

Well-Being Through Policies & Procedures

Policy Guide on Well-Being and Health Equity

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Territory Recognition

SFU Health Promotion recognizes the historical position of SFU as an institution founded through colonialism, located on the ancestral, unceded, and traditional territories of Coast Salish Peoples, including the traditional territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sk̓w̓x̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), səlilwətaʔl (Tsleil-Waututh), k^wik^wəłəm (Kwikwetlem) Katzie, Qayqayt, Kwantlen, Semiahmoo, and Tsawwassen Nations. These lands were never surrendered, relinquished, or handed over in any way. In acknowledging all the stewards of these lands since time immemorial, we must take on the responsibility of reconciliation and decolonization by understanding the truth and stories of these lands, and the peoples' relationships and responsibilities to these lands. As a unit, we are committed to decolonizing our practices and supporting health promoting strategies to emphasize justice and reconciliation and hope to continue working with diverse communities and organizations to improve upon policies and procedures at SFU.

As this guide discusses policies and procedures as they relate to well-being, it is important to recognize that these have been used as tools of oppression and colonialism and support the settler-colonial state that SFU operates within. As such, we must responsibly consider how policies and procedures can be decolonized and structured to empower communities who have been historically excluded and marginalized. We must do the work of confronting the lessons from our colonial history, as well as recognizing our complicity in ongoing colonialism, oppression, and racism. SFU is committed to creating a “diverse, equitable and inclusive community where all feel welcome, safe, accepted and appreciated in learning, teaching, research and work” (Simon Fraser University EDI, n.d).

This Territory Recognition has been shaped by reflections and learning from teachings by Len Pierre. Len Pierre is Coast Salish from Katzie First Nation, as well as an educator, consultant, TEDx Speaker, social activist, traditional knowledge keeper, and cultural practitioner. We would like to give many thanks to Len for his time, knowledge, and patience. We are very grateful to have had the opportunity to work and grow with him, and we look forward to working alongside more Indigenous community members and knowledge keepers as we move forward in this work with our diverse SFU community.

Purpose

In recent years, policy has been identified as a critical area for action for creating health promoting environments in higher education (Okanagan Charter, 2015; Canadian Standards Association, 2020). Policy impacts students' experience of stress, well-being and inclusion within the institution and as such needs to be critically examined as a means for improving well-being and student success which are fundamental to the core business of the institution. It is also important to note that policies that are created to exclude certain groups fail to protect one's dignity, and thus create environments that harm peoples' well-being and mental health. The intent of applying this guide to policies and procedures is to contribute to an institutional environment and culture that supports student success and well-being. It is also acknowledged that policies and procedures are an essential part of maintaining the integrity of the institution and its operations and there is a need for legal consideration in policy language and content.

- To provide guidelines for developing or amending policies in ways that support and enhance student well-being and overall mental health at SFU. These guidelines support the strategic vision set forth in *What's Next: The SFU Strategy* which emphasizes the need to “focus on the well-being of all those who work and learn at SFU” (p.6).
- To provide a framework to intentionally consider how policies and procedures impact the physical, social, and mental well-being of students, to be used when reviewing existing and creating new policies and procedures.

Scope

These guidelines are intended to be used in alignment with Policy B. 10.00 [Policy on University Policies & Procedures](#) (particularly during step 3 of the [Steps in Process](#)), to ensure new policies and amended policies are supportive of student well-being. It can also be used by anyone who creates, reviews and amends departmental procedures and policies.

This guide may be applied to new and existing policies and procedures, including content, application, processes, and communication, and aims to ensure they are understandable for all students. Relevant policies include formal and informal institutional and departmental policies. It also includes procedures, processes and practices as outlined in the Academic Calendar and Policies as listed in the Policy Gazette. Given this scope, multiple levels of the institution have a role to play, including departments, programs, faculties, and Senate.

