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## Examining Relationships Between Wellness And Student Success: Recommendations For Integration Of Wellness At A Community College

Heather Dewaard-Flickinger

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EXAMINING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN WELLNESS AND STUDENT SUCCESS:  
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTEGRATION OF WELLNESS AT A COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE

by

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A Dissertation in Practice

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

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Doctor of Education

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## ABSTRACT

Wellness, persistence, and retention in higher education have a common goal of student success. Colleges and universities explore various methods to help students succeed and continue towards degree completion. Most of the research has focused on traditional predictors (e.g., high school GPA, ACT/SAT scores) of persistence and success. There is limited research regarding the relationship among student persistence, retention, academic achievement, and a holistic approach to wellness. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between student wellness and student success outcomes at a community college. Wellness is a multidimensional and active behavioral process that includes personal choices concerning physical, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being. This quantitative study was conducted at a rural community college. A sample of 139 students in their first year of their academic program completed the Body-Mind-Spirit Wellness Behavior and Characteristic Inventory (BMS-WBCI) to determine their wellness behaviors relating to six dimensions of wellness. They were also asked to indicate their intent to return for year two of their program. Institutional data, persistence (fall to spring semester) and first-semester GPA, were also collected for this sample of students. The results indicated a positive relationship between the body sub-scale (physical wellness) and first-semester GPA. Due to a lack of variance within the institutional measure of persistence and students' intent to return for year two, statistical relationships were not tested on these two outcome variables. The final product of this study includes a white paper

that highlights the issue of student wellness in higher education and provides recommendations for community colleges to implement to help increase student wellness and ultimately success.

*Keywords:* academic achievement, persistence, retention, wellness, well-being

## INTRODUCTION

Health and wellness continue to be a topic of concern in the United States. Every ten years, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Healthy People initiative sets data-driven goals to help improve the health and wellness of the nation (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, n.d.). In the United States, six out of ten adults are living with a chronic disease (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020) and one in five adults experience mental illness each year (National Alliance on Mental Illness [NAMI], 2020).

Research shows connections among mental illness and chronic diseases. Specifically, a person with depression is almost two times more likely to develop cardiovascular and metabolic diseases compared to the general population (NAMI, 2020). Likewise, health and wellness are also topics of concern among college students (Amaya et al., 2019; Baldwin et al., 2017; Beauchemin et al., 2018). College students identify anxiety, depression, sleep difficulties, illness, and stress as negatively impacting their academic performance (American College Health Association [ACHA], 2020; McFadden, 2016).

Wellness is a life-long process. Therefore, incorporating wellness into higher education can help teach students the important role of practicing healthy behaviors to enhance overall well-being and help combat the negative trends reported by the CDC. Placing a priority on health and wellness in college can also positively impact students' experiences and success (Anderson, 2016). Previous research has shown a correlation among student success in terms of academic performance and persistence and retention (Reason, 2009; Stewart et al., 2015).

Student persistence and retention have been topics of concern in higher education for decades (Aljohani, 2016; Tinto, 2006). While colleges and universities seek to help students continue towards degree completion (Tinto, 2006). More research is needed to explore the connection among student wellness and persistence, retention, and academic achievement in higher education. Colleges and universities have the responsibility to educate the whole person. If there is a relationship among wellness and persistence, retention, and academic achievement, this phenomenon can help inform higher education practice. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationships of student wellness with several student success outcome variables, such as persistence from a fall to a spring semester, intent to return for year two, and academic achievement at a community college. The setting for this study was at a rural community college in the Midwest. Community colleges are an institution type of higher education, which play a significant historical and contemporary role in policy initiatives of increasing educational attainment in the United States (Brandon, 2009; Biden, 2011; Mullin, 2012).

This dissertation in practice includes three artifacts that build from one another. Artifact I explores the problem of practice by presenting an overview of the problem in higher education, a literature review, and common approaches to solving the problem. This artifact explores research pertaining to persistence and retention in higher education, along with student wellness, and concludes by identifying common approaches to solving the issue of student wellness and success in higher education. Artifact II highlights the research approach for this study, the findings, and interpretations. Last, Artifact III provides recommendations for implementation of the solution through a white paper. The goal of the white paper is to highlight the need for wellness education within the first year of college and provide practical strategies community colleges can implement to help improve student success.

## **ARTIFACT I: PROBLEM OF PRACTICE DEFINED**

Students enroll in college with the intent to gain knowledge, learn new skills, and complete their degree. College brings new challenges and changes for students which may impact their intent to persist and succeed in higher education. Student persistence and retention have been topics of concern in higher education for decades (Aljohani, 2016; Tinto, 2006). There is also a growing concern regarding college students' well-being (Amaya et al., 2019; Baldwin et al., 2017; Beauchemin et al., 2018). Although there is a considerable amount of research regarding both topics, more research is needed focusing on the relationship among student wellness and persistence, retention, and academic achievement in higher education.

### **Overview of the Problem**

College provides students with many opportunities to learn and develop lifelong skills that will help them succeed both personally and professionally (Anderson, 2016; Jaijairam, 2016). College is a time to set a solid wellness foundation; during this time students can learn valuable skills to help balance their academics, social lives, finances, and health-related concerns (Baldwin et al., 2017). Wellness is a life-long process, and colleges and universities can promote health and wellness on their campuses to help reduce wellness related issues that can impact student success (Anderson, 2016).

The health and well-being of college students has been a topic of concern for decades (Amaya et al., 2019; Baldwin et al., 2017; Beauchemin et al., 2018). The American College Health Association (ACHA) conducts the National College Health Assessment on a regular

basis, which is a nationally recognized survey used to collect data regarding the health perceptions, behaviors, and habits of college students (ACHA, 2020). A recent survey of approximately 16,000 students conducted by the ACHA (2020) identified several challenges college students experience in relation to their academic performance. Anxiety, depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sleep difficulties, and stress were some of the highest rated items to negatively impact college students' academic performance (ACHA, 2020). Approximately 50% of the students surveyed felt their college or university prioritize student health and well-being on campus, meaning that roughly half of the students surveyed did not feel a priority was placed on health and well-being on their campus. Placing a priority on college students' health and wellness can positively impact student experiences and success (Anderson, 2016). It lays the groundwork for life-long wellness practices and behaviors to help reduce wellness-related issues later in life. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] (2020), six out of ten adults in the United States have a chronic disease (e.g.; heart disease, cancer, diabetes, etc.). It is also reported three out of four adults in the United States do not get the recommended level of physical activity, which can increase a person's risk of chronic disease (CDC, 2019). But the impact of positive college experiences on long-term life outcomes is well-documented (Mayhew et al., 2016). A greater number of college interventions in connection to student health and wellness may eventually combat the troubling trends reported by the CDC.

Students enroll in college with an intent to complete their degree (Tinto, 2015). Institutions use data to explore various strategies and implement policies and practices to help students continue towards graduation (Tinto, 2006). Indeed, student persistence has been a highly researched area and topic of discussion in higher education for decades (Tinto, 2006).



Researchers explore predictors of persistence as well as potential obstacles students face that impact their determination in college (Stewart et al., 2015). Traditional predictors of persistence tend to be used such as high school GPA or ACT/SAT scores (Saunders-Scott, 2018; Stewart et al., 2015).

An overall positive state of wellness is an important component to student persistence and, ultimately, success (Buning et al., 2014). Health and psychosocial factors (e.g., stress, anxiety, illness) are often identified as impacting academic performance (ACHA, 2020; McFadden, 2016). More research is needed to explore the connection between student wellness and persistence, retention, and academic achievement in higher education. This study provides an exciting opportunity to advance our knowledge of the relationship between students' well-being and their intent to persist in higher education. If a relationship exists, it could help inform higher education practice in terms of student wellness and success.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships of student wellness with several student success outcome variables, such as persistence from a fall to a spring semester, intent to return for year two, and academic achievement at a community college. For the purposes of this dissertation in practice, the term wellness was used to mean an active process in which a person raises awareness and makes choices that lead to a lifestyle to achieve a balance in holistic health (Global Wellness Institute, n.d.; National Wellness Institute, 2020). The term well-being was used to mean a positive outcome or condition that results from the wellness practices (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2018). This dissertation in practice seeks to address the following questions:

1. What are college students' behaviors related to wellness at a community college?

2. What is the relationship between college students' wellness and their persistence (institutional measure) from fall semester to spring semester at a community college?
3. What is the relationship between college students' wellness and their intent to return from year one to year two at a community college?
4. What is the relationship between college students' wellness and academic achievement, as measured by their first-semester GPA at a community college?

### **Definitions of Terms**

There are several key terms and concepts related to wellness, persistence, and retention that need to be defined with regard to this study. Key terms and concepts related to wellness are highlighted followed by terms related to persistence and retention.

#### **Student Wellness**

The term wellness is relatively new; however, the concept of wellness dates back to ancient times (Global Wellness Institute, n.d.). Although there is not an accepted universal definition, the Global Wellness Institute (n.d.) defines wellness as “the active pursuit of activities, choices, and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health” (para. 2). The National Wellness Institute (2020) defines wellness as “an active process through which people become aware of, and make choices towards, a more successful existence” (para. 2). Both definitions highlight the importance of an active process, personal choices, and lifelong impacts. These definitions relate to behaviors, practices, and life choices. Although similar to wellness, there is not an accepted universal definition for well-being. The National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (2018) states “well-being includes the presence of positive emotions and moods (e.g., contentment, happiness), the absence of negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety), satisfaction with life, fulfillment and positive functioning” (para. 5).

Although differences of opinion overall still exist regarding definitions and frameworks of wellness, there appears to be some common elements that support an overall framework (Anderson, 2017). Wellness is often explored from a holistic, multidimensional approach; most models include at least six dimensions while others can include as many as twelve dimensions (Global Wellness Institute, n.d.). An organization and/or individual typically selects the wellness model that aligns with the context and needs of the institution and/or person (Anderson, 2017). For the purposes of this study, six dimensions of wellness will be explored: physical, emotional, social, intellectual, spiritual, and occupational in relation to student persistence, retention, and academic achievement in higher education. Due to the availability of the validated instrument, the Body-Mind-Spirit Wellness Behavior and Characteristic Inventory (BMS-WBCI) that measures the six dimensions of wellness (Hey et al., 2006) is best positioned to shape the research design to address the research questions of this dissertation in practice. The BMS-WBCI is divided into three sub-categories: body, mind, and spirit. The body sub-category includes the physical dimension of wellness. The mind sub-category includes the intellectual, emotional, social, and occupational dimensions of wellness. Finally, the spirit sub-category includes the emotional, occupational, and spiritual dimensions of wellness.

Anderson (2017) adopted the six dimensions of wellness model from the National Wellness Institute and highlighted several key components of the dimensions of wellness; this information will be used to further define and explore wellness in the context of this study. First, physical wellness relates to the physical body. This dimension includes staying active through physical activity and exercise, eating a healthy diet, getting adequate sleep, and maintaining regular doctor and dentist check-ups. Emotional wellness relates to one's ability to cope with everyday life. This dimension includes healthy ways to manage stress, awareness of emotions

and how they impact life, and awareness of mental health disorders. Social wellness relates to interpersonal relationships. This dimension includes communication skills, diversity, civility, and healthy relationships. Intellectual wellness relates to one's ability to think critically and creatively. This dimension includes keeping the mind active through debates, reading, puzzles, innovation, using logic, adaptability, and practicing mindfulness. Spiritual wellness relates to meaning and purpose in one's life. This dimension includes motivation, values, beliefs, and connections to the larger world. Finally, occupational wellness relates to one's satisfaction and enjoyment in his/her job, career, volunteer work, and/or school. This dimension relates to goals, interests, values, professionalism, work ethic, and career readiness.

### **Student Success: Retention, Persistence, and Academic Achievement**

Student success is another term that does not have a universal definition (American Federation of Teachers, 2011). Student success is an umbrella term and a complex concept that may vary for each institution in higher education. Cuseo (2012) indicated student success is “a favorable or desirable student outcome” (para. 2). In his article, Cuseo highlighted the indicators of student success that have been cited the most in higher education research. Three of the indicators that were highlighted include student retention, persistence, and academic achievement. Thus, for the purpose of this study, student success will be defined through three outcomes: persistence, retention, and academic achievement.

The terms persistence and retention are often used interchangeably and relate to students' continued enrollment in a program and/or degree in higher education; however, there are differences among the two terms. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2020) defines retention as an institutional measure, whether a student continues enrollment at the same institution. Whereas persistence is a student measure, where a student continues enrollment at

any institution. Tinto (2017) suggests persistence is a form of motivation. He states “it is the quality that allows someone to continue in pursuit of a goal even when challenges arise” (p. 2). In this context, persistence is explored from an individual perspective rather than an institutional perspective.

It is important for higher education institutions to explore ways to help influence their students’ intent to continue to degree completion by examining persistence from a student’s viewpoint. For the purposes of this dissertation in practice, the terms persistence and retention will be defined based on the definitions used by the community college in this study. Therefore, the term student persistence will be used to describe student persistence from fall semester to spring semester. Retention will be used to describe student retention as returning from year one to year two of an academic program. This definition represents an institutional measure; however, due to time constraints of this study the institutional measure could not be collected. Instead, retention will be used to describe a student’s intent to return from year one to year two in his/her academic program at the same institution.

The term student success is generally used to refer to students’ academic performance as represented by grade point average (GPA) (Horton & Snyder, 2009; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003) or similar measures. Studies have shown student achievement, as measured by first-semester GPA has a strong correlation with a student’s decision and chances of returning for their second semester/year of college (Reason, 2003; Stewart et al., 2015). For the purposes of this dissertation in practice, academic achievement was used to describe a student’s first-semester GPA. For this study, student success encompassed persistence, retention, and academic achievement.

## **Review of Relevant Theories, Research, and Practitioner-Based Literature**

In this section, I review relevant research in relation to student persistence, retention, and wellness. Persistence, retention, and wellness in higher education have a common goal of student success. To begin, theories regarding student persistence and retention in higher education will be explored, followed by an introduction to three models and one framework of wellness. Finally, relevant research regarding the intersection of student persistence and wellness will be examined.

