of learning.

**Environmental:** Respecting the environment and understanding the human connection to nature.



# Best Practices for Higher Ed Leaders

## Create a culture and design for wellbeing

When institutions are proactive rather than reactive, they can prevent students from having to seek help in the first place. If students can find support and develop coping skills throughout their college journey, a crisis may never happen. Universities can build that infrastructure through wellness spaces, coaches, online tools, and noncredit courses.

For example, Cornell University created a Health Leaves Coordinator position so students could receive consistent support when leaving and returning to Cornell. According to Ann LaFave, Senior Director of Student Services for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) at Cornell, the new service brings clarity to students during a difficult time. “Due to the decentralized nature of the university, this was an important centralized role to reduce the stress and anxiety students were experiencing when faced with the difficult decision of taking a health leave of absence.”

The [Office of Wellbeing at Wake Forest University](#) leads the campus in making wellness a part of every experience in the lives of students, faculty, and staff. Their [Wellbeing Collaborative](#), which promotes the lifelong health of students, is recognized in NASPA research as a leader in the field. Marian Trattner, Assistant Director of Wellbeing, Health Promotion and Interim Director at the Office of Wellbeing, discussed the importance of getting leadership to prioritize a campus-wide culture of wellness.

“It’s imperative to have support from upper administration,” said Trattner. “Our president talked about the importance of thriving and wellbeing back in 2014 and was inspired to integrate wellbeing and a holistic framework across the campus that includes not only students, but employees as well.”

At the University of Arizona, instructors are being given more resources and training to spot health and wellness issues as extreme as suicidal ideation. They’ve been expanding their use of technology to bring more of the student service organizations onto a shared system to make student referrals faster and easier.



“We want to take care of the whole student, with health and wellness being foundational in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Students won’t be successful in their academic pursuits if they aren’t financially sound and healthy, don’t have a place to live, or food to eat.”

**Darcy Van Patten**  
Chief Technology Officer, University of Arizona



## Hire a Chief Wellness Officer (CWO)

While the CWO is now commonplace in the business world, it's still a relatively new role in higher education. The CWO, usually positioned within Student Affairs, develops and carries out the vision, goals, and strategies needed to create a culture of wellbeing across the institution. The CWO also acts as a change agent to improve health across multiple campus organizations through activities and programs that cover everything from healthy eating and movement to stress management and addiction treatment.

In 2011, Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, Vice President for Health Promotion and Chief Wellness Officer at Ohio State University, was appointed the [first CWO in higher education](#) – a role she still holds today. Melnyk explained that mental health and wellbeing has been built into the One University Health and Wellness Strategic plan, and endorsed and approved by university leadership, president's cabinet, and the board of trustees.



“My role is to spearhead and improve population health and wellbeing for our students, faculty, and staff within a sustained wellness culture that makes healthy behaviors the norm so that everyone can achieve their highest potential and aspirations.”

**Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk**  
Vice President for Health Promotion and Chief  
Wellness Officer, Ohio State University

Since Melnyk was appointed, other universities have adopted different CWO models to address wellbeing issues on their own campuses. Today, you'll find CWOs on campuses across the country, including University of Utah Health, University of Pennsylvania, Oklahoma State University, and Texas A&M University to name a few.

## Top Tips from Higher Ed's First CWO

Here are Melnyk's top strategic wellbeing recommendations for student affairs leaders.

- Be creative and evidence-based in your offerings. Use students to help create some of the resources. They're full of great ideas!
- Collaborate and partner with people inside and outside your organization. There are so many terrific resources at your university and with partners at the local, state, and national levels.
- Gain support from campus leadership and deans and vice presidents in your organization. They're vitally important to your efforts, as are managers and supervisors.
- Focus your efforts on their self-care, resiliency skills, and how they can better support those who work for and with them. Building a culture of well-being will improve the mental health and well-being of students, faculty, and staff.
- Join the [National Consortium for Building Healthy Academic Communities](#), a terrific network of universities and colleges across the country that are creating that culture of wellness for all who work and live at the university.



## Use technology as an enabler

Technology can propel your institution forward, even if you don't have a large staff to support students. From virtual advising and online communities to student surveys and employee assessments, new tools for tracking data and analytics enable equity and help you make the most of the resources you have. For example, regular wellness checks could flag a student suffering from food insecurity, alcohol addiction, or other serious matters that need immediate attention.

The key to using these technologies in the most effective way, says Kruger of NASPA, is to really pay attention to what the data is telling you so you can get a holistic picture of students – especially those who are struggling.