Rationale & Alignment with SFU's Strategic Vision

Improving well-being through policies and procedures helps improve student learning, persistence, success and satisfaction. Policy is widely recognized as having an important impact on student success and well-being and is an essential component of a systemic approach to student success and well-being. Through its content, understandability, and application, it is a key component in reducing undue stress,

contributing to a supportive institutional culture, promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion, and creating opportunities for student learning and development (Canadian Standards Association, p. 21).

As SFU catalyzes its commitment to student well-being through various initiatives, including *What's Next*, it is imperative that the policies aimed at enhancing well-being on- and off-campus are designed to do so. *What's Next: The SFU Strategy (2022)*, emphasizes the need to “focus on the well-being of all those who work and learn at SFU” (p.6). Addressing the impacts of policy on well-being is an important component of this. This approach is supported and endorsed by the Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges (2015) which SFU co-lead and signed in 2015. Focusing on the impacts of policy on well-being is also supported by the National Standard for Post-Secondary Mental Health & Well-being (Canadian Standards Association, 2020), which is considered one of the leading guiding documents in post-secondary student mental health in Canada. The need for a coordinated focus on policy at SFU is also outline in the SFU Equity Compass (2023), which notes the need to “review existing institutional policies as they come forward for community consultation from an equity lens” and “coordinate and facilitate synergies across complementary institutional-level strategic plans and commitments (SFU Equity Compass, p.6).

Founded in the context of settler-colonialism, post-secondary institutions' decolonization efforts often tend to be performative and inadequate as they remain rooted in colonial ideologies (Stein, 2020 p. 157). Policy mandated in this environment thus remains a harmful tool of colonization. In alignment with reports including, but not limited to, the Okanagan Charter, the Aboriginal Reconciliation Council's report, *Walk this Path with Us* (2017), and the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Action Plan (2020), SFU's Equity Compass (2023) and SFU's Student Mental Health and Well-being Framework (2023), future policies can take a proactive, transformative, and equitable approach to well-being through reconciliation and targeted equity efforts.

Policies are one of the key areas for action identified within SFU's Healthy Campus Community initiative. The notion of considering policy impacts on well-being explores how policies can contribute to improved health outcomes (e.g. reduced undue stress and anxiety) and shape a campus environment that positively enhances well-being.

Principles and Guidelines

Campus stakeholders are invited and encouraged to use the principles and guidelines outlined in this document for the development or review of new or existing policies and procedures. An initial step prior to any policy/procedure development or review is to intentionally reflect on how the policy/procedure development, review, or process may intentionally or unintentionally impact the mental health and well-being of students, with particular consideration of impacts on equity-deserving students or impacts on equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives. Thoughtful and reflexive practice with policy and procedures is necessary to support eventual actions that contribute to a culture of care and institutional supports for students.

Principles

As a fundamental principle, all aspects of policies and procedures must embody a culture of respect, fairness, equity and support for student experience, success and well-being; and to recognize that these have diverse meanings across student populations.

The following three principles have been identified as key to understanding and addressing the impacts of policies on student well-being in higher education settings:

1. Reducing Undue Stress

Policies may intentionally or unintentionally contribute to experiences of stress for students, and these may disproportionately impact certain populations. Some stress is necessary in an academic setting, but undue stress is considered stress that is unnecessary and takes away from experiences of learning, growth and student success.

2. Creating a Culture of Care

A culture of care is one where policies, procedures and communications are designed to prioritize relationships, respect, reciprocity, flexibility, compassion, connection, equity and belonging. Student experience and well-being are greatly impacted by the tone and culture of the institution and are enhanced when that culture is human-centered and relational.

3. Enhancing Health Equity

Policies play a central role in creating equitable and safe access to learning and support opportunities on campus. They contribute to representation, and can be used to mitigate and change systemic inequities thus enhancing health equity of campus. In addition, policies that intentionally or unintentionally excluded certain groups, fail to protect one's dignity, and thus create environments that harm peoples' well-being and mental health.

