Student Mental Health Policy

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Preamble

Student mental health has become a priority at post-secondary institutions. Among the organizations calling for action in this area are the Ministère de l'Éducation, l'Union étudiante du Québec, la Centrale des syndicats du Québec, and the Canadian Mental Health Association. In keeping with the *Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting University and Colleges*, Champlain College Lennoxville is committed to taking concrete steps to ensure the health, wellbeing, and resilience of its students into the future. The College's Student Mental Health Policy lays the foundation for this work.

Reflecting an integrated approach to student mental health, the Policy affirms that each and every member of the Champlain Lennoxville community has the right to learn and work in an environment that does not have a harmful impact on their mental health and wellbeing. The Policy focuses on student needs, but it also recognizes that the wellbeing of managers, staff, and teachers is essential to creating safe spaces in which students can thrive. In this regard, it anticipates future policy work that responds to the needs of other members of the College community.

This Policy has been developed with the recognition that inequality and discrimination, e.g., in the areas of race, sexual orientation, and disability, have an adverse effect on mental health. Students have the right to learn in an environment that is free from such inequality and discrimination; that is, they have the right to learn in culturally safe and caring spaces, both inside and outside of the classroom. The College is committed to ensuring the integrity of these kinds of spaces, especially through community education.

In keeping with Annex VIII-10 of the *Collective Agreement of the Fédération des enseignantes et enseignants de CÉGEP FEC (CSQ)*, this policy also affirms the importance of academic freedom within the Cegep context. It insists that all instructors should benefit from the "freedom of teaching, research, and expression inherent in their role and responsibilities within an institution of higher education." The Policy also recognizes that academic freedom does not include vexatious speech and behaviour, as defined in the *College's Policy on Harassment*. (Cf. the RLRQ, Ch. R-8.2, p. 370.)

This Policy reserves a central place for awareness promotion and is not meant to be punitive in orientation. Vexatious speech and behaviour, such as discrimination on the basis of race, sexual orientation, or disability, which have a negative impact on individual persons and on the College community, falls within the purview of the College's Policy on Harassment. In other words, it would be a misapplication of the Policy on Student Mental Health if it were to serve as a basis for disciplinary measures directed towards any member of the College community.

Finally, this Policy seeks to establish the parameters within which our Action Plan on Student Mental Health will be developed.

Definitions

The College: Champlain College Lennoxville.

Étudiants avec des besoins particuliers (EBP): All persons who pursue, on a full-time or part-time basis, a course of study within the College, both in regular day division and continuing education, who may require accommodations or support services through their college studies. This population may include students with official diagnoses related to learning, physical, or mental conditions; students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) from high school, without official diagnoses; Indigenous students; International students; students who belong to visible or ethnic minorities; students from the LGBTQIA2S+ community; students who are parents; and first-generation students in higher education.

Faculty and staff: These include (1) all regular or occasional, full-time, or part-time employees of the College; (2) individuals employed under a contract issued by the College; and (3) individuals who have been authorized to act on behalf of the College.

Flourishing: "A condition denoting good mental and physical health: the state of being free from illness and distress but, more important, of being filled with vitality and functioning well in one's personal and social life" (APA, n.d.).

HAN: This is defined in the *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration.* The Act defines a "handicapped person" as a "person with a deficiency causing a significant and persistent disability, who is liable to encounter barriers in performing everyday activities." The policy *Equals in Every Respect: Because Rights are Meant to Be Exercised* specifies that the disability can be motor, intellectual, related to speech or language, visual, auditory, or associated with other senses. It can be related to organic functions, an autism spectrum disorder, or a serious mental health condition.

Harm: "Harm and Threat of Harm includes physical abuse, verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, harassment, force, or other conduct that causes injury or a reasonable expectation of injury to the physical or mental health or safety of another person" (UKY, n.d.).

Inclusion: "The act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued as a fully participating member. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people. Inclusion integrates the fact of diversity and embeds it into the core academic mission and institutional functioning" (UC Davis, n.d.). Note that this definition is not meant to imply that teachers, departments, or programs are required to privilege "inclusive pedagogy," a term that denotes a particular philosophy of education (UChicago, 2020).