### **Student Retention and Persistence in Higher Education**

A considerable amount of literature has been published on student retention and persistence in higher education. These studies have explored various aspects of retention and persistence to learn more about the topic and to identify strategies for educators and policies for institutions that can be implemented to increase the likelihood of a student continuing toward graduation. Much of the research focuses on student retention and persistence from an institutional perspective, looking for ways in which the institution can work to retain students (Tinto, 2016, 2017). Although this information is helpful, it is also important to explore persistence from the students' perspective as there is not a one-size-fits-all model for increasing student persistence in higher education. Research from the students' perspective can help open the doors to learn more about their experiences, perceptions, and behaviors and identify strategies to help enhance the student experience for all learners in hopes to increase persistence. To begin, two theoretical models regarding student retention and persistence will be explored, followed by relevant research findings related to student persistence in higher education.

Several different studies and theoretical models have been explored regarding student retention and persistence in higher education. Two main theories regarding persistence are

Astin's (1999) student involvement theory and Tinto's (1993) final version of the institutional departure theory. Astin (1999) presented a simple and practical student development model called the student involvement theory to guide researchers, administrators, and faculty in their pursuit to increase student persistence. The student involvement theory emphasizes the importance of active participation. Students who are active on campus and in the classroom tend to see increases in learning and personal development. Based on this theory, student involvement focuses more on the motivation and behavior of the student.

Tinto (1993) presented the final version of the institutional departure model which focuses on the social and intellectual development of students. This model focuses on the role the institution plays in influencing students' social and intellectual development. Based on this model, student experiences related to social and intellectual integration will impact their intent to persist. The first year of college, especially the first semester, is important for this transition in regard to student persistence.

Astin's (1999) student involvement theory and Tinto's (1993) institutional departure theory helped create a framework for research regarding persistence and retention in higher education. Several key findings have emerged as a result of research regarding student persistence which I will explore in the following sections of this review of relevant literature. Milem and Berger (1997) found student persistence is linked to early student involvement and engagement with faculty. Their findings indicate a student's level of involvement in the early weeks of a semester is related to whether the student will persist in college. Also, early engagement with faculty can lead to positive impacts relating to a student's desire to continue in college. Additionally, student learning is an important component to persistence overall (Tinto, 2006). Active learning practices that engage students can positively impact retention rates of

first-year students (Braxton et al. 2008). Tinto (2006) suggests restructuring the learning environment to include more collaborative learning, service learning, and frequent feedback from faculty to help enhance student learning, these practices encourage active learning.

Each of these findings provide helpful information for institutions to enhance the student experience in hopes to improve student persistence. Many colleges and universities approach the issue from the standpoint of retention models, where the institution focuses on programs and services to help retain students. For example, colleges and universities add new courses or programs (e.g., first year experience, freshman seminar) to improve the student experience and to promote student persistence (Tinto, 2006). Although this strategy may be helpful in the short-term, it is not necessarily a long-term fix as it does not address cultural and structural issues that may be present. Colleges and universities must move beyond the quick fix of the “add a course” strategy and move towards an inclusive learning environment that changes the overall culture and structure of the institution (Tinto, 2006).

In addition to making changes to higher education structure, it is essential for instructors to create an environment that engages all students and promotes learning. Students who are engaged and learning are more likely to persist (Braxton et al., 2008; Milem & Berger, 1997). Creating an engaging environment for all students can help shape an inclusive culture and, when paired with a first-year experience or freshman seminar course, may be a starting point to help increase student persistence.

When looking through the lens of a student, persistence is defined as their willingness to continue (Tinto, 2015, 2016). By exploring persistence from a student’s standpoint, institutions can learn valuable information to help motivate their students. Psychosocial factors, such as motivation and self-perceptions have been found as influential predictors of student persistence



and achievement (Fong et al., 2017). Self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, and perceived value of curriculum are three important components to students' intent to persist (Tinto, 2015, 2016, 2017).

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability. A student with high self-efficacy is more likely to remain committed to his/her education (Baier et al. 2016; Tinto, 2015, 2016, 2017; Wright et al. 2012). Wright et al. (2012) explored the role of college self-efficacy, which includes course self-efficacy, social self-efficacy, and roommate self-efficacy, in relation to first-year student persistence and academic success. The results from this study indicated course self-efficacy was a significant predictor of persistence. Baier et al. (2016) examined whether self-efficacy, perceptions of mentorship, high school GPA, ACT scores, GPA from first semester, and demographic variables impacted first-year students' intent to persist in college. The strongest predictors of intent to persist for freshmen included both college self-efficacy and perceptions of mentorship. This study also found GPA, ACT scores, and socioeconomic status were not significant predictors of intent to persist. These examples highlight the important role self-efficacy plays in students' intent to persist in higher education.

Next, students must find value in the curriculum to increase their intent to persist. Students who find the curriculum relevant and meaningful are more likely to engage with the content and learn (Tinto, 2015, 2016, 2017). Students who are engaged and learning are more likely to persist (Braxton et al. 2008). Institutions can help students select their educational path based on their needs and interests and highlight the relevance and connections between courses to help students see the value in the curriculum (Tinto, 2015).

The last component of persistence is a sense of belonging. Students need to feel part of the college community, a student with a strong sense of belonging is more likely to continue

towards degree completion (Tinto, 2015, 2016, 2017). Early student involvement on campus and interactions with faculty appear to have positive impacts on student persistence in higher education (Milem & Berger, 1997). Buning et al. (2014) noted students with positive well-being are more likely to be an active participant in the campus community. The findings from these studies indicate there may be a connection between student intent to persist and student well-being which could potentially impact persistence.

The study of student persistence continues to grow and has extended to explore various student populations. For example, some studies focus on specific populations, such as community college students (Fong et al., 2017), African American students (Thomas et al., 2013), and low-income students (Corrigan, 2003), in regard to persistence in higher education. Previous research has indicated low rates of student persistence, especially in low-income and under-represented groups (Tinto, 2006). This study provides a general focus on students attending a community college.

More research is needed regarding student wellness, persistence, and retention in higher education. A comprehensive approach will provide a foundation for further research regarding specific populations in the future. The next section of this review explores three wellness models, a wellness framework, and identifies key components of well-being before examining literature that explores the intersection of persistence and wellness in higher education.

### **Wellness Models**

Research on wellness does not consist of multiple theories, but instead focuses on wellness models and frameworks. This section will focus on three wellness models and one wellness framework. The first model is evidence-based and was developed for mental health and counseling practitioners. The second model is the American Indian well-being model designed

for indigenous students in higher education. The third model is the six dimensions of wellness developed by Bill Hettler (National Wellness Institute, 2020). Finally, Anderson (2017) explored a wellness framework based on the six dimensions of wellness to help identify wellness issues in higher education.

Myers and Sweeney (2004) introduced an evidence-based model of wellness called the indivisible self for mental health and counseling practitioners. This model focuses on a holistic approach to wellness and is based on a previous wellness model, the wheel of wellness. The indivisible self-model includes the following: essential self, creative self, coping self, social self, and physical self. Each of these areas include additional components, for example, the essential self includes spirituality, self-care, gender identity, and cultural identity. The creative self includes thinking, emotions, control, positive humor, and work. The coping self includes realistic beliefs, stress management, self-worth, and leisure. The social self includes love and friendship, and the physical self includes exercise and nutrition. It is important to note based on this model, environmental factors (e.g., families, neighborhoods, schools, religion, government, etc.) may impact overall wellness in a positive or negative way. The indivisible self-model contains many components to highlight a holistic approach to wellness. Although this model is intended for mental health and counseling practitioners, it may be helpful in connecting dimensions of wellness to student persistence in higher education. For example, Pritchard and Wilson (2003) reported social and emotional factors related to student performance (GPA) and retention.

Secatero (2010) began the process of developing the American Indian well-being model. This model is a holistic approach to well-being and includes eight pillars of well-being: spiritual (purpose), cultural (identity), professional (planning), social (networking), mental (thinking),

emotional (feeling), physical (body), and environmental (place). This model was specifically designed for American Indian college students, with the main purpose of creating a road map to address the eight pillars of well-being. Students can use this model to identify resources, strengths, challenges, and a plan of action for each of the eight pillars. For example, after a student learns the meaning of each pillar, he/she would identify a resource (e.g., counselor, professor, staff member, coach, community leader, etc.) connected to that particular pillar. Then the student would identify personal strengths and potential challenges for the pillar. Finally, he/she would identify a plan of action to help overcome the potential challenges. If the student struggles to overcome challenges for a particular pillar by using his/her plan of action, the student can seek help from the identified resource. This process can serve as a problem-solving tool, which can be helpful in college and beyond. It helps to visualize this model as a circle with the student in the center and the eight pillars surrounding the student.

Secatero (2010) acknowledged the need for more research regarding this model as it is in the development phase. It is noted more research needs to be conducted and implemented with all student populations and that this model could benefit all college students. Although this model is in the development phase and there have not been any new developments with the model in the recent years, it provides valuable information regarding the pillars of well-being and includes problem-solving tools to help students succeed in higher education.

Both of these wellness models were created for different purposes (i.e., health and counseling practitioners and American Indian college students); however, there are similarities among the two models that can be beneficial in the college setting. For example, Myers and Sweeney's (2004) indivisible self-model and Secatero's (2010) American Indian well-being model highlight the same pillars and components. Secondly, the spiritual and cultural pillars of

wellness in the American Indian well-being model are also components of the essential self in the indivisible self-model. Also, the mental and emotional pillars in the American Indian well-being model are also components of the creative self in the indivisible self-model. Both models focus on a holistic approach to well-being, meaning the pillars and components work together and individuals should work to maintain a balance within their well-being. Holistic wellness should be viewed as a personal journey. Each person's experience will be different; however, the goal is finding and maintaining a balance within the dimensions (Horton & Snyder, 2009).

The third model, the six dimensions of wellness, was developed by Bill Hettler (National Wellness Institute, 2020). This model includes the following dimensions of wellness: physical, emotional, social, intellectual, spiritual, and occupational. In this model, each of the six dimensions are equally important and play an important role in contributing to healthy lifestyles (Oliver et al., 2018). Similar to the other two wellness models, the six dimensions of wellness model also focuses on a multidimensional and holistic approach to wellness (National Wellness Institute, 2020). Based on this model an individual has opportunities to improve their wellness by making healthy choices through their actions (Oliver et al., 2018).

Anderson (2017) explored various wellness issues in higher education and provided strategies to help promote health and wellness for students in college and beyond. In his book, he explored a wellness framework that is based on the six dimensions of wellness; however, his framework included seven dimensions of wellness: emotional, physical, intellectual, social, occupational, environmental, and spiritual. The dimensions of wellness highlighted in this framework align with both of the wellness models previously discussed. Another dimension of wellness that is sometimes included in wellness models is financial wellness. Heckman et al. (2014) examined financial stress among college students and found a majority of college

students (71%) felt stressed due to financial concerns. Financial issues can add to the stress of college students which in turn may impact well-being and academic performance. Financial concerns are typically driven by, or cause concerns regarding, the other dimensions of wellness (Anderson, 2017).

Although there is not a universal definition for wellness and there are a variety of models and frameworks, there are some common themes regarding wellness. Wellness focuses on a variety of dimensions. The dimensions are interconnected, and wellness is positive and growth oriented (Anderson, 2017). There is a connection between the dimensions, when a person suffers in one or more areas it tends to impact other dimensions of wellness. Wellness tends to focus on a positive approach in looking for ways to promote health and wellness. Finally, wellness focuses on long-term growth. There is always room for continuous improvement regarding wellness.

While there seems to be variations regarding the concept of wellness, there are overall common themes to connect the different definitions, dimensions, models, and frameworks. The following section will explore relevant literature relating to student wellness and persistence, more specifically the interconnection between these topics and student experience and success.

### **Student Experience and Student Success Connections (Intersection)**

College is a transitional period for many students. It brings on new experiences, schedules, financial obligations, and responsibilities which can increase stress and create an imbalance in overall wellness which may impact students' success and persistence. Previous research has explored both topics of persistence (Stewart et al., 2015) and wellness (Baldwin et al., 2017) separately in college settings. Research in both of these areas highlight the importance of the student experience and student success in higher education. For example,

promoting well-being within higher education can help reduce the frequency of illness and boost overall health (Baldwin et al., 2017). Chow (2010) noted that colleges and universities should provide activities and programs to help enhance overall quality of life for their students. There has been little research conducted regarding the relationship between health and academic performance, retention, and persistence (McFadden, 2016). Students often indicate health and wellness concerns impact their academic performance which may relate to their intent to persist (Neilson et al., 2005). However, there is limited research connecting student persistence and a holistic approach to wellness in higher education.

Many researchers focus on demographics and academic variables to predict academic success, retention, and persistence (Saunders-Scott et al., 2018; Stewart et al., 2015). However, Pritchard and Wilson (2003) moved outside these traditional predictors. They set out to explore the impact of social and emotional health on student success (GPA) and retention in higher education. The findings from this study indicate a positive relationship between the two health components and retention and student performance. For example, Prichard and Wilson found emotional health was significantly related to GPA and students with positive coping skills were more likely to remain in college. Another study by Saunders-Scott et al. (2018) compared traditional predictors (e.g., ACT scores and high school GPA) to non-traditional predictors (e.g., stress and grit) to identify which factors best predict academic success (GPA) and retention in college. Their findings indicate perceived stress was the best predictor of retention while ACT scores and high school GPA were the best predictors of academic success, college GPA. These studies highlight the importance of expanding research regarding student success, retention, and persistence outside of the traditional predictors. These studies only focused on a couple of

components of well-being including perceived stress; the next study examined seven dimensions of wellness in relation to academic success.

Horton and Snyder (2009) set out to examine the seven dimensions of wellness (physical, spiritual, social, emotional, intellectual, environmental, and occupational) in relation to academic success (GPA) for students enrolled in a hospitality and tourism management program. The students in this study tracked how they spent their time over a two-week period regarding the seven dimensions of wellness. The results revealed physical, environmental, social, and occupational wellness impacted student success (GPA). More specifically, the data proposes academic success (GPA) can be achieved when there is a balance with overall wellness. Therefore, exploring a holistic approach to wellness maybe beneficial for college students. This study was limited to students in one academic area, hospitality and tourism management, making it difficult to generalize the findings to all college students. While this study focused on student success, it did not explore whether a holistic approach to wellness impacted student persistence.

