Learning Sustainable Well-Being Initiative
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Background
In this bustling modern world, anxiety and depression are on the rise. People spend a lot of time ruminating (regretting the past, worrying about the future) and are overly concerned about their identity and status (exacerbated by social media). This trend is especially noticeable in college students, who are on their own for the first time, are facing immense academic and social pressures, yet have no practice in place for their well-being. As the Dalai Lama pointed out in his 2017 commencement speech at UCSD, universities were once religious institutions, which provided both academic and spiritual guidance, but with the secularization of universities, that spiritual guidance is painfully missing. The solution is for universities to implement a comprehensive system of guidance so that students can flourish both academically and personally.

The Need at UCSD
Undergrads. At UCSD, data show that there are high rates of feeling depressed, stressed or upset (over 36% of students report frequently and/or always feeling this way, UCUES Survey, 2016), and greater than the national average rates of loneliness (Arnold & Dobkins, 2019). Some of this increased prevalence is due to unique challenges at UCSD:
- a highly competitive atmosphere, as a top-ranked university
- a large transfer rate (30%), which makes it harder for those students to integrate
- a large international population (10%, mainly from Asia), which results in culture shock and a sense of non-belonging
- a large, and growing, student body (36K), which makes it hard for students to connect with professors
- in general, there is low morale, with students taking, and professors teaching, classes because they “need to” rather than “honoring the transfer of knowledge”.

What UCSD offers for student well-being and why it is not good enough
Like all universities, UCSD has a “Counseling and Psychological Services” (CAPS) for students in need (both undergrads and medical students). Unfortunately, students who experience extreme stress/depression say they cannot be seen at CAPS in a timely fashion, and many do not want to go in fear of being stigmatized. Although UCSD has several programs that might be thought to help prevent stress/depression -- they are designed to help students fit in and feel welcome (e.g., first year experience, freshman seminars), they are ineffectual because:
- enrollments are low
- they are not specifically about the practice of mental well-being

Bottom Line: Students are in need of a “preventative mental health” plan at UCSD.
The Solution: Learning Sustainable Well-Being (LSW)

The LSW initiative was conceived by Professor Dobkins in 2018, with the ultimate goal of testing the effectiveness of scaling up a campus-wide 1-unit class on mental well-being (already being taught by Dobkins since 2014).

Since Fall 2018, the Dobkins lab has been collecting data to examine the following:

A) Interest in a Well-Being Class: We asked 6051 students at UCSD how interested they would be in taking a well-being class if it counted for credit. Not only is there strong interest, the mode response from students is “extremely interested”.

B) Does Mindfulness Decrease Loneliness and Stress? In the sample of 6051, we looked at the relationship between trait Mindfulness and i) Loneliness and ii) Stress. We see that students higher in trait Mindfulness have significantly less Loneliness and Stress, suggesting that courses in Mindfulness should help the loneliness (and stress) problem at UCSD.

C) Effectiveness of a Well-Being Class: Since 2014, Dobkins has been teaching a well-being class at UCSD (as a freshman seminar, 1.5 hours/week to class sizes of 20, in a roundtable format) entitled “Principles of Clarity”, POC (based on Mindfulness, Positive Psychology, Cognitive Therapy and Neuroscience, see syllabus), which focuses on how to live with Clarity, Awareness and Compassion. The data collected from students show significant (and lasting) improvements in well-being.

Data collected from Fall 2018, which compared POC students to a wait-list control, showed significant improvements in practicing the principles of the course (Dobkins principles), psychological well-being, and trait Mindfulness.

In Fall 2019, Dobkins started piloting a 100-student stadium seating version of this class (Psych88: LSW, 1 unit, grade based on attendance). In Spring 2020, UGIAs were approved for this course, which allows students who have already taken the class to help facilitate smaller break-out groups (to mimic the smaller, 20-student, roundtable version). The goal is to determine whether this large-format version is as effective as the small-format version, as the former will likely be a necessary step in “scaling up” the course.
D) **Academic Success vs. Well-Being**: Working with Cindy Lyons (Appointment of University Registrar) and Pegah Parsi (Privacy Officer, Academic Affairs), and with our IRB approval (#161450), we are obtaining academic records from UCSD students to determine the link between well-being and academic success (GPA, retention, time to graduate, placement). *Data are not yet analyzed.*

**Pilot Project: Test the Effectiveness of Scaling up the LSW Course**

A) **Overview**
- Put together a task force for how best to administer this pilot project (partnering with the Compassion and Empathy center in the Medical School), including deciding on which materials to use.
- Target a specific cohort of students at UCSD (perhaps one of the six colleges, or perhaps “premed” students)
- Accommodate ~1400 students per year, for two years
- Open LSW course to all grade levels
- Find ~14 professors to teach classes of 100 students each

*Professors get paid to go through a training program, as well as paid to teach the course*

As part of a campus-wide survey, the Dobkins lab has asked students to name professors they think would be good at teaching a class on well-being. The professors with the most votes will be approached to join the program, although it will be open to any professor who is interested.

**Building Community.** It is important to have professors (as opposed to staff) teach this course as a way to build community at UCSD, since students feel disconnected from professors. Dobkins’ personal experience from teaching her LSW course over the last 5 years is that students crave this level of connection.

In a future iteration of this pilot, we should consider training (and paying) students to lead discussion sections, with a format similar to the First Year Experience (FYE) program. Each week, students would meet for 1 hour with the professor in a large-format class, as well as for 1 hour with one of 3 to 4 undergraduate UGIAs) leading a small-format, more intimate, discussion section. Bringing in undergrads also builds community as students currently feel disconnected from one another.

B) **Budget**
- Training of Professors (2 days of attending the course + 3 days intensive training on how to teach)
- Administrative Assistant
- Grad Student (GSR) for analyzing data
- Future: Payment of UGIAs Trainer (Dobkins and others?): 1/9h, summer salary = ~20K/year = **40K (2 years)**
14 Professors get paid to be trained to teach LSW, some percentage of salary (if 2K/each) = **28K**
14 Professors get paid to teach LSW 1x/year (discretionary departmental funds) (if 2K/each) = **56K (2 years)**
5 Professors on the task force get paid a percentage of salary = ~2K/year = **20K (2 years)**
Grad students to analyze the data = 5K/year = **10K (2 years)**
Administrative Assistant to run the program (1/2 time + benefits) = 40K/year = **80K**

**Total = 234K**