

Exploring Student Perceptions of Wellness Related to Class Instruction and Assignment Design

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Abstract

Background: This study examined how undergraduate students experienced physical and health education course design in relation to their multidimensional health. The health promoting universities framework (Dolf & Dooris, 2025), inspired by the Okanagan Charter (2015), calls upon institutions to support student wellness at multiple system levels; in this work, goals for student wellness described in the university strategic plan (Mount Royal University, 2023) are met with a grassroots, wellness-oriented approach to class instruction and assignment design. Given the wellness-oriented content within the course, this involved working to live and model what was being taught.

Methodology: This study involved a qualitative, interpretive approach (Creswell, 2003), locating the researcher as a course instructor within the research. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems was used as a theoretical lens, recognizing multiple nested systems within education as compelling conceptual scaffolding for understanding student wellness. Methods of data collection included qualitative survey responses as well as focus group interviews, which were approved by the university's Human Research Ethics Board. Data were explored using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019).

Results & Conclusion: Overarching themes included exploring course efficacy regarding how health and wellness are (1) taught; (2) assessed; and (3) applied in a physical and health education context. These themes have led to further exploration regarding approaches to universal design for learning and tensions between living or modeling wellness while assessing it. This work is meaningful to the field of physical and health education because it offers insights regarding how teaching and learning is experienced and how student health and wellness can be implicated within course design. Additionally, there lies potential in collaboration across disciplines, campuses, and countries to help students experience the wellness they learn about.

Keywords: health promoting universities; student wellness; physical and health education; systems thinking

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