Integrated approach: "A principles-based, evidence informed framework that guides the protection and promotion of [student] mental health through three overlapping domains of action": (1) harm prevention; (2) mental health promotion; and (3) development of strategies for addressing mental health problems among members of the College community (Nebbs et al., 2023).

LGBTQIA2S+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Two

Spirit, and other gender identities or sexual orientations.

Member of the College community: Anyone working or studying at the College.

Mental health: "Mental health is a dynamic state of internal equilibrium which enables individuals to use their abilities in harmony with universal values of society. Basic cognitive and social skills; ability to recognize, express and modulate one's own emotions, as well as empathize with others; flexibility and ability to cope with adverse life events and function in social roles; and harmonious relationship between body and mind represent important components of mental health which contribute, to varying degrees, to the state of internal equilibrium" (Galderisi et al., 2015).

Learning environment: "The learning environment…comprises the psychological, social, cultural, and physical setting in which learning occurs and in which experiences and expectations are co-created among its participants…These individuals, who are primarily students, faculty, and staff, engage in this environment and the learning process as they navigate through their personal motivations and emotions and various interpersonal interactions. This all takes place within a physical setting that consists of various cultural and administrative norms (e.g., school policies)" (Rusticus et al., 2023).

Safe spaces: The term "safe spaces" is multifaceted. (1) Safety in an office is when people feel welcome to disclose personal information or ask questions about mental health issues with the expectation of receiving support (O'Brien & Fisher, 2019). Teachers are not required to receive detailed disclosures from students but are expected to direct students to the appropriate resources in Student Services. (2) Safety in a classroom is when "students are willing and able to participate and honestly struggle with challenging issues…where students can freely express their ideas and feelings, particularly around challenging areas, such as diversity, cultural competence, and oppression" (Holley & Steiner, 2005).

Cultural Safety: The term "cultural safety" refers to an environment in which students experience "no assault, challenge, or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need" (Williams, 1999).

Student community: Any student enrolled at the College.

Wellbeing: A condition of "emotional, psychological and social well-being, [with generally] positive feelings (e.g., happiness, satisfaction), positive attitudes towards own responsibilities and towards others, and positive functioning (e.g., social integration, actualization, and coherence)" (Keyes, 2014).

General Principles

This Policy adopts an integrated approach to student mental health. The entire community shares the responsibility for maintaining a culture of mental health. Not only do individual persons have crucial roles to play but so, too, do the College's constituent bodies, including governance, management, support staff, professionals, faculty, programs, departments, unions, any student associations, teams, and clubs.

The College recognizes that mental health is an essential element of academic perseverance and success. The College's commitment in this regard is in keeping with its core values:

- Lifelong learning for students, faculty, and staff through personal growth and professional development.

- Excellence through striving for continuous improvement.

- Respect for all individuals, manifested through open communications and a commitment to fairness, justice, and honesty.

- Caring through compassion, courtesy, friendliness, and a commitment to the wellbeing of students, faculty, and staff.

- Collaboration in the achievement of shared goals and objectives.

- Stewardship through the responsible and effective use of human, physical, environmental, and financial resources.

Objective and Scope

In keeping with the College's core values, the objective of this Policy is to ensure the following:

- Maintenance of healthy, safe, caring, and supportive living and learning environments conducive to student mental health and wellbeing.

- Coordination of promotion, awareness, and prevention efforts that support student mental health.

- Determination of conditions for the responsible conduct of all members of the College community regarding mental health.

- Establishment of roles and responsibilities among the different groups of the College community to advance the priorities of the Student Mental Health Policy.

Roles and Responsibilities

Because mental health is influenced by many factors, all members of the College community contribute to the creation of an environment that supports positive mental health. Below are their roles and responsibilities.