Sharma and Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2018) also stepped outside the traditional predictors of student retention and persistence and examined the relationship between students' sense of purpose and their commitment to higher education. Their findings revealed students with a stronger sense of purpose reported being more committed to completing their degree. The authors acknowledged this study was the first step in identifying a relationship between sense of purpose and student commitment. It was noted more research should be conducted regarding this relationship, especially longitudinal studies to determine whether or not students obtain their degrees. As highlighted in the American Indian well-being model, spiritual well-being can be described as a sense of purpose (Secatero, 2010). Therefore, it may be helpful to explore the spiritual side of overall wellness and student persistence.



Several of the research studies discussed thus far have provided evidence of the need to explore the relationship between wellness and student persistence, retention, and academic achievement. Each of the studies have explored one or more dimensions of wellness; however, each of these studies have been limited because they were focused on a specific group or a smaller population of college students.

Gopalan and Brady (2019) set out to explore students' sense of belonging and the connection to persistence and mental health from a national perspective. They used nationally available data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study that included first-time, first-year students from two-year and four-year institutions. Their findings indicated a sense of belonging was positively related to persistence, engagement, and mental health for students enrolled at four-year institutions. At the four-year institutional level, first generation and racial-ethnic minority students reported a lower sense of belonging compared to their peers; however, the reverse was true at the two-year level. Student sense of belonging was also reported lower for students enrolled in a two-year college compared to students enrolled in a four-year institution, and it was not significantly linked to persistence, engagement, or mental health.

Johnson et al. (2019) set out to explore the impacts of integrating wellness education (specifically, physical and emotional wellness) into a first-year writing class to support teaching the whole student. The goal of the interdisciplinary writing course was to help support students as they transitioned into the college lifestyle and provide wellness strategies to help them throughout their degree. Results indicated educating the whole student through this course led to increased student awareness about wellness and positive wellness behavior changes. Specially, wellness habits were developed that promoted physical and emotional health. They also found

this course helped students create connections with their classmates which helped develop a sense of community and belonging. This led to student engagement and investment to each other and the course and improved learning outcomes. Johnson et al. argue the need to incorporate wellness into academic programs in addition to other support services available on college campuses to help support the whole student.

A sense of belonging is an important component to students' desire to continue (Tinto, 2016). Students who balance the dimensions of wellness in a positive way are more likely to engage on their college campuses (Buning et al., 2014). Johnson et al. (2019) found their interdisciplinary writing course helped improve awareness and wellness behaviors and created a sense of community and belonging for a group of students. Therefore, there is a need to continue to explore the connections between a sense of belonging and student persistence, engagement, and well-being. Additionally, while social and emotional dimensions of wellness are often studied in connection to student success (Gopalan & Brady, 2019; Prichard & Wilson, 2003), the other dimensions have not been studied individually. For example, while there are studies that explore physical wellness (Milroy et al., 2013; Sidman et al., 2009), there has not been a connection to retention or persistence. Research on student success has been growing to include all dimensions of wellness. For example, a few authors (Choate & Smith, 2003; Horton & Snyder, 2009) studied wellness dimensions and student success outcomes. Horton and Snyder (2009) found that physical as well as social, environmental, and occupational dimensions affect a student's GPA. This research highlights the need to further investigate connections between student wellness and success. The next section will focus on common approaches to addressing the problem of practice.

## **Common Approaches to Addressing the Problem**

Although there is a considerable amount of research regarding student persistence, retention, and wellness in higher education, there is a need for more research combining these topics with a holistic approach to wellness. As students continue to face the challenges and changes of college, higher education institutions must be ready to help students build a skill set that will not only benefit them throughout their academic career but beyond. This section will focus on common approaches to addressing the problem of practice.

Johnson et al. (2019) integrated wellness education into a first-year interdisciplinary writing class. The aim of this study was to incorporate physical and mental (emotional) well-being into a writing class to increase the students' awareness and confidence in their first year of college. Their finding revealed students enrolled in this course reported improved awareness regarding both physical and mental wellness and positive behavior changes. Throughout their experience in the course, the students felt a sense of belonging and community, which had a positive impact on the student learning outcomes.

Gieck and Olsen (2007) examined the impacts of holistic wellness (physical, emotional, spiritual, social, occupational, and intellectual) on the level of activity for obese and sedentary students. The participants engaged in an 11-week program where they recorded daily walking and attended bi-monthly classes that focused on holistic wellness. Their findings indicated an increase in activity level, self-efficacy, and knowledge regarding wellness.

These two examples demonstrate some of the positive results related to incorporating specific dimensions of wellness in an academic course and a wellness program on two college campuses. In the first study, students reported positive behavior changes in relation to both physical and emotional wellness and a sense of belonging. The second study also reported

positive impacts regarding students' level of activity, self-efficacy, and wellness knowledge. Sense of belonging and self-efficacy are two important components to a student's intent to persist in college (Tinto, 2015, 2016, 2017). Both the course and wellness program sought to increase awareness and help students develop healthy wellness behaviors to improve students' overall well-being.

Another approach outside of individual courses and/or programs integrating wellness education is the use of a freshman seminar, also referred to as a first-year seminar or first-year experience course. A first-year seminar is an introductory course to help students transition into college. First-year seminar courses are utilized for a variety of reasons, such as helping students acclimate to the new college environment and developing study skills (Jaijairam, 2016); many institutions create a first-year experience course to help improve persistence (Porter & Swing, 2006).

There are many positive benefits of first-year seminar courses which several research studies have documented these positive impacts. For example, students enrolled in these courses are more likely to persist, have positive self-perceptions as a learner, experience frequent interactions with faculty that are meaningful, become more active in campus activities, and report higher levels of satisfaction in relation to their college experience (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006). Barton and Donahue (2009) found students who completed a first-year seminar had a higher GPA at the end of their first year, reported a higher work ethic, and engaged in campus activities and discussed grades with faculty more often. First-year seminars have also been shown to have a positive impact on students returning for year two (Mendez et al., 2020). Further, Schnell and Doetkott (2003) conducted a longitudinal study regarding the long-term

impacts of a first-year seminar and found that students who took a first-year seminar had higher retention rates over a four-year time period.

Porter and Swing (2006) explored the impact of first-year seminar course components on student persistence at four-year institutions. Although many researchers have studied first-year seminar courses, most focus on the overall impact of the course, however, there is limited research focusing on the components of the class structure and which content areas contribute the most to increase student persistence. The researchers used a survey to collect data at 45 four-year institutions. The survey focused on the student's intent to persist and the following first-year seminar variables: study skills and academic engagement, college policies, campus engagement, peer connections, and health education. The results indicated two of the five variables, study skills and academic engagement and health education, had a significant impact on the students' intention to persist. Therefore, including health education along with study skills and academic engagement in a first-year seminar course may have a positive impact on a students' willingness to continue.

Although there are variations among first-year seminars depending on the institution, many courses focus on similar learning goals. Some of the major learning goals for first-year seminars include life skills, strategies for academic success, campus and community connections, and foundations for global learning (Jaijairam, 2016). Jaijairam (2016) noted wellness is typically included in life skills; however, many of the dimensions are linked to the other learning goals as well. For example, strategies for academic success includes critical thinking skills which connects to intellectual wellness. Diversity, inclusion, and civic engagement connects to social well-being in addition to faculty and peer interactions.

Amaya et al. (2019) discussed the importance of creating a wellness culture on college campuses. A culture of wellness can provide many benefits for students, staff, faculty, and administrators. The authors highlighted several best practice strategies in their article. Some of the strategies highlighted in the article include effective communication regarding wellness opportunities, sense of community, and learning opportunities. Higher education institutions looking to create or maintain a wellness culture should consider including these strategies in their wellness initiatives. Wellness initiatives should be comprehensive and include the concerns of students, faculty, and staff. Faculty and staff have unique opportunities to promote student wellness on college campuses, whether they serve as a mentor, advisor, or confidant related to wellness issues (Buning et al., 2014). A first-year seminar course could provide a platform to begin creating a culture of wellness where faculty and staff serve as a support network for students and each other in regard to their well-being.

Creating a wellness culture on campus will take time, including wellness education into a first-year seminar course would be only the starting point. Students would be introduced to wellness topics within their first year on campus. Including wellness education in a first-year course may help encourage new students to continue with their courses and work towards degree completion. As previously mentioned, health education in first-year seminar courses was linked to a greater intent to persist (Porter & Swing, 2006). As Tinto (2006) argued, many colleges and universities try adding courses or programs to increase persistence; however, these changes do not always result in the desired outcomes. As a result of these inclusions, there must be changes in higher education culture and structure. Building a wellness culture on campus can help provide positive benefits such as an increased sense of community (Amaya et al., 2019). Students who feel they are a part of the campus community (sense of belonging) are more likely

to persist (Tinto, 2015, 2016, 2017). Also, students are more likely to be active on campus if they have a positive sense of well-being (Buning et al., 2014). Therefore, wellness education might be a missing link in student persistence and retention in higher education. The next section will focus on linking possible solutions and barriers to theoretical foundations.

### **Linking Possible Solutions and Barriers to Theoretical Foundations**

This section will focus on possible solutions and barriers relating to the theories that inform the problem of practice. The major theories explored thus far have been Astin's (1999) student involvement theory and Tinto's (1993) institutional departure theory. Both of these theories focus on student persistence. To date, there have not been any theories developed relating to the dimensions of wellness. Instead, research has focused on different models and frameworks. Three models relating to wellness were examined, Myers and Sweeney's (2004) indivisible self-model, Secatero's (2010) American Indian well-being model, and the six dimensions of wellness model.

The two theories regarding student persistence help inform the problem of practice by highlighting the importance of student involvement, especially early on in a student's academic journey. Tinto's (1993) institutional departure theory focuses on a student's social and intellectual growth, while Tinto highlights the importance of the first year of college in terms of student persistence. Social integration can be measured by a student's interactions with his/her peers and faculty, while academic or intellectual integration can be measured by a student's grades and intellectual development (Aljohani, 2016). Based on this theory, students must become involved in the social and intellectual life of college. The social and intellectual aspects of this theory relate to two dimensions of wellness: social and intellectual. Astin's (1999) student involvement theory focuses on a student's involvement in college, or the amount of

energy invested by the student, with an emphasis on motivation and behavior. Similar to Tinto's institutional departure theory (1993), Astin's student involvement theory relates to one dimension of wellness: social. This dissertation in practice seeks to explore the relationship between student persistence, intent to return for year two, academic achievement, and a holistic (multidimensional) approach to well-being. There is limited research in this area, which could pose as a potential barrier. Many studies relating to student persistence and retention focus on traditional predictors of persistence and retention, while this study will step outside of the traditional predictors and explore wellness from a holistic approach.

Again, to date there are no clearly developed wellness theories; however, different models exist and have been researched. One of the biggest barriers to the wellness models is the lack of universal design. Unfortunately, in wellness research, there are several different definitions, models, frameworks, and components of wellness. The models previously highlighted are helpful in exploring wellness from a holistic approach that is multidimensional. Although each model includes different dimensions, they appear to overlap and cover similar areas of overall wellness. Therefore, the lack of consistency is troublesome when researching wellness.

As previously mentioned, there is a considerable amount of research regarding college student persistence and retention. There are also a number of studies focusing on wellness in higher education; however, more research is needed focusing on both student wellness and persistence, intent to return for year two, and academic achievement in higher education. This study will add to the literature and explore outside of the traditional predictors of student persistence. Higher education institutions have the responsibility to develop the whole student.



If there is a relationship between student wellness and success outcomes, it can help inform practice in higher education.

## **ARTIFACT II: INQUIRY APPROACH**

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships of student wellness with several student success outcome variables, such as persistence from a fall to a spring semester, intent to return for year two, and academic achievement at a community college. This dissertation in practice sought to address the following questions:

1. What are college students' behaviors related to wellness at a community college?
2. What is the relationship between college students' wellness and their persistence (institutional measure) from fall semester to spring semester at a community college?
3. What is the relationship between college students' wellness and their intent to return from year one to year two at a community college?
4. What is the relationship between college students' wellness and academic achievement, as measured by their first-semester GPA at a community college?

This study utilized a quantitative approach to address the research questions. There are three dependent variables: 1) institutional measure of persistence (fall to spring enrollment) 2) students' self-reported measure of their intent to return for year two, and 3) institutional measure of first-semester GPA. The independent variables are students' wellness measured by the Body-Mind-Spirit Wellness Behavior and Characteristic Inventory (BMS-WBCI) instrument subscales (e.g., body, mind, spirit).

