

# An analysis into the university of melbourne's approach to wellbeing



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### Introduction

University students' mental health and wellbeing has become an increasing concern in the education system that requires urgent attention. Students have conflicting opinions about their university experience as some struggle to transition into university life, while others enjoy the university life.

Traditionally, there is unawareness of what mental health and wellbeing is, as well as the potential impacts it may have on the flourishing of organisations and oneself because there was more emphasis on “teaching and research excellence” (Slemp, 2017, pp. 142). Thus, the study of positive psychology was introduced. Positive psychology refers to the study of environmental factors and practices that promote individual and organisational optimisation and prosperity (Roberts, 2006, pp. 292). Studies were conducted in various organisations and due to individual and organisational wellbeing being one of the prominent influencing factors of determining organisational thrift, researchers looked for approaches to maintain and enhance that flourishing. A proactive approach some universities around the world have started implementing is the concept of positive education, whereby it is an “educational practice that draws on the science of positive psychology, best practices in education and organisational science in the effort to help individuals, schools, and communities to flourish” (Slemp, 2017, pp. 142). In return, universities worldwide are attempting to ensure that the transition into university life is as easy, enjoyable and adaptable as possible.

## Aim

This essay aims to analyse the degree to which the Arts faculty at the University of Melbourne (Parkville) has a positive organisational culture. This is achieved by exploring the current the wellbeing programs the university offers to Arts students and suggesting other initiatives that could be implemented, while evaluating the possible results of the suggested wellbeing initiatives.

## Wellbeing Initiatives at the Arts Faculty

The current observations of the Arts faculty's approach to student wellbeing will be reviewed in relation to identifying and discussing the three levels of organisational culture introduced by Edgar H. Schein – an academic from the field of organisational development. In some circumstances, there are organisations and possibly communities as well that have no culture as they don't share a “ common history or have frequent turnover of members” (Schein, 1990, pp. 111). The presence of a strong culture involves the sharing of a significant, yet powerful experience (Schein, 1990, pp. 111) that allows members and the overall community or organisation to excel. The fundamental stages in which culture is demonstrated is by analysing the visible artifacts, values and underlying assumptions in the faculty. Schein (1990, pp. 111) describes artifacts as the layout, dress code, mannerism, atmosphere, level of emotions and other trends observed in an organisation. The values that are manifested in an organisation refers to the existing standards, beliefs and attitudes (Schein, 1990, pp. 112). Whereas, the underlying assumptions are features that drives the system, thinking

process, emotions and behaviours members have towards the organisation (Schein, 1990, pp. 112).

The current approach to student wellbeing in the Faculty of Arts is unexpectedly limited. One visible artifact is the Arts Faculty's webpage. The webpage has a section that provides a short 'Arts Student Wellbeing Series' that addresses three key ideas: 'Looking after your Mental Health', 'Work-Study-Life Balance' and 'Starting out at University'. Each key idea has a video of university students expressing their opinions on the topic and a compilation of resources regarding each idea. There are links for counselling and psychological services, student equity and disability support, academic skills, as well as student services directory. Focusing on the counselling and psychological services artifact, the university values students' input and their wellbeing. The formal layout of the webpage illustrates the underlying assumption that seeking student wellbeing assistance is a formal process only accessible and exclusive to a limited number of students, specifying that it is 'free, confidential' and 'short-term'. This portrays the faculty's culture as very high-class and controlled. The effect of this assumption suggests that students needing the service may not receive it at all. Students may be reluctant to seek help as they believe that university services are associated with stigma (Slemp, 2017, pp. 142). Another underlying assumption is the allocation of funds for university student services. There may be limited funds allocated to counselling and psychological services, hence the 'short-term' condition for the service access.

Another artifact is the layout of study areas in the Arts West building. The most notable feature is that many study spaces have tables that are set out in groups. This illustrates that although the university values the act of studying, but they also value and try to encourage students to study collaboratively too. The underlying assumption is that the Arts faculty is an environment that manifests a competitive culture among students as students are inclined to study more to achieve top marks in their degrees with the access of study spaces. While the Arts faculty's initial intention was to perhaps enhance student groupwork engagements and studying habits, it may have an antithetical effect on students' wellbeing because instead of increasing "positive emotions, meaning and engagement" (Oades et al., 2011, pp. 432), it perpetuates the stress and competitive attitude towards studying. The impact of this sense of competitiveness is that the hope of students studying collaboratively may be disregarded as there are some students who prefer to self-study. Students may be isolating themselves from others and unwilling to collaborate. Consequently, the pressure and stress for students to continuously study may overwhelm them, which could negatively influence student wellbeing rather than enhance it.