All Members of the College Community

1. Create physical spaces that are healthy, safe, caring, and inclusive.

2. Be a positive role model.

3. Collaborate in the creation and maintenance of a culture of respect and caring that supports positive mental health, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

4. Familiarize themselves with the Policy, its language, and the roles and responsibilities articulated therein.

5. Guide the student community to appropriate College mental health resources.

Governing Board

1. Adopt the Policy.

Directors, Management

1. Ensure the development, implementation, promotion, evaluation, and revision of the Student Mental Health Policy.

2. Ensure that this Policy is consistent with and complements other College policies, including those aimed at preventing and countering discrimination, harassment, and violence in higher education.

3. Ensure that mental health support, accompaniment, awareness promotion, and prevention services are in place and that information on these services is accessible and up to date.

4. Ensure that the needs of EBP and HAN students are taken into consideration in College initiatives on student mental health.

5. Promote accommodations, where required, to support the wellbeing of EBP and HAN students.

6. Ensure that training measures are put in place and that they respond to the particular needs of the different groups of the College community.

7. Determine the human, financial, and material resources available for the implementation of the action plan.

8. Create physical and virtual places that are welcoming, healthy, safe, caring, and inclusive.

9. Create a climate of mutual aid and non-judgment for students, faculty, and staff.

10. Encourage collaborations with external organizations.

11. Encourage the presence of representatives of EBP and HAN on decision-making committees.

12. Encourage the development of pedagogical practices that promote student mental health, e.g., inclusive pedagogy, in collaboration with the College's departments and programs.

Faculty, Programs, Departments, and Union

1. Promote the Policy.

2. Promote and refer students to available College psychosocial services when necessary.

3. Create welcoming, healthy, safe, caring, and inclusive classroom and office spaces.

Professionals, Support Staff, and Their Unions

1. Promote the Policy.

2. Create safe spaces for students to ask for assistance.

3. Promote and refer students to the available internal and external psychosocial services.

4. Create welcoming, healthy, safe, caring, and inclusive office spaces.

Student Associations, Student Teams, and Clubs

1. Encourage diversity awareness among the student population.

2. Promote a positive college climate, especially in the Champlain student associations.

3. Promote information about mental health resources available.

4. Encourage students and student leaders to participate in mental health training and workshops.

5. Raise awareness and promote activities on mental health.

Students

1. Encourage peers to seek out appropriate mental health resources if necessary.

2. Be trained as Active Bystanders.

3. Familiarize themselves with mental health services and encourage participation in training and workshops offered on mental health.

Standing Committee on Student Mental Health

The College is committed to establishing a Standing Committee on Student Mental Health. This committee will include representatives from management, faculty, professional, technical and support staff, and other members of the College community, including student associations. One of its principal responsibilities involves the development of an Action Plan that reflects the priorities of the College Policy on Student Mental Health. More specifically, the Standing Committee will do the following:

1. Create an annual action plan.

2. Recommend ways the College can improve their support for student mental health.

3. Report on the actions carried out.

4. Evaluate the implementation of this Policy.

Continuum of Services

The College refers to the *Cadre de référence sur la santé mentale étudiante* for the implementation of a continuum of services.

Policy Implementation

The College implements structured actions and training regarding awareness, promotion, and prevention of student mental health, while respecting the diversity of needs in the student community. These actions will focus on mental health, harm reduction, healthy lifestyles, or any other relevant theme related to the different determinants of mental health.

Training Measures

Mental health training is provided to managers, faculty, professionals and support staff, and the student community on topics related to mental health.

Services and Interventions

The College implements a system for receiving, assessing, and handling mental health service requests and ensures that this system is known to the entire community. Peer support programs and self-care tools are also offered.

Assessment of Impact

The College recognizes that its policies, programs, practices, and internal regulations can impact the mental health of the student community. Collection of data makes possible the assessment of the Student Mental Health Policy and the analysis of obstacles encountered in view of making necessary changes. The results will be transmitted to all members of the community.

Distribution of the Policy

The College ensures that the Policy is publicized and made accessible to the entire College community.

Entry into Force

This Student Mental Health Policy comes into effect upon adoption by the Governing Board.

Policy Evaluation and Review Mechanism

The Standing Committee on Student Mental Health is responsible for evaluating the Policy and its implementation at least once every five years.

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