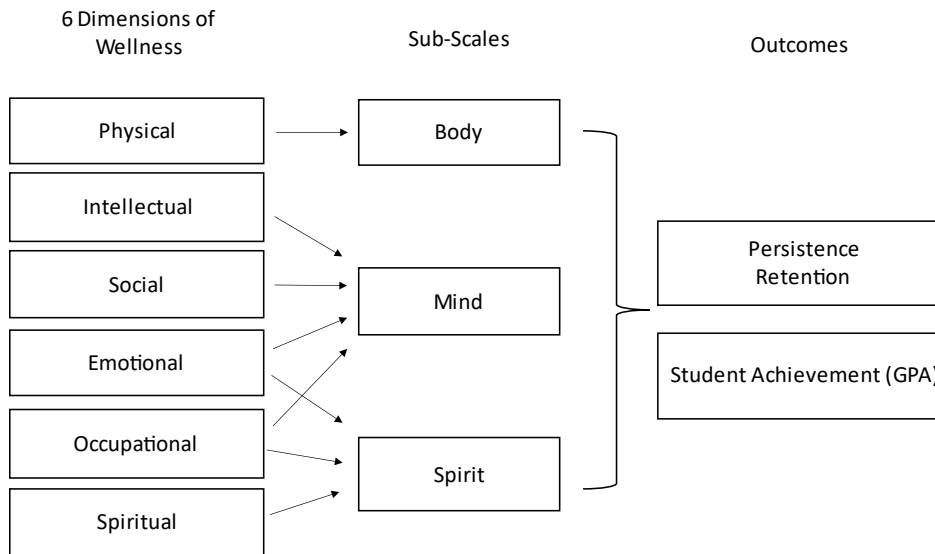
The BMS-WBCI created by Hey et al. (2006)<sup>1</sup> was used to measure student behaviors related to the dimensions of wellness. The lead author granted permission to use their instrument in this study (W. Hey, personal communication, March 26, 2021). This instrument focuses on the same dimensions of wellness included in the six dimensions of wellness model. Due to the availability of the validated instrument (BMS-WBCI) that measures the six dimensions of wellness (Hey et al., 2006), this model was best positioned to shape the research design to address the research questions of this dissertation in practice. This instrument was also selected for this study because it is easily accessible, time efficient, cost effective, focuses on six dimensions of wellness, and was designed for college students. In addition, the instrument has been tested and used among college students (Bart et al., 2018). The BMS-WBCI is a consistent measure of college students' self-reported wellness behaviors and is supported by researchers for this population (Bart et al., 2018). Hey et al. (2006) conducted a two-part project to first identify wellness statements regarding body, mind, and spirit dimensions that are suitable for college students and then tested the validity of the BMS-WBCI. The researchers wanted to create a wellness instrument that focused on multiple dimensions that was useful, efficient, and cost-effective. The results from this project indicate that the BMS-WBCI is a short, time efficient, cost-effective, and useful wellness behavior inventory for college students. Mareno and James (2010) further validated the BMS-WBCI as an effective instrument to measure wellness behaviors of college students. A conceptual diagram is included below that includes the variables being studied in this dissertation in practice. The conceptual diagram includes the six dimensions of wellness, each dimension's connection to the sub-scales (body, mind, spirit) in the BMS-WBCI, and the outcomes (see Figure 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Copyright by Hey & Calderon

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual diagram of the variables used in this dissertation in practice*



### **Survey Methods and Instrument**

The BMS-WBCI includes 44 items divided into three subscales: body, mind, and spirit. The body subscale includes nine items relating to physical wellness such as personal safety, physical fitness, and nutrition. The following sample item from the body subscale reads: “I maintain my fitness by exercising regularly and maintaining my weight.” The mind subscale includes 20 items relating to intellectual, social, emotional, and occupational wellness. The following sample item from the mind subscale reads: “I have satisfying interpersonal relationships.” The spirit subscale includes 15 items relating to spiritual, emotional, and occupational wellness. The following sample item from the spirit subscale reads: “I am content with who I am.” Each item is measured on a 3-point Likert scale, 1 indicates “rarely/seldom;” 2 indicates “occasionally/sometimes;” and 3 indicates “often/always.” Scores from this survey will range from 44 – 132, where higher scores indicate higher levels of participation in positive

wellness lifestyle behaviors. Table 1 shows the possible scores for the wellness composite, body sub-scale, mind sub-scale, and spirit sub-scale.

**Table 1**

*BMS-WBCI Scores and Interpretations/Actions Needed*

	Scores	Interpretation/Actions Needed
Wellness Composite	44-73	“Need immediate behavior change to improve wellness lifestyle”
Body Sub-scale	9-14	
Mind Sub-scale	20-33	
Spirit Sub-scale	15-24	
Wellness Composite	74-103	“On the way to a wellness lifestyle, but behavior change is needed in certain areas”
Body Sub-scale	15-20	
Mind Sub-scale	34-47	
Spirit Sub-scale	25-34	
Wellness Composite	104-132	“Frequency of behaviors indicate that a healthy lifestyle exists”
Body Sub-scale	21-27	
Mind Sub-scale	48-60	
Spirit Sub-scale	35-45	

In addition to the 44 items on the BMS-WBCI, students were asked demographic questions such as gender, age, ethnicity, academic program (one- or two-year program), and year (freshman or sophomore). Students were also asked to report their intent to return for year two of their program, and whether they are enrolled in or have taken College Essentials or participated in a Student Success Series workshop on campus. After the BMS-WBCI was completed and institutional data (first-semester GPA and persistence from fall to spring) was collected, then statistical analyses were conducted.

## **Setting**

This study was conducted at a small rural community college in the Midwest. The college offers approximately 50 one-year and two-year career programs, in addition to transfer options for students seeking a bachelor's degree. On average, the college serves approximately 2,300 students, with dual-enrolled high school students accounting for approximately 40% of the student population. The community college focuses on eight dimensions of wellness: physical, emotional, social, spiritual, intellectual, environmental, occupational, and financial. The eight dimensions of wellness are introduced in College Essentials, which is a required, one credit hour course, and one that all students enrolled in a two-year program are required to take. The college also offers a Student Success Series program built around the eight dimensions of wellness. The Student Success Series includes a variety of free workshops for students each semester which highlight one or more dimensions of wellness and connect students to resources on campus. Therefore, the majority of the participants included in this study have been introduced to the dimensions of wellness by either taking the College Essentials course and/or attending one of the Student Success Series workshops (See Table 3).

## **Population and Sample**

A major focus of this study was on persistence and intent to return the following year. Therefore, participants in this study included students enrolled in their first year of a two-year program. Due to the purpose of this study, high school students, students enrolled in the second year of their program, and students completing a diploma (one year program), or certificate were excluded. There were 527 students who were eligible to participate in this study, 139 of the eligible students (26%) completed the survey. Table 2 includes demographic information about

the sample in this study. The majority of the participants were female (69%), traditional age 18-24 (88%), and predominately White (91%).

**Table 2**

*Participant Demographic Information*

Demographic Category	Overall Sample Count ( <i>n</i> = 139)	Overall Sample Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	42	30.2
Female	96	69.1
Non-binary/Third Gender	1	0.7
<b>Age</b>		
18-24	123	88.5
25-29	8	5.8
30-39	7	5.0
40 and older	1	0.7
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
White	127	91.4
Black or African American	4	2.9
Asian	2	1.4
Other	5	3.6
Prefer Not to Say	1	0.7

This sample population in this particular study is similar to the population of this community college and of all community college students within the state in terms of gender and ethnicity. Based on the Fall 2020 enrollment data for this community college, the majority of the student population was female (55%) and predominantly White (85%) (National Center for Educational Statistics, n.d.). Based on the Fall 2020 enrollment data for all community college students in the state, the majority were female (56%) and predominately White (72%) (Iowa Department of Education, 2022). In terms of age, the majority of the participants in this study

were between 18-24 years in age (86%), while, based on the Fall 2020 enrollment data for this community college, only 60% of the college population was between 18-22 years of age and only 44% of all community college students within the state were between 18-22 years of age (Iowa Department of Education, 2022).

Table 3 includes academic information about the sample. The majority of the participants were classified as freshmen (81%) and all participants were in a two-year program. Academic standing is determined by the number of credits; therefore, this study included students that were classified as freshmen and sophomores. The sophomores included in the study were enrolled in the first year of their two-year academic program. Students with sophomore status may have taken college credits in high school or prerequisite classes prior to enrolling in their program. Students were asked to indicate their Meta-Major; the college in this study defines a Meta-Major as a group of career and transfer programs grouped together based on broad areas of interest. The majority of the students (84%) were either enrolled in or had taken College Essentials, while 53% of the participants had attended a Student Success Series Workshop. A large majority (99%) of the participants persisted from the fall to spring semester and indicated their intent to return for the second year of their academic program. Participants were asked to rank their intent to return for year two on a Likert scale 1 = “Strongly Disagree” and 5 = “Strong Agree.” The average ( $M = 4.19$ ) of that response indicated that the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they would return for year two.



**Table 3***Academic Information*

Demographic Category	Overall Sample Count ( <i>n</i> = 139)	Overall Sample Percentage
<b>Academic Standing</b>		
Freshman	112	80.6
Sophomore	26	18.7
Missing	1	0.7
<b>Academic Program</b>		
2 Year Program	139	100
<b>Meta-Major</b>		
Agriculture	12	8.6
Business	9	6.5
Health Sciences	55	39.6
Human and Public Services	30	21.6
Humanities	7	5.0
STEM	13	9.4
Not sure	13	9.4
<b>College Essentials</b>		
Enrolled or taken College Essentials	117	84.2
Not enrolled or have not taken College Essentials	14	10.1
Not Sure	3	5.8
<b>Student Success Series</b>		
Attended SSS	74	53.2
Did not attend SSS	42	30.2
Not Sure	23	16.5
<b>Persistence</b>		
Persisted fall to spring semester	137	98.6
Did not persist fall to spring semester	2	1.4
<b>Intent to Return Year Two</b>		
Yes	137	98.6
No	2	1.4

When looking at the institutional measure of retention at this community college, 70% of first-time full-time students who enrolled in the Fall 2019 returned and enrolled in Fall of 2020 (National Center for Educational Statistics, n.d.). Based on the sample population in this study the majority (99%) of the participants indicated they would return for year two.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection began in Fall 2021 after approval was obtained from the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at the University of North Dakota (IRB #0003748). IRB approval and consent were also obtained from the participating institution. The survey was administered late October 2021 and concluded mid-November 2021. An explanation of potential risks and benefits of participation in this study was provided and informed consent was obtained from the participants before they began the survey.

There were two plans for data collection. Plan A involved administering the survey online using Qualtrics. A post was made on the student portal page at the community college inviting students to participate in the research study. The post provided the qualification criteria, a brief description of the study, a link to the Qualtrics survey, and a QR code. All students at the community college had access to the portal page and could view the post. There were 437 views and one like of the post on the portal page. During the first week, there was a low response rate with only 10 students completing the online survey. Therefore, Plan B was implemented which included the researcher attending class sessions across campus. The researcher sent an email to faculty who teach first-year courses that traditionally include more first-year students. Faculty were asked if the researcher could attend a class session to seek participants for this study. The researcher attended 12 different class sessions across campus either in person or via Zoom to recruit students to participate in the study. In each class session, the researcher explained the

qualification criteria to participate in the study and asked eligible and willing participants to read and complete the consent form before starting the survey. Participants had the option of completing the survey online in Qualtrics by using a QR code or completing a paper/pencil survey. The survey took approximately 10-15 minutes for participants to complete. A total of 192 surveys were submitted, 183 surveys were submitted online via Qualtrics while 9 surveys were submitted using a paper/pencil copy. There were 15 submitted surveys that were either submitted blank, did not include a name/student ID number, or did not include a valid student ID number.

The survey responses were exported into an Excel spreadsheet from Qualtrics after the survey closed. The researcher created a second Excel spreadsheet which included only the participants' student ID number and/or name. The second spreadsheet was created to collect the institutional data (first-semester GPA and persistence) from the participating college. This spreadsheet was transferred to the participating institution's Human Resources Department using a secured flash drive. The participating institution reviewed the names and student ID numbers to verify each matched a student on campus. Based on the 177 names and student IDs presented, 174 matched a current student, with 5 students completing the survey two times. The participating institution completed the spreadsheet by entering in each student's first-semester GPA, persistence (collected after the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the spring semester), and anticipated date of graduation. The institutional data was returned to the researcher to complete the data collection stage. Based on the data provided by the community college, a total of 139 submitted surveys met the study qualifications and were included in the data analysis.

## **Confidentiality and Data Storage**

Survey data was collected two ways: online via Qualtrics and paper/pencil. The Qualtrics program allows the creation and storage of online surveys. The Qualtrics survey data for this study can only be accessed with the use of a password. The researcher for this study is the only person who knows the password. The data remained in Qualtrics until it was exported into an Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet was stored on a flash drive. The researcher is the only individual who had access to the flash drive.

To obtain the institutional data, the researcher created a second Excel spreadsheet with only the participants' name and/or student ID number (what was provided on the submitted surveys). The Excel spreadsheet was transferred from the researcher's flash drive to the computer of the individual in charge of institutional research. After the institution linked either the participants' name or student ID number to his/her first-semester GPA, persistence, and anticipated graduation date, the Excel spreadsheet was returned to the researcher. At this point each participant was given a new participation ID number and all identifying information was removed.

## **Limitations**

There were a few limitations to this research approach. Due to time constraints, this study could not collect first-to-second year retention data from the institution. Instead, the students' intent to return from year one to year two was explored. Retention data was self-reported by the students regarding their intention to return for year two, instead of using institutional retention data. Next, the wellness behavior data was self-reported. There is a risk of social desirability bias, where students may over or underestimate their wellness. Porter (2011) highlighted an example of social desirability bias in a self-reported survey where students were

asked to use a daily journal for certain behaviors and later completed a follow-up survey. The students severely overestimated their behaviors in the follow-up survey. Finally, this study used convenience sampling instead of random sampling to identify participants. Therefore, this sample may not represent the population and may bias the results. Random sampling may have led to a better representation of the population because all students would have had an equal probability of being selected and would have increased external validity (Sedgwick, 2013). Instead, the convenience sample may have included more students intending to return and may not represent the student population as a whole.

### **Positionality**

My occupation, expertise, and personal experiences may influence the interpretation of results for this study. I am a Physical Fitness and Wellness Instructor at the participating community college, I helped develop and teach College Essentials, and I serve on the committee that organizes and facilitates the Student Success Series Workshops. I also value my own wellness; it is part of who I am. I developed a passion for wellness at a young age and continue to enhance my personal well-being. My thoughts and beliefs on wellness behaviors and what I consider healthy habits will be different from others. My expertise and experiences shape my holistic viewpoint on wellness. I strongly believe it is the role/mission of higher education to prepare students for life beyond college which includes healthy behaviors from a holistic approach including the mind, body, and spirit. My viewpoint will differ from others who do not have a background in wellness; therefore, we may interpret the results differently. I will continue to think through how my expertise and personal experiences may impact my blind spots and how I interpret the results through this study.

## Findings

### Analysis

Preliminary data analysis consisted of the descriptive statistics and tests for reliability and internal consistency. Table 4 presents the Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) for reliability and internal consistency of each sub-scale (body, mind, and spirit) and the wellness composite score. It also presents the distribution tendencies for the independent variables (body, mind, and spirit sub-scales and the wellness composite scale) and the dependent variable (first-semester GPA). The BMS-WBCI includes three sub-scales: the body sub-scale included nine items ( $\alpha = .75$ ), the mind sub-scale included 20 items ( $\alpha = .82$ ), and the spirit sub-scale included 15 items ( $\alpha = .92$ ). The wellness composite includes all 44 items ( $\alpha = .91$ ). The Cronbach values are all greater than 0.7 which indicates acceptable to excellent internal consistency for each of the sub-scales and the wellness composite (Bland & Altman, 1997).