“Using data and analytics to serve the individual student is the future of higher education,” said Kruger. “If we're going to be constrained on resources, we need to put the resources that we do have into the students who need us the most.”

For instance, telehealth has opened new opportunities to treat students and staff when and where they want, without the stigma of being seen walking into a counselor's office or sitting in the waiting room. Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) recently shifted from traditional face-to-face appointments and walks-ins to digital telehealth services. However, they needed an accessible system that would support students living in different places and learning in different ways, as their psychologists and counselors were only licensed in Ohio.

“We moved to a telehealth platform,” said Thomas Matthews, Associate Provost, Student Success at Case Western Reserve University. “With licensed counselors in all 50 states and flexible hours, students can choose the type of counselor they want. Since January, we've already seen high student participation.”



# How colleges and universities are using technology to promote student wellbeing



**Offer digital-first student advising:** When technology makes advisors more accessible, [students are more likely to reach out](#) – not only for academic support, but for mental health, stress management, and overall wellbeing. In fact, more than half of students (51%) look for this kind of support on their schools' website or via email (42%). By providing digital-first experiences like these, you can make it easy for students to stay on track and get help when they need it.



**Give easy access to advisors:** With [Advisor Link](#), a digital advising solution, students at [CWRU](#) were able to enjoy the convenience of making multiple appointments from one place. In fact, 86% of students reported that it was much easier to access advisors for questions and guidance using the system. Within the first year, more than 10,000 appointments were created, with 608 student success plans developed within the first five months.



“At Cornell, we’ll offer both virtual and in-person advising meetings in the fall. Although we can’t wait to see our students face-to-face again, we also see the benefit and ease if a student prefers a virtual meeting between classes, or if they won’t be near campus that day.”

**Ann LaFave**  
Senior Director of Student Services for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs), Cornell University



## A Little Chatter Goes a Long Way

Cornell University built an online community powered by Salesforce, called Cornell Chatter, where students can talk with peers, faculty, and staff, and join subgroups related to their status (new or transferring) and major. They can also reserve safe, socially distanced places to study on campus using the community's [Study Space App](#). According to the [Cornell Daily Sun](#), the community has given students a bright spot during the pandemic. “It’s for my own sanity at this point,” said one student. “I just need to get out and change the scenery a little bit.”







**Create belonging in online communities:** In a Salesforce.org [survey](#), students said online communities were vital to helping them adapt to the pandemic. Almost 30% said online communities created a sense of belonging to their institution, and 25% said online communities supported their wellbeing. They added that receiving personalized messages showed them that their schools still cared about their success.



**Conduct continuous surveys and assessments:** Empower your staff and faculty with online wellbeing checks. A simple quiz can help leaders and employees determine stress levels and learn how to move forward. Like this quiz from Thrive Global, founded by Arianna Huffington, which asks 12 questions to help you see where you're thriving and where you can improve your wellbeing.

If you're looking for ways to manage employee and student wellness, start with [Work.com for Education Institutions](#), which provides tools and solutions for reopening campuses. [The University of Kentucky](#) uses Work.com solutions to conduct daily wellness assessments and symptom checks of their student body, faculty, and staff. They also use it to view data and insights from the community in the Command Center, which helps them assess campus readiness and quickly respond to changing conditions.

"We're using Salesforce's Work.com solutions as a springboard for a healthier community, supporting student mental health and wellbeing, and preparing our university to handle any number of future scenarios," said Dr. Eli Capilouto, University of Kentucky President.

## Small Changes, Big Impact

The University of Notre Dame [surveyed its students](#) last summer and twice during the fall semester to find out how they were doing and what they might need. They met regularly with students, faculty, and staff to understand what changes they could make to alleviate student stress or anxiety. The ongoing assessment and surveys helped the university make changes that improved students' mental and emotional health. For example, they provided more opportunities for outdoor adventures, like using outdoor athletic spaces where students could watch movies, and building outdoor fire pits where students could relax.



## Conclusion

# Welcome to student success 2.0

Transforming the student experience means making wellbeing a top priority. By following these best practices, you can create a strategy to ensure the long-term wellbeing of your entire campus. And you can make sure students have the support they need—no matter how overwhelmed or stressed they may be.

Helping students make strides as they advance along the college journey means taking a holistic approach to their health – from emotional and physical to spiritual and social. Once students find their balance, lifelong wellbeing is just a step away.

**Discover how Salesforce can help transform your institution's holistic student experience.**

[Learn More](#)