However, it is equally important to note that there is a lack of greenspaces around the Arts faculty for students to utilise. Additionally, almost no student wellbeing-related weekly activities and events organised by the Arts Students Society could be found, considering Mental Health Week and 'Are You Ok Day' is coming up.

Dreaming Big about Wellbeing Initiatives on Campus

Martin Seligman has constructed a wellbeing theory (PERMA) consisting of five elements that meet three criteria of wellbeing. The elements of his wellbeing theory are: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishments (Seligman, 2011, pp. 44-pp. 45). Each element plays a role in wellbeing, in which “ many people pursue it for its own sake” and is “ defined and measured independently of the other elements” (Seligman, 2011, pp. 44). The following wellbeing initiatives suggested are based on Seligman’s framework.

One of the wellbeing initiatives that should be implemented in the future is taking a systematic approach to reforming the way tutorials and lectures are structured in the Arts faculty. In lectures, it may be beneficial if lecturers allowed time at the end of lectures for students to discuss with people around them about the content just covered. This way, it allows students to build social connections with others, consolidate their learning and ask about any misconceptions they have, hence helping them engage in learning. Students may feel more positive and accomplished overall when they know that they are not the only one who does not understand the content and are seeking for further clarifications. This initiative may also be applicable in tutorial situations.

In tutorials, especially for Art Foundations, it may be helpful for tutors to begin with an activity where students write an anonymous positive message and then put it into a box. At the end of the tutorial, students can draw a message for themselves. This is a fun activity that may help ease the tension first-year students experience at the university as they do not know anyone on campus. Another idea is that tutors may begin tutorials with a quick <https://assignbuster.com/an-analysis-into-the-university-of-melbournes-approach-to-wellbeing/>

group bonding and teamwork activity, such as ‘ Human Knots’, that promotes positive emotions and engagement. It involves players crossing and joining hands with another person in the circle. The objective is to get everyone’s hands untangled.

Creating more greenspaces around campus could also enhance student wellbeing. The university is lacking greenspaces. Having them would allow students to enjoy and connect with the nature around them. Activities like yoga, studying and socialising can be done using greenspaces. For example, Geelong Grammar School in Victoria, Australia is an exemplification of embedding positive education in the school community (O’Connor & Cameron, 2017, pp. 353). Greenspaces are used to conduct activities to educate stakeholders about positive education and wellbeing (“ Positive Education at Geelong Grammar School”, 2019). It is difficult to be resilient when the environment is stressful (Turner et al., 2017, pp. 716). Having greenspaces around campus allows students to extract themselves from a stressful environment and distress.

#### Final Thoughts: Potential Outcomes

Implementing change is a challenging process that can be met with both positive and negative outcomes.

A positive outcome of this is the enhancement of student wellbeing where students can enjoy the university experience, by openly seek assistance for wellbeing support when needed, while flourishing by making meaningful relationships with the people they meet, engaging in the schoolwork and with the environment. Another positive outcome is that these wellbeing <https://assignbuster.com/an-analysis-into-the-university-of-melbournes-approach-to-wellbeing/>

initiatives can be applicable to staff and parents, where all university stakeholders can be educated about mental health and wellbeing.

However, resistance may be present from staff members when a systematic, whole-school change is implemented because staff may have certain perspectives on the way they lead classes. When change is unanticipated, “teachers feel overworked and disconnected from a new PosEd initiative” (Slomp et al., 2017, pp. 109) if they do not benefit from the change too. They may be demotivated to implement new change, unless staff also maximise their autonomy (Oades et al., 2011, pp. 437) from the change. Another disadvantage could be the financial element to fund for more greenspaces. There may be other faculties that need funds for more important purposes. Therefore, conflicts of interest may circulate among university stakeholders.

## Conclusion

Student wellbeing should be highly emphasised to ensure a positive organisational culture exists. Changes to wellbeing initiatives in the Arts faculty of the University of Melbourne would benefit student cohorts and enhance individual and organisational flourishing in the future. However, implementations of change would be met with resisting forces.

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