**Table 4**

*Summary of the Variables*

Variable	$\alpha$	$M$	$SD$	Variable Range
Body (sub-scale)	.75	18.98	3.62	11-27
Mind (sub-scale)	.82	52.81	4.66	39-60
Spirit (sub-scale)	.92	34.30	6.87	18-45
Wellness (composite)	.91	106.09	12.19	74-130
First-Semester GPA		3.03	.92	.00-4.00

Primary data analysis consisted of descriptive statistics, a bivariate correlation, and a one-way ANOVA. The specific data analyses for each research question are addressed below.

### ***Students' Behaviors Related to Wellness at a Community College***

Primary data analysis for this question included the descriptive statistics for each sub-scale (body, mind, spirit) and the wellness composite. The analyses of the wellness behaviors revealed that on average the participants engaged in a healthy lifestyle, with some room for improvement. The mean scores, included in Table 4, for the body, mind, and spirit sub-scales fall within the interpretation range of “on the way to a wellness lifestyle, but behavior change is needed in certain areas.” While the mean score, included in Table 4, for wellness composite was within the interpretation range of “frequency of behaviors indicate that a healthy lifestyle exists”.

Table 5 illustrates the frequencies within each of the interpretation ranges for the BMS-WBCI. The majority of the participants (55%) are “on the way to a wellness lifestyle...” for the body sub-scale. While the majority of participants were in the highest range “frequency of behaviors indicate that a healthy lifestyle exists” for the remaining sub-scales (mind 88%, spirit 52%) and the wellness composite (59%).

### ***Relationships Between College Students' Wellness and Their Persistence and Retention***

The second and third research questions for this study sought to explore the relationship between college students' wellness and their persistence (institutional measure) from fall semester to spring semester at a community college and their intent to return to year two. Due to the lack of variance within the institutional measure of persistence from fall to spring semesters, statistical relationships were not feasible and data analysis was not conducted for the second research question. Similarly, there was a lack of variance within students' reported intent to return year two as 99% of the students reported their desire to return for their second year.

**Table 5***Frequencies of the BMS-WBCI Interpretations/Actions Needed*

Interpretation Range	<i>Body Sub-scale</i>	<i>Mind Sub-scale</i>	<i>Spirit Sub-scale</i>	<i>Wellness composite</i>
Need immediate behavior change to improve wellness lifestyle	N = 16 12%	N = 0 0%	N = 13 9%	N = 0 0%
On the way to a wellness lifestyle, but behavior change is needed in certain areas	N = 76 55%	N = 16 12%	N = 54 38%	N = 57 41%
Frequency of behaviors indicate that a healthy lifestyle exists	N = 47 34%	N = 123 88%	N = 72 52%	N = 82 59%

Again, statistical relationships were not feasible and data analysis was not conducted for this question. Although this current study could not answer research question two and research question three, there is value in this information about the college success rate of the sample. Future studies could use this information to conduct a longitudinal study by collecting the wellness survey data earlier in students' college careers and then following up on this sample with the institutional data for persistence (fall to spring enrollment) and institutional data for retention (returning from year one to year two of a program) in year two of their studies. A longitudinal study could use an actual measure of retention rather than a self-reported measure.

***Relationships Between College Students' Wellness and Academic Achievement***

The fourth research question for this study explored the relationship between college students' wellness and academic achievement, as measured by their first-semester GPA at a community college. First, a bivariate correlation was computed to assess the relationship between each sub-scale (body, mind, spirit) and the wellness composite and first-semester GPA. There was a statistically significant positive correlation ( $r=.178$ ,  $n = 139$ ,  $p = .036$ ) between the



body sub-scale and first-semester GPA. There was no evidence of a statistically significant relationship among the other sub-scales, the wellness composite and first-semester GPA. Table 6 provides a summary of the outputs.

**Table 6**

*Bivariate Correlations*

	First-semester GPA
Body (subscale)	
Pearson Correlation	.18*
Sig. (2-tailed)	.04
N	139
Mind (subscale)	
Pearson Correlation	.07
Sig. (2-tailed)	.43
N	139
Spirit (subscale)	
Pearson Correlation	.14
Sig. (2-tailed)	.11
N	139
Wellness (composite)	
Pearson Correlation	.16
Sig. (2-tailed)	.07
N	139

\*Correlation is significant at  $p < 0.05$  (2-tailed)

Second, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of three interpretations/actions needed for each of the BMS-WBCI subscales (body, mind, and spirit) and wellness composite on first-semester GPA, Table 7 provides a summary of the outputs. A one-way ANOVA revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in first-semester GPA between at least two groups for the spirit subscale ( $F(2,203), p = 0.04$ ). A Bonferroni Test

adjusted for multiple comparisons post hoc and found that the mean value of first-semester GPA was significantly different between Category 1 (“Need immediate behavior change to improve wellness lifestyle”) and Category 2 (“On the way to a wellness lifestyle, but behavior change is needed in certain areas”) ( $p = 0.04$ ). There was no evidence of a statistically significant difference in first-semester GPA between Category 1 and Category 3 for the spirit subscale ( $p = 0.06$ ) and Category 2 and Category 3 ( $p = 1$ ). Table 8 shows the mean difference between each of the interpretation ranges/actions needed for the spirit sub-scale.

**Table 7**

*ANOVA Interpretations/Actions Needed BMS-WBCI Sub-Scales and Wellness Composite*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.
<b>Body Subscale</b>					
Between Groups	3.90	2	1.95	2.37	0.10
Within Groups	112.14	136	0.83		
Total	116.05	138			
<b>Mind Subscale</b>					
Between Groups	0.83	1	0.83	0.99	0.32
Within Groups	115.22	137	0.84		
Total	116.05	138			
<b>Spirit Subscale</b>					
Between Groups	5.38	2	2.69	2.20	0.04
Within Groups	110.67	136	0.81		
Total	116.05	138			
<b>Wellness Composite</b>					
Between Groups	1.14	1	1.14	1.36	0.25
Within Groups	114.91	137	0.84		
Total	116.05	138			

**Table 8***Multiple Comparisons Table Dependent Variable: First-Semester GPA (Bonferroni Test)*

	Need immediate behavior change to improve wellness lifestyle	On the way to a wellness lifestyle, but behavior change is needed in certain areas	Frequency of behaviors indicate that a healthy lifestyle exists
Need immediate behavior change to improve wellness lifestyle	-1	0.04*	0.06
On the way to a wellness lifestyle, but behavior change is needed in certain areas	-	-1	1
Frequency of behaviors indicate that a healthy lifestyle exists	-	-	-1

\* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

### **Interpretations**

Literature has assisted with the interpretations of the variables' distributions in the sample and findings of the relationship between wellness and student success outcomes. The following section highlights the interpretations of the findings from this study.

#### ***Students' Behaviors Related to Wellness at a Community College***

The findings from this study indicated on average the community college students' reported wellness behaviors fell within the interpretation/actions needed category of "on the way to a wellness lifestyle, but behavior change is needed in certain areas" for each sub-scale (e.g.,

body, mind, spirit). The average or mean wellness composite score indicated the community college students' "frequency of behaviors indicated that a healthy lifestyle exists." This interpretation category indicates the highest levels of wellness; therefore, the students' reported wellness behaviors in this study indicated high levels of wellness. When looking at the frequencies within each interpretation range, the majority of participants were within the interpretation category of the highest levels of wellness for mind (88%), spirit (52%), and wellness composite (59%), while the majority of participants were "on the way to a wellness lifestyle..." or the middle interpretation category for body (55%). Therefore, looking at the wellness behaviors of the participants in this study, the majority are making progress towards a wellness lifestyle or are already participating in wellness behaviors that indicate a healthy lifestyle exists.

LaFontaine et al. (2007) explored wellness behaviors of first-year college students. This study used the Wellness Evaluation of Lifestyle (WEL) survey, their results indicated students scored highest in the sub-scales of love and sense of worth, these results have emotional and social connections. Students in this study scored the lowest on nutrition and the stress management subscales; however, still had higher mean scores on these areas compared to the national average. Nutrition and the stress management subscales connect to the physical and emotional dimensions. LaFontaine et al. suggested colleges should focus their attention on student wellness behaviors, particularly in the first year, to help create programs, interventions, and align campus academic and student services to enhance students' overall well-being. In the present study, the participants (first-year students) indicated high levels of wellness behaviors. The community college in this study has wellness integrated into the first-year experience for community college students through College Essentials (first-year seminar) and the Student

Success Series (wellness workshops). This community college is beginning to align academic and student services to introduce students to the dimensions of wellness early in their academic career.

### ***Relationships Between College Students' Wellness and Their Persistence and Retention***

Due to the lack of variance within the institutional measure of persistence from fall to spring semester and within students' reported intent to return for year two data (99% indicated that they would return the following semester), analyses were not conducted for the second and third research questions. Although this current study was unable to answer these two research questions, there is value in regard to the success rate of the sample. Future research could expand from this study to explore a whole person approach to promote student success (e.g., persistence, retention, academic achievement). Cuseo (2015) argued a holistic approach, or a focus on the whole person, is needed to promote student success in higher education. One way is through a first-year seminar with a holistic focus that includes academic and non-academics topics relating to college life. First-year seminars impact college students' academic performance, persistence, and retention (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006; Jaijairam, 2016). Additionally, Porter and Swing (2006) found health education had a substantial impact on first-year students' intention to persist in college. The foundation built during the first year of college should integrate a whole person approach to wellness to help students achieve success inside and outside of the classroom.

Cuseo (2015) noted the importance of collaboration between academics and student services. Other studies have also highlighted the importance of collaboration between academics and student affairs in terms of student success and wellness (Amaya et al., 2019; Buning et al., 2014; LaFountaine, et al., 2007). In addition, Buning et al. (2014) suggests the importance of

overall well-being in terms of student success in higher education. LaFontaine et al. (2007) suggests aligning policies with the dimensions of wellness throughout campus such as, healthy dining options, quiet hours in housing, recreation facilities, wellness programming and services, and wellness courses in the college curriculum. They also recommend assessing student wellness behaviors in the first year of college. The current study assessed student wellness behaviors during the first year of their academic program for a small sample of community college students, as previously suggested future studies should survey first-year students earlier regarding their wellness behaviors and later follow-up by collecting institutional measures for persistence and retention. A longitudinal study could allow for the collection of institutional measures rather than relying on self-reported data.

The institution in this study has been integrating a whole person approach for students in their first two years of college. The institution has shown progress in collaboration between academics and student services. For example, the College Essentials course, required for all first-year students enrolled in a two-year program, integrates the eight dimensions of wellness (physical, emotional, social, intellectual, spiritual, environmental, occupational, financial). The integration of the dimensions of wellness in this academic course took place within the last few years. The Student Success Series, wellness workshops based around the eight dimensions, is also a newer addition to student services on campus. This is the second full year of the wellness workshop offerings. College Essentials and the Student Success Series require the collaboration between academics and student affairs. The information in College Essentials connects resources on campus (available through student services) to the eight dimensions of wellness. Also, the Student Success Series focuses on workshops that can be integrated into academic courses across campus.

Based on the participants reported wellness behaviors in this current study, the students indicate higher levels of wellness. In terms of the participants persistence (fall to spring) and intent to return for year two, 99% of the participants returned from first semester to second semester and 99% indicated their desire to return for the second year of their program. Although there was a lack of variability for both the institutional measure of persistence and the participants desire to return for year two, there is practical significance from the results in this study. The participants in this study indicated higher levels of wellness and also have high levels of persistence and intent to return for year two. Looking at these results from a practical standpoint, the students in this study feel they are doing well in terms of their own wellness and are dedicated to continuing their degree. This study could be a starting point to explore possible connections between wellness and student success in terms of persistence and retention in higher education. Previous research has focused on different areas related to wellness and/or health in relation to persistence and retention; however, further research is needed to explore a whole person approach (multidimensional) to student success (persistence, retention, GPA) in higher education. This research could help identify practical strategies colleges can implement to help improve college students' well-being and increase their success by increasing persistence and retention in higher education.

### ***Relationships Between College Students' Wellness and Academic Achievement***

The findings from this study indicated a positive correlation between the body sub-scale and academic achievement as measured by first-semester GPA. Therefore, the body sub-scale scores and first-semester GPAs moved in the same direction. With this sample of community college students' physical wellness had a positive relationship with academic achievement. Horton and Snyder (2009) had similar findings; they found students with higher GPAs spent

more time on physical and environmental activities and less time on occupational and social activities. Similar to the current study, as GPAs increased, physical wellness (activities) moved in the same direction and also increased. Horton and Snyder's (2009) study emphasized the importance of having a balance within the dimensions of wellness in relation to academic achievement as measured by GPA. Although in this current study there was no evidence of a statistically significant relationship between emotional wellness (mind sub-scale) and GPA, another study found a significant finding. Pritchard and Wilson (2003) found a positive relationship between emotional health and GPA. As previously noted, LaFontaine et al. (2007) recommend institutions align their policies with the dimensions of wellness across campus. A few of their suggestions include having recreation facilities, wellness programming and services, and wellness courses in the curriculum. The institution in this study has recreation facilities (multiple gyms, fitness center, walking path), integrates wellness programming through the Student Success Series, and incorporates the eight dimensions of wellness in College Essentials (required course for all first-year students in a two-year program). The facilities, programs, and College Essentials help lay the foundation for physical activities on campus at the institution in this study.

Although there was only one statistically significant finding between the body sub-scale and first-semester GPA, there is practical significance in the findings from this study. For example, overall, the students reported high levels of wellness and the mean first-semester GPA was 3.03. Students reported higher levels of wellness and on average had higher GPAs. An annual assessment of student wellness behaviors should be implemented during the first year of college. An annual wellness assessment would be a good starting point to identify student wellness behaviors. Then, the institution could use their findings to create programs and



interventions that support and enhance the students' overall well-being. From a practical standpoint, this study has provided evidence to support further research to explore the relationship among student wellness behaviors and persistence, retention, and academic achievement.

## **ARTIFACT III: IMPLEMENTATION IN PRACTICE**

### **Introduction**

The literature in Artifact I and the findings in Artifact II highlight the connections between student wellness and success in higher education. As a faculty member and advocate for student health and well-being, I wanted to share the results from my study and my professional experiences to advocate for the integration of wellness into higher education. More specifically, I will address integrating wellness into the first-year experience of community college. Working in higher education, specifically at a community college, it can be difficult implementing information from research studies because those studies do not always include practical strategies or practical ways to implement strategies. Also, community college faculty do not have a research requirement for their position; therefore, they may not be as actively involved in new research. Thus, the final product for this dissertation in practice is a white paper. The white paper provides a brief overview of the issue of student wellness in higher education followed by the key findings from this dissertation in practice. The final section of the white paper provides recommendations for community colleges to implement to help increase student wellness and ultimately student success.

### **Audience**

This white paper is intended for a wide audience that includes community college faculty, staff, and administrators. This audience has the ability to take the recommendations and begin integrating wellness into campus life for students at various levels of the institution. Community

college faculty, staff, and administrators must be mindful of their behaviors and intentional in the programs, resources, and services offered on campus.

### **White Paper**

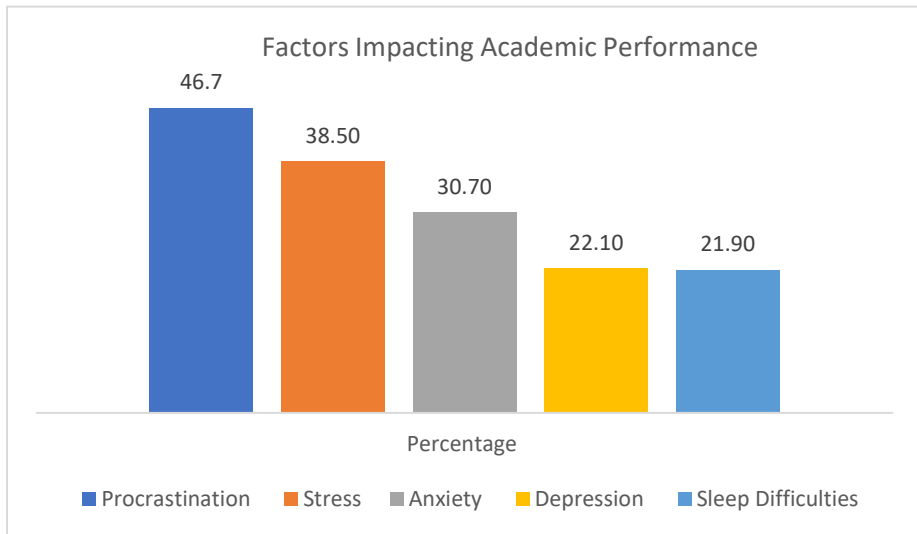
Community colleges have been known for lower persistence and retention rates. The National Clearinghouse (2021) reported in 2019 community college persistence rates were 59% and retention rates were 52% for full-time and part-time students. No matter the institution, all colleges have a common goal of helping students succeed. However, there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to student success in higher education, especially at the community college level. This article highlights the importance of student wellness and its impact on persistence, retention, and academic achievement in higher education, followed by practical strategies community colleges can implement to help increase student success.

One area of concern in higher education has been the health and well-being of students (Amaya et al., 2019; Baldwin et al., 2017; Beauchemin et al., 2018). The American College Health Association (ACHA) conducts a national college health assessment to identify college students' health habits and behaviors. According to the ACHA (2022), college students reported several factors that negatively impacted their academic performance; some of the factors with the highest percentages are highlighted in Figure 2.

In addition, 53% of the students who completed the national college health assessment did not feel that their health and well-being were a priority to their college/university. Student wellness may be one of the missing links in terms of student success in higher education. Students who are stressed, having troubles sleeping, and experience mental health issues reported negative impacts to their academic performance. While college is a time of transition for students, higher education institutions have the responsibility to help students build a wellness

**Figure 2**

*This bar graph shows factors impacting college students' academic performance*



foundation that will benefit them in college and beyond (Baldwin et al., 2017). Community colleges have a unique opportunity to reach many students who are within the first two years of their college degree. The first year of college is the ideal time to introduce and begin creating a foundation of wellness that students can continue to build upon.

Wellness is not something with which we are born. It is not a one-time action or behavior but rather a life-long journey. Wellness is an active process in which a person raises awareness and makes choices that lead towards a lifestyle to achieve a balance in holistic health (Global Wellness Institute, n.d.; National Wellness Institute, 2020). Most wellness models include at least six dimensions while others can include as many as twelve dimensions (Global Wellness Institute, n.d.). The next section highlights a recent study conducted at a community college related to student wellness, persistence, retention, and academic achievement.

## **Findings From a Community College Study on Wellness and Student Success**

The first year of college is essential to the success of students. Many colleges implement a first-year seminar or first-year experience for incoming students to help increase persistence (Porter & Swing, 2006). A first-year seminar or first-year experience helps introduce and transition students to college life. A small rural community college in north central Iowa has been implementing wellness into the first-year experience for their students since the fall of 2020. This community college focuses on eight dimensions of wellness (physical, emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual, environmental, occupational, financial). The eight dimensions are integrated into a first-year seminar course and into the Student Success Series which includes a variety of free wellness workshops built around these eight dimensions.

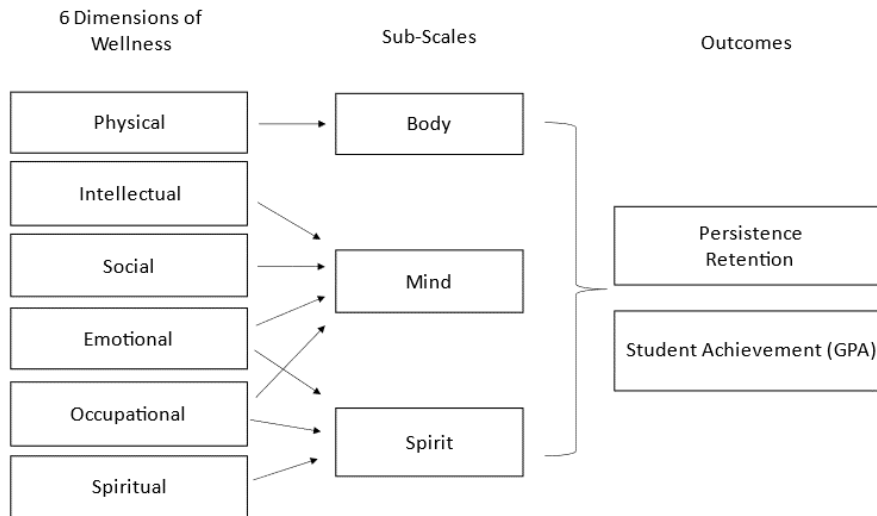
I recently conducted a study on a small sample of students ( $n = 139$ ) who were in their first year of their academic program at this rural community college. The study explored the relationship between wellness behaviors and academic achievement (measured by first-semester GPA). Due to the lack of variance within the institutional measure of persistence from fall to spring semesters and students' intent to return for year two, statistical relationships were not feasible and data analysis was not conducted for these variables. Although this study could not examine the relationships among student wellness behaviors and persistence and intent to return for year two, there is value in reporting the distribution of persistence and intent to return in this sample. There was a 99% persistence rate (fall-to-spring semester) and 99% of the students reported their intent to return year two of their academic program.

The students completed the Body-Mind-Spirit Wellness Behavior and Characteristic Inventory (BMS-WBCI) and were asked to indicate whether they intended to return for year two of their program. The BMS-WBCI focuses on six dimensions of wellness (physical, emotional,

social, intellectual, spiritual, occupational) and includes three sub-scales (body, mind, spirit). A conceptual diagram identifies the variables included in this study (See Figure 3).

**Figure 2**

*The variables used in the community college study (2022)*



The findings from this study revealed evidence of a positive relationship between the body sub-scale and first-semester GPA. Overall, this sample of community college students reported higher levels of wellness, nearly all (99%) persisted from fall to spring semester and indicated their intent to return for year two with an average GPA of 3.03. Therefore, this sample of students reported higher levels of wellness behaviors and were achieving success in their first year of their academic programs. The vast majority of the participants had taken the first-year seminar (84%) and a majority had attended a Student Success Series workshop (53%). Both the first-year seminar and Student Success Series introduce students to the dimensions of wellness and provide strategies and resources to improve each of the dimensions. The next section provides recommendations of practical strategies community colleges can implement to integrate wellness into the first year of college life on campus.

## Recommendations and Strategies

Evidence shows that community colleges have an opportunity to help students create healthy habits by creating a foundation of wellness during the first year of their degree. This section highlights practical strategies that community college faculty, staff, and administrators can implement to help begin building a wellness foundation. Colleges that advocate for and integrate wellness on campus demonstrate student health and well-being are a priority of the institution. The first two strategies can be implemented quickly, while the final two strategies may require more time and planning before implementation.

- 1) **Be a Role Model for Students:** The first and easiest strategy to implement is being a role model for students. Campus faculty, staff, and administrators should model healthy behaviors and promote a lifestyle that is balanced among the dimensions of wellness. Amaya et al. (2019) discussed the importance of creating a culture of wellness on college campuses. One of the best practice strategies highlighted in their article was modeling healthy behaviors. Faculty, staff, and administrators can discuss, support, and model healthy wellness behaviors during an advising meeting, at an orientation session, or in the classroom. Modeling healthy behaviors helps increase the health and well-being of campus employees while illustrating the importance and benefits of practicing healthy behaviors to students. As a faculty member at a community college, it is my responsibility to be a role model for students. I model healthy behaviors on campus by highlighting the importance of overall well-being in my classes and encouraging students to join me and participate in wellness-related activities on campus. For example, there are many websites and free apps available related to the dimensions of wellness (e.g., yoga, stretching, relaxation, budgeting, etc.). Anytime I try a new app or find a helpful

website, I share the information with my classes. We often have discussions about new apps or websites the students have found as well. I integrate wellness topics into course content (e.g., mindfulness exercise at the start of each class session), encourage students to attend wellness speakers, seminars, and activities on campus, and attend these events and activities myself. I also serve on campus committees that support student wellness to help create a culture supportive of student well-being. Hopefully, my actions and behaviors on campus demonstrate my passion for the health and well-being of the campus community.

- 2) **Collaboration between Student Services and Academics:** Next, community colleges can encourage collaboration between student services and academics in terms of health and wellness resources and services. Collaboration between student services and academics can help break down silos that exist resulting in two-way exchanges of information between departments. The free flow of information between these two departments not only keeps faculty and staff informed of resources and services, but also provides more avenues for students to learn about opportunities and services available.
  - a. Several studies have highlighted the importance of collaboration between student services and academics in terms of wellness and student success (Amaya et al., 2019; Buning et al., 2014; LaFontaine, et al., 2007). One helpful way to support collaboration between student services and academics is to create a wellness engagement committee that includes faculty members and student services staff. The committee should seek members from a variety of departments and disciplines across campus. The goal of the committee is to advocate for wellness on campus by assessing, planning, and integrating wellness into the college



experience through courses and activities. At my institution, we have a Student Engagement Committee which is charged with all functions of the Student Success Series. The committee plans, organizes, and implements wellness workshops on campus. In addition, this committee helps spread the word about upcoming wellness opportunities.

- b. Community colleges can also highlight and promote the resources and services available on-campus, within the community, and virtually to enhance the dimensions of wellness. Resources should be easily accessible for students on the college website and be integrated into academic courses. The wellness engagement committee can sponsor and support Wellness Wednesday Tips on campus social media, create monthly stall-talks to post in campus restrooms that highlight the dimensions of wellness and resources available, and design free wellness workshops for students. When student services and academics work together, they learn about the various resources and services available on and off campus to better support students. Colleges can work towards making wellness resources and services more visible and the topic of discussion across campus in classrooms.

- 3) **Incorporate Wellness into First-Year Experiences on Campus:** Community colleges can incorporate wellness into the first-year experiences on campus through seminars, workshops, and campus life. The first year of college is a critical time for new students (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006; Porter & Swing, 2006), and there are several possibilities to foster students' wellness development during that juncture.

- a. One way wellness can be incorporated into the first-year experience is through a first-year seminar course. Research has shown positive impacts of first-year seminar courses on student persistence (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006) and the importance of health education as a course component in a first-year seminar (Porter & Swing, 2006). Based on my experience with developing first-year seminar courses, wellness naturally fits within the course curriculum and plays an integral role in helping new students as they transition into college life.

Integrating wellness into a first-year seminar benefits traditional-aged students as they develop into adults. College may be their first experience away from home; and they must learn to navigate college and begin making wellness decisions for themselves. Wellness can serve as the foundation for the first-year seminar course. Depending on the wellness model used by the college, each unit of the class can be based on a dimension of wellness and connect the dimension to campus resources, activities, and services. For example, the intellectual wellness unit would introduce this dimension of wellness and then connect to study skills, critical thinking skills, campus resources (e.g., library, tutoring center), and incorporate strategies to enhance this dimension. The unit should highlight how students can be “intellectually” well on campus by utilizing the tutoring center and library, creating a study schedule, finding a place to read/study on campus, meeting with an academic advisor or faculty member to discuss plans of study, and participating in debates and discussions. I have helped develop and teach two first-year seminar courses at two different institutions, and although the courses are different, both are built on a foundation of wellness. The courses highlight,

promote, and encourage life-long behaviors that enhance overall well-being. The goal is to promote wellness by aligning the dimensions of wellness with first-year seminar topics (e.g., study skills, life skills, interpersonal skills, etc.) and campus resources and services.

- b. Additionally, the course should highlight and promote the resources and services available on campus in relation to each of the dimensions of wellness. If the college creates or has a wellness engagement committee, or another wellness group on campus, it should collaborate with those in charge of the first-year seminar. This collaboration will ensure consistent messages across campus and help build connections for faculty, staff, and administrators. Resources and services on campus align well with the dimensions of wellness and topics covered in first-year seminar courses. For example, first-year seminars often include strategies for academic success (Jaijairam, 2016); this section aligns well with intellectual wellness. The first-year seminar can integrate resources and services on campus, such as the tutoring center or the library to help students enhance their study skills and intellectual well-being. The first-year seminar can also highlight counseling options or student services as a resource for emotional wellness, while the financial aid and business offices can be highlighted as resources/services for financial wellness, and so on. There are many resources and services available to students, a first-year seminar can help connect the dots between these resources/services and personal and academic well-being. Figure 4 provides an example of how eight dimensions of wellness connect to first-year seminar topics, resources, and services on college campuses.

**Figure 3**

*Connections between the dimensions of wellness topics, first-year seminar topics, and campus resources and services*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Dimension Topics</b>	<b>FYS Topics</b>	<b>Resources &amp; Services</b>
<b>Intellectual</b>	Critical Thinking Creative Thinking Mindfulness Growth Mindset	Critical Thinking Study Skills Library Skills	Tutoring Center Library Supplemental Instruction Clubs & Organizations
<b>Emotional</b>	Stress Management Mental Health	Time Management	Counseling Student Services
<b>Physical</b>	Physical Activity Nutrition Sleep Health	Personal Goals Life Skills	Recreation/Fitness Center Student Services Intramurals Fitness Classes Quiet Hours in Housing
<b>Social</b>	Communication Relationships	Interpersonal Skills Faculty/Peer Interactions Community Engagement	Clubs & Organizations Campus Activities (athletics & arts) Wellness Workshops
<b>Spiritual</b>	Meaning & Purpose Values & Beliefs	Goal Setting Ethics	Nature on Campus Clubs & Organizations Volunteer Center Yoga Classes
<b>Occupational</b>	Major & Career Professional Values Volunteering Work/Life Balance	Career Goals Time Management	Volunteer Center Transfer Counselor Career Counselor Job Fairs
<b>Financial</b>	Money Management	Life Skills	Financial Aid Business Office
<b>Environmental</b>	Personal Safety Environmental Awareness	Community Engagement	Campus Safety Recycling

- c. Community colleges can also provide wellness workshops for students. The workshops should cover the dimensions of wellness supported by the institution. The college can use resources on campus such as the Financial Aid office or the Tutoring Center to create hands-on informational workshops for students to attend. The departments across campus can help encourage students to enhance their well-being while also promoting their services and departments. The workshops should be introduced early on during student orientation and continue throughout the school year. This introduction will help get students engaged early in the activities, so they think about their well-being as they begin their first year of college. At my college, several wellness workshops are offered throughout the year. Here are a few examples: financial aid created and presented a financial apps workshop for college students (financial wellness). An outside resource that partners with the college presented on healthy relationships in college (social wellness). Lastly, a faculty member led students on a hike in an outdoor workshop (physical, spiritual, and emotional wellness).
- d. Community colleges should incorporate physical wellness into campus life through recreation centers, walking trails, fitness stations/challenges around campus, intramural activities, fitness classes, and encouraging students to walk/bike to class. Physical activity is good for the body and mind, and as the study I conducted showed, there is a positive relationship between physical wellness and academic achievement (GPA). Colleges can encourage students to be active by providing a variety of opportunities to increase physical wellness. Colleges can create flyers and social media postings that highlight the physical

activity opportunities on campus and include facts and short statements highlighting the benefits of physical wellness and the connection to academic achievement. Students are more likely to participate in an activity if they are able to see personal benefits. Colleges can encourage students to be physically active by providing physical activity challenges with prizes for winners. From my experience, students participate in activities when there are incentives such as bookstore gift cards, free movie passes, and/or other prizes. The challenges can be created and implemented by an engagement committee or student wellness committee.

- 4) **Wellness Assessment:** Finally, community colleges should assess student wellness behaviors. Assessing student wellness will provide colleges with valuable information to create targeted interventions and programs, and also to identify resources and service needs on campus. The wellness assessment plan will allow institutions to create an individualized wellness program based on their students' needs. Here are a few recommendations to begin creating a wellness assessment plan:
- a. First, select a wellness survey to assess student wellness behaviors. The selected survey should align with the wellness model utilized by the college.
  - b. Next, have first year students complete the survey at the beginning of year one in their first-year seminar course. Ideally, the survey will be electronic making it easier to administer and collect the results.
  - c. The engagement committee or student wellness committee can use the results to identify areas to improve wellness resources, services, and initiatives to continue promoting healthy wellness behaviors. For example, if students indicate high

levels of stress, the college can target stress management techniques in Wellness Wednesday posts or workshops. Or if mental health issues are a concern from the survey data, the college can target resources and services to enhance emotional well-being on campus.

- d. Colleges collect student success (persistence, retention) and academic achievement (GPA) data. The next step of the plan is to request persistence, retention, and GPA data on first-year students. This data will help track trends in student success and academic achievement for first-year students.

The goal of the assessment plan is to identify student wellness behaviors to create targeted initiatives and to track student success and achievement. The results from the assessment should be shared with the engagement committee or student wellness committee first and then shared with the campus community. The committee can decide the best way to present the information to all stakeholders on campus (e.g., administration, faculty, staff, students), including but not limited to, a written report with an executive summary, an infographic highlighting the main findings, and/or a short presentation.

The assessment plan should start small and simple. For example, planners can begin collecting data on a smaller sample of students by asking one or two faculty members or departments to conduct the assessment in their course sections. Then, the following semester/year one or two other faculty/departments conduct the assessment on their sections. This yearly assessment would provide useful incremental data without overwhelming the faculty/departments. Depending on the number of faculty and sections surveyed, the assessment plan could run on a three-to-five-year cycle, meaning faculty

members would complete the assessment once every three to five years. The assessment results, then provide valuable information for the college in terms of wellness behaviors and student success.

### **Dissemination Plan**

I would like to share this white paper with community college faculty, staff, and administrators. I plan to submit a modified version of my white paper for submission to either the E-Source or The Toolbox through the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Student Transition. The E-Source and The Toolbox are electronic newsletters that align with my topic and vision for my paper. Both publications encourage topics relating to first-year experience and request practical strategies for practitioners. Either of these options are a viable platform for a broader outreach and audience regarding first year college students.

### **Conclusion**

Wellness is an important component of student success in higher education. Community college faculty, staff, and administrators must highlight the importance of student wellness by becoming role models, integrating wellness into first-year seminars and the campus community, and assessing student wellness behaviors. These strategies can help students succeed by building a wellness foundation and can be a starting point for community colleges to begin modeling and advocating for student wellness on campus. Colleges have the responsibility to educate the whole student and encourage healthy behaviors that will impact students in college and beyond.



## **CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships of student wellness with several student success outcome variables, such as persistence from a fall to a spring semester, intent to return for year two, and academic achievement at a community college. The combination of the three artifacts helps build a foundation and highlight the need for further research relating to student wellness and persistence, retention, and academic achievement at the college level. Artifact I provided an overview and common approaches to solving the problem of student wellness and success in higher education. This was done by examining research regarding student persistence and retention, student wellness, and the intersection of wellness and student success in higher education. The review of literature set the foundation for the research approach in Artifact II. Artifact II began narrowing the focus by explaining the research approach, findings, and interpretations of the results that led to the final product in Artifact III. Artifact III was presented as a white paper highlighting specific recommendations for community colleges to use to integrate wellness into the first year of the college curriculum and campus life. The goal for the final artifact was to combine the relevant research findings from Artifact I and the results highlighted in Artifact II into a user-friendly white paper (see the Appendix for an alternative format of the white paper) advocating for wellness education within the first year of the college experience at community colleges.

The three artifacts contribute to the body of research on the problem of practice by further validating the need for more research focusing on a holistic approach to wellness and

student success. More research is needed to explore the connections between student wellness and persistence, retention, and academic achievement. The quantitative research approach helped address the problem of practice by setting the groundwork for further research. In this study, students were asked to report their wellness behaviors using the BMS-WBCI which measured six dimensions of wellness. The students were also asked to report their intent to return for year two, and the institution provided persistence rates and first-semester GPA. A quantitative approach was effective in exploring relationships between the variables. Future studies could use the information from the three artifacts and conduct a longitudinal study. This longitudinal study would, then allow researchers to collect student wellness data earlier in the first semester of college and initiate a follow-up sample using institutional data for persistence and retention. Future studies should also look to incorporate a larger sample of students.

This dissertation in practice did not provide answers to all of the research questions; however, it was able to provide valuable information for further research and current practice. This study found there is a positive relationship between the body-subscale (physical wellness) and academic achievement (first-semester GPA). Using the findings from this study can help inform practice at the community college level and inspire future research on this topic. Higher education has the responsibility to educate the whole person which ultimately benefits students in college, and life beyond the classroom.

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## **APPENDIX**

# Community College Student Wellness and Success

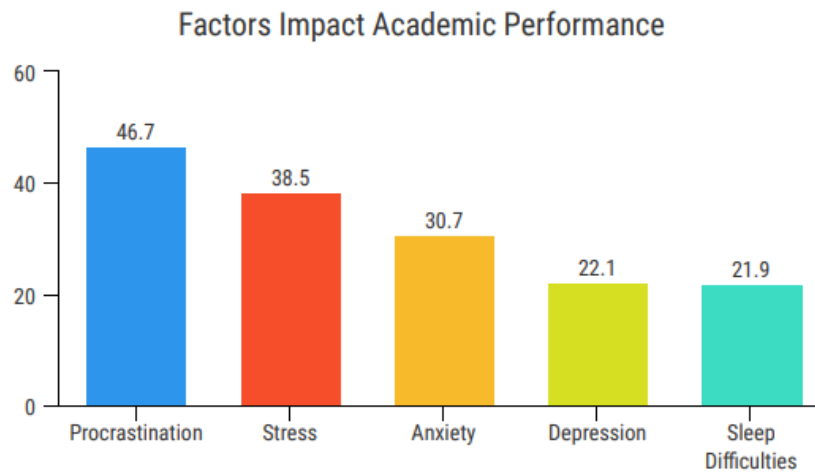
*By: Heather DeWaard-Flickinger  
Doctoral Student at The University of North Dakota*



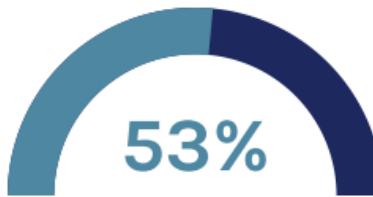
## Introduction

Community colleges have been known for lower persistence and retention rates. The National Clearinghouse (2021) reported in 2019 community college persistence rates were 59% and retention rates were 52% for full-time and part-time students. No matter the institution, all colleges have a common goal of helping students succeed. However, there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to student success in higher education, especially at the community college level. This article highlights the importance of student wellness and its impact on persistence, retention, and academic achievement in higher education, followed by practical strategies community colleges can implement to help increase student success.

One area of concern in higher education has been the health and well-being of students (Amaya et al., 2019; Baldwin et al., 2017; Beauchemin et al., 2018). The American College Health Association (ACHA) conducts a national college health assessment to identify college students' health habits and behaviors. According to the ACHA (2022), college students reported several factors that negatively impacted their academic performance; some of the factors with the highest percentages are highlighted in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** This bar graph shows factors impacting college students' academic performance.



**of students did not feel that their  
health and well-being were a priority  
to their institution**

In addition, 53% of the students who completed the national college health assessment did not feel that their health and well-being were a priority to their college/university.

Student wellness may be one of the missing links in terms of student success in higher education. Students who are stressed, having troubles sleeping, and experience mental health issues reported negative impacts to their academic performance. While college is a time of transition for students, higher education institutions have the responsibility to help students build a wellness foundation that will benefit them in college and beyond (Baldwin et al., 2017). Community colleges have a unique opportunity to reach many students who are within the first two years of their college degree. The first year of college is the ideal time to introduce and begin creating a foundation of wellness that students can continue to build upon.

Wellness is not something with which we are born. It is not a one-time action or behavior but rather a life-long journey. Wellness is an active process in which a person raises awareness and makes choices that lead towards a lifestyle to achieve a balance in holistic health (Global Wellness Institute, n.d.; National Wellness Institute, 2020). Most wellness models include at least six dimensions while others can include as many as twelve dimensions (Global Wellness Institute, n.d.). The next section highlights a recent study conducted at a community college related to student wellness, persistence, retention, and academic achievement.



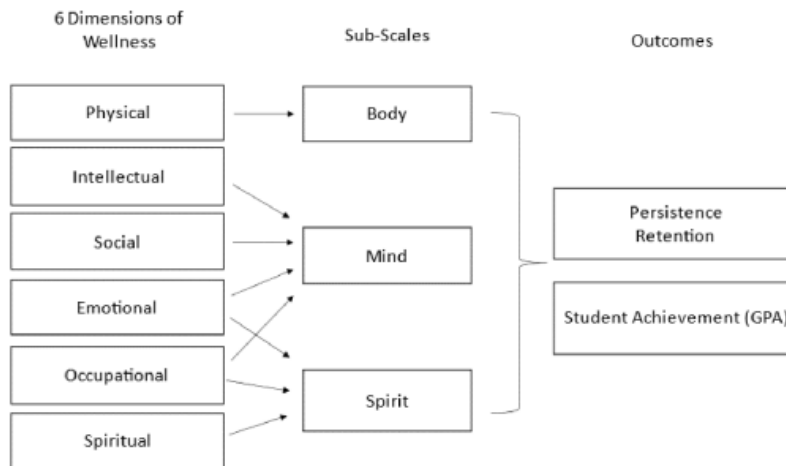
## Findings from a Community College Study on Wellness and Student Success

The first year of college is essential to the success of students. Many colleges implement a first-year seminar or first-year experience for incoming students to help increase persistence (Porter & Swing, 2006). A first-year seminar or first-year experience helps introduce and transition students to college life. A small rural community college in north central Iowa has been implementing wellness into the first-year experience for their students since the fall of 2020. This community college focuses on eight dimensions of wellness (physical, emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual, environmental, occupational, financial). The eight dimensions are integrated into a first-year seminar course and into the Student Success Series which includes a variety of free wellness workshops built around these eight dimensions.

I recently conducted a study on a small sample of students (n = 139) who were in their first year of their academic program at this rural community college (DeWaard-Flickinger, 2022). The study explored the relationship between wellness behaviors and academic achievement (measured by first-semester GPA). Due to the lack of variance within the institutional measure of persistence from fall to spring semesters and students' intent to return for year two, statistical relationships were not feasible and data analysis was not conducted for these variables. Although this study could not examine the relationships among student wellness behaviors and persistence and intent to return for year two, there is value in reporting the distribution of persistence and intent to return in this sample. There was a 99% persistence rate (fall-to-spring semester) and 99% of the students reported their intent to return year two of their academic program.

## Findings from a Community College Study on Wellness and Student Success

The students completed the Body-Mind-Spirit Wellness Behavior and Characteristic Inventory (BMS-WBCI) and were asked to indicate whether they intended to return for year two of their program. The BMS-WBCI focuses on six dimensions of wellness (physical, emotional, social, intellectual, spiritual, occupational) and includes three sub-scales (body, mind, spirit). A conceptual diagram identifies the variables included in this study (See Figure 2).

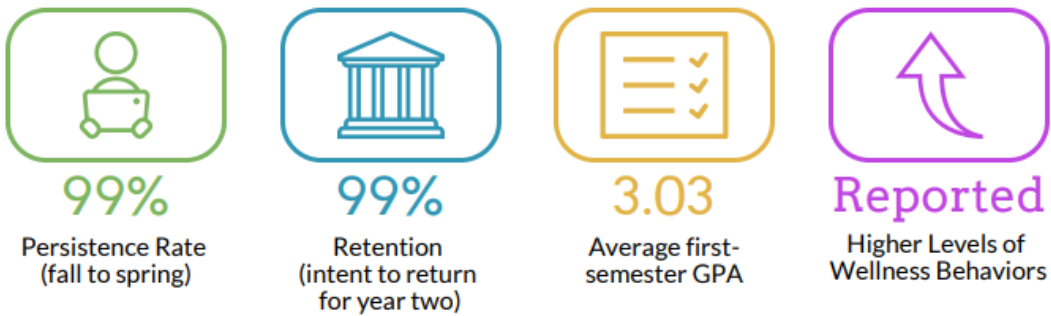


**Figure 2.** The variables used in the community college study (2022).



**Wellness has a positive relationship with academic achievement.**

*Body Sub-Scale & First-Semester GPA*



The findings from this study revealed evidence of a positive relationship between the body sub-scale and first-semester GPA. Overall, this sample of community college students reported higher levels of wellness, nearly all (99%) persisted from fall to spring semester and indicated their intent to return for year two with an average GPA of 3.03. Therefore, this sample of students reported higher levels of wellness behaviors and were achieving success in their first year of their academic programs. The vast majority of the participants had taken the first-year seminar (84%) and a majority had attended a Student Success Series workshop (53%). Both the first-year seminar and Student Success Series introduce students to the dimensions of wellness and provide strategies and resources to improve each of the dimensions. The next section provides recommendations of practical strategies community colleges can implement to integrate wellness into the first year of college life on campus.



## Recommendations and Strategies

Evidence shows that community colleges have an opportunity to help students create healthy habits by creating a foundation of wellness during the first year of their degree. This section highlights practical strategies that community college faculty, staff, and administrators can implement to help begin building a wellness foundation. Colleges that advocate for and integrate wellness on campus demonstrate student health and well-being are a priority of the institution. The first two strategies can be implemented quickly, while the final two strategies may require more time and planning before implementation.

### **Be a Role Model for Students**

#1

### **Collaboration between Student Services and Academics**

#2

### **Incorporate Wellness into First-Year Experiences on Campus**

#3

### **Wellness Assessment**

#4

# Be a Role Model for Students

## #1

The first and easiest strategy to implement is being a role model for students. Campus faculty, staff, and administrators should model healthy behaviors and promote a lifestyle that is balanced among the dimensions of wellness. Amaya et al. (2019) discussed the importance of creating a culture of wellness on college campuses. One of the best practice strategies highlighted in their article was modeling healthy behaviors. Faculty, staff, and administrators can discuss, support, and model healthy wellness behaviors during an advising meeting, at an orientation session, or in the classroom. Modeling healthy behaviors helps increase the health and well-being of campus employees while illustrating the importance and benefits of practicing healthy behaviors to students. As a faculty member at a community college, it is my responsibility to be a role model for students. I model healthy behaviors on campus by highlighting the importance of overall well-being in my classes and encouraging students to join me and participate in wellness-related activities on campus. For example, there are many websites and free apps available related to the dimensions of wellness (e.g., yoga, stretching, relaxation, budgeting, etc.). Anytime I try a new app or find a helpful website, I share the information with my classes. We often have discussions about new apps or websites the students have found as well. I integrate wellness topics into course content (e.g., mindfulness exercise at the start of each class session), encourage students to attend wellness speakers, seminars, and activities on campus, and attend these events and activities myself. I also serve on campus committees that support student wellness to help create a culture supportive of student well-being. Hopefully, my actions and behaviors on campus demonstrate my passion for the health and well-being of the campus community.

# Collaboration between Student Service and Academics

## #2

Next, community colleges can encourage collaboration between student services and academics in terms of health and wellness resources and services. Collaboration between student services and academics can help break down silos that exist resulting in two-way exchanges of information between departments. The free flow of information between these two departments not only keeps faculty and staff informed of resources and services, but also provides more avenues for students to learn about opportunities and services available.

- Several studies have highlighted the importance of collaboration between student services and academics in terms of wellness and student success (Buning et al., 2014; LaFontaine, et al., 2007; Amaya et al., 2019). One helpful way to support collaboration between student services and academics is to create a wellness engagement committee that includes faculty members and student services staff. The committee should seek members from a variety of departments and disciplines across campus. The goal of the committee is to advocate for wellness on campus by assessing, planning, and integrating wellness into the college experience through courses and activities. At my institution, we have a Student Engagement Committee which is charged with all functions of the Student Success Series. The committee plans, organizes, and implements wellness workshops on campus. In addition, this committee helps spread the word about upcoming wellness opportunities.
- Community colleges can also highlight and promote the resources and services available on-campus, within the community, and virtually to enhance the dimensions of wellness. Resources should be easily accessible for students on the college website and be integrated into academic courses. The wellness engagement committee can sponsor and support Wellness Wednesday Tips on campus social media, create monthly stall-talks to post in campus restrooms that highlight the dimensions of wellness and resources available, and design free wellness workshops for students. When student services and academics work together, they learn about the various resources and services available on and off campus to better support students. Colleges can work towards making wellness resources and services more visible and the topic of discussion across campus in classrooms.



# Incorporate Wellness into First-Year Experiences on Campus

## #3

Community colleges can incorporate wellness into the first-year experiences on campus through seminars, workshops, and campus life. The first year of college is a critical time for new students (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006; Porter & Swing, 2006), and there are several possibilities to foster students' wellness development during that juncture.

- One way wellness can be incorporated into the first-year experience is through a first-year seminar course. Research has shown positive impacts of first-year seminar courses on student persistence (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006) and the importance of health education as a course component in a first-year seminar (Porter & Swing, 2006). Based on my experience with developing first-year seminar courses, wellness naturally fits within the course curriculum and plays an integral role in helping new students as they transition into college life. Integrating wellness into a first-year seminar benefits traditional-aged students as they develop into adults. College may be their first experience away from home; and they must learn to navigate college and begin making wellness decisions for themselves. Wellness can serve as the foundation for the first-year seminar course. Depending on the wellness model used by the college, each unit of the class can be based on a dimension of wellness and connect the dimension to campus resources, activities, and services. For example, the intellectual wellness unit would introduce this dimension of wellness and then connect to study skills, critical thinking skills, campus resources (e.g., library, tutoring center), and incorporate strategies to enhance this dimension. The unit should highlight how students can be "intellectually" well on campus by utilizing the tutoring center and library, creating a study schedule, finding a place to read/study on campus, meeting with an academic advisor or faculty member to discuss plans of study, and participating in debates and discussions. I have helped develop and teach two first-year seminar courses at two different institutions, and although the courses are different, both are built on a foundation of wellness. The courses highlight, promote, and encourage life-long behaviors that enhance overall well-being. The goal is to promote wellness by aligning the dimensions of wellness with first-year seminar topics (e.g., study skills, life skills, interpersonal skills, etc.) and campus resources and services.

## Incorporate Wellness into First-Year Experiences on Campus

### #3

- Additionally, the course should highlight and promote the resources and services available on campus in relation to each of the dimensions of wellness. If the college creates or has a wellness engagement committee, or another wellness group on campus, it should collaborate with those in charge of the first-year seminar. This collaboration will ensure consistent messages across campus and help build connections for faculty, staff, and administrators. Resources and services on campus align well with the dimensions of wellness and topics covered in first-year seminar courses. For example, first-year seminars often include strategies for academic success (Jajjairam, 2016); this section aligns well with intellectual wellness. The first-year seminar can integrate resources and services on campus, such as the tutoring center or the library to help students enhance their study skills and intellectual well-being. The first-year seminar can also highlight counseling options or student services as a resource for emotional wellness, while the financial aid and business offices can be highlighted as resources/services for financial wellness, and so on. There are many resources and services available to students, a first-year seminar can help connect the dots between these resources/services and personal and academic well-being. Figure 3 provides an example of how eight dimensions of wellness connect to first-year seminar topics, resources, and services on college campuses.



Dimension	Dimension Topics	FYS Topics	Resources & Services
Intellectual 	Critical Thinking Creative Thinking Mindfulness Growth Mindset	Critical Thinking Study Skills Library Skills	Tutoring Center Library Supplemental Instruction Clubs & Organizations
Emotional 	Stress Management Mental Health	Time Management	Counseling Student Services
Physical  	Physical Activity Nutrition Sleep Health	Personal Goals Life Skills	Recreation/Fitness Center Student Services Intramurals Fitness Classes Quiet Hours in Housing
Social 	Communication Relationships	Interpersonal Skills Faculty/Peer Interactions Community Engagement	Clubs & Organizations Campus Activities (athletics & arts) Wellness Workshops
Spiritual 	Meaning & Purpose Values & Beliefs	Goal Setting Ethics	Nature on Campus Clubs & Organizations Volunteer Center Yoga Classes
Occupational 	Major & Career Professional Values Volunteering Work/Life Balance	Career Goals Time Management	Volunteer Center Transfer Counselor Career Counselor Job Fairs
Financial 	Money Management	Life Skills	Financial Aid Business Office
Environmental 	Personal Safety Environmental Awareness	Community Engagement	Campus Safety Recycling

**Figure 3.** Connections between the dimensions of wellness topics, first-year seminar topics, and campus resources and services.

## Incorporate Wellness into First-Year Experiences on Campus

### #3

- Community colleges can also provide wellness workshops for students. The workshops should cover the dimensions of wellness supported by the institution. The college can use resources on campus such as the Financial Aid office or the Tutoring Center to create hands-on informational workshops for students to attend. The departments across campus can help encourage students to enhance their well-being while also promoting their services and departments. The workshops should be introduced early on during student orientation and continue throughout the school year. This introduction will help get students engaged early in the activities, so they think about their well-being as they begin their first year of college. At my college, several wellness workshops are offered throughout the year. Here are a few examples: Financial Aid created and presented a financial apps workshop for college students (financial wellness). An outside resource that partners with the college presented on healthy relationships in college (social wellness). Lastly, a faculty member led students on a hike in an outdoor workshop (physical, spiritual, and emotional wellness).
- Community colleges should incorporate physical wellness into campus life through recreation centers, walking trails, fitness stations/challenges around campus, intramural activities, fitness classes, and encouraging students to walk/bike to class. Physical activity is good for the body and mind, and as the study I conducted showed, there is a positive relationship between physical wellness and academic achievement (GPA). Colleges can encourage students to be active by providing a variety of opportunities to increase physical wellness. Colleges can create flyers and social media postings that highlight the physical activity opportunities on campus and include facts and short statements highlighting the benefits of physical wellness and the connection to academic achievement. Students are more likely to participate in an activity if they are able to see personal benefits. Colleges can encourage students to be physically active by providing physical activity challenges with prizes for winners. From my experience, students participate in activities when there are incentives such as bookstore gift cards, free movie passes, and/or other prizes. The challenges can be created and implemented by an engagement committee or student wellness committee.

# Wellness Assessment

## #4

Finally, community colleges should assess student wellness behaviors. Assessing student wellness will provide colleges with valuable information to create targeted interventions and programs, and also to identify resources and service needs on campus. The wellness assessment plan will allow institutions to create an individualized wellness program based on their students' needs. Here are a few recommendations to begin creating a wellness assessment plan:

- First, select a wellness survey to assess student wellness behaviors. The selected survey should align with the wellness model utilized by the college.
- Next, have first year students complete the survey at the beginning of year one in their first-year seminar course. Ideally, the survey will be electronic making it easier to administer and collect the results.
- The engagement committee or student wellness committee can use the results to identify areas to improve wellness resources, services, and initiatives to continue promoting healthy wellness behaviors. For example, if students indicate high levels of stress, the college can target stress management techniques in Wellness Wednesday posts or workshops. Or if mental health issues are a concern from the survey data, the college can target resources and services to enhance emotional well-being on campus.
- Colleges collect student success (persistence, retention) and academic achievement (GPA) data. The next step of the plan is to request persistence, retention, and GPA data on first-year students. This data will help track trends in student success and academic achievement for first-year students.

## Wellness Assessment

### #4

The goal of the assessment plan is to identify student wellness behaviors to create targeted initiatives and to track student success and achievement. The results from the assessment should be shared with the engagement committee or student wellness committee first and then shared with the campus community. The committee can decide the best way to present the information to all stakeholders on campus (e.g., administration, faculty, staff, students), including but not limited to, a written report with an executive summary, an infographic highlighting the main findings, and/or a short presentation.

The assessment plan should start small and simple. For example, planners can begin collecting data on a smaller sample of students by asking one or two faculty members or departments to conduct the assessment in their course sections. Then, the following semester/year one or two other faculty/departments conduct the assessment on their sections. This yearly assessment would provide useful incremental data without overwhelming the faculty/departments. Depending on the number of faculty and sections surveyed, the assessment plan could run on a three-to-five-year cycle, meaning faculty members would complete the assessment once every three to five years. The assessment results, then provide valuable information for the college in terms of wellness behaviors and student success.

## Conclusion

Wellness is an important component of student success in higher education. Community college faculty, staff, and administrators must highlight the importance of student wellness by becoming role models, integrating wellness into first-year seminars and the campus community, and assessing student wellness behaviors. These strategies can help students succeed by building a wellness foundation and can be a starting point for community colleges to begin modeling and advocating for student wellness on campus. Colleges have the responsibility to educate the whole student and encourage healthy behaviors that will impact students in college and beyond.

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