These principles are supported by the [broader principles that are foundational to the Healthy Campus Community initiative at SFU](#), as well as foundational documents that outline the importance of policies

in shaping experiences of mental health and well-being (Government of Ontario Healthy Equity Impact Assessment (n.d.), Okanagan Charter (2015), Canadian Standards Association (2020). By considering these principles throughout policy development, review and dissemination processes, significant impacts on student well-being can be achieved.

Guidelines

The following guidelines support the development, review and dissemination of policies that enhance student well-being.

Policy/Procedure Analysis, Development, Selection and Review

1. The policy/procedure development or review process engages input and feedback from key stakeholders, with intentional inclusion of students.
 - Engagement is multimodal and offers distinct and unique opportunities for communities to be consulted or provide feedback.
 - Engagement is done with considerations for respectful involvement with different groups.
2. Prior to the review or creation of a policy or procedure, take pause to intentionally reflect on the purpose of the new policy or procedure or the purpose of review and what feedback, insights, or directions will be included or excluded.
3. The intersection of policies/procedures is considered (e.g., how does the implementation or revision of one policy impact other policies and vice versa).
4. Policies/procedures is evaluated regularly to assess relevance and evaluations are conducted on a predetermined, routine interval.
5. System and technological support is considered when developing policies/procedures (e.g., does the Student Information System allow for the application of the policy).

Policy/Procedure Content, Writing and Format

6. A clear rationale for the policy/procedure is provided at the beginning of the policy/procedure to help students understand the need and intent.
7. The tone and content of the policy/procedure is inclusive, supportive, and respectful.
8. Plain language is used as much as possible to help improve understandability of the policy/procedure (see Appendix B).
9. The format of the policy/procedure is as brief as possible, using methods such as examples, bullets and headings to improve understandability.
10. Inclusive language is used with guidance from credible resources, such as the [Inclusive and Anti-Racist Writing Guide](#).
11. Time-sensitive requirements are clearly indicated and apparent to all.
12. All content shared, including engagement materials and procedures, is accessible with options to ensure meaningful and fulsome participation of individuals with disabilities.
13. Examples, scenarios, and links to additional resources are provided where possible to enable understanding of the policy/procedure (e.g., definitions, links to additional resources, links to related policies)

Policy/Procedure Application, Communication and Interpretation

14. Policies/procedures allow for flexibility and exceptions where possible for unique circumstances.
15. Links to relevant supports (e.g., counselling services, ombudsperson, advising) are included where possible in the policy/procedures or related guidelines.
16. Clear guidelines as well as training are provided for staff, instructional staff, instructors, faculty, and community members regarding the interpretation and implementation of policy/procedure to ensure consistency.
17. Supporting information and resources are made available to assist with students' understanding and interpretation of policy/procedure where possible (e.g. guidelines, websites, videos, explanations, links).
18. Individuals interacting with students connect students to relevant services, resources or supports (e.g., counseling services, ombudsperson, advising).
19. The application of policy/procedure is seen as an extension of students' formal education. Efforts are made to use discussions with students as teachable moments, contributing to students' development, and the tone of these interactions will be positive, supportive and respectful as opposed to punitive.

Worksheet/Checklist

The following worksheet is designed to assist in applying the key principles identified above within each phase of policy development. The guidelines can be applied during three phases 1) Policy/procedure analysis, development, selection and review 2) Policy/procedure content, writing and format 3) Policy/procedure application, communication and interpretation.

Reducing Undue Stress

Analysis, development, selection and review	Are there policies that are causing undue stress for students? How might you find out which policies are causing undue stress for students?
Content, writing and format	How might these policies be amended in terms of content to avoid undue stress? How might plain language help ensure clarity around this policy?
Application, communication and interpretation	How might these policies be amended in terms of their application or communication to avoid undue stress? (ie transparency, clarity and flexibility in application).

Creating a Culture of Care

Analysis, development, selection and review	Are there policies that are confusing to students, and/or result in students feeling that SFU does not prioritize their well-being?
Content, writing and format	How might these policies be amended in terms of content to help create a culture of care at SFU? How might plain language help ensure clarity around this policy?
Application, communication and interpretation	What processes can be put in place to ensure this policy is applied and communicated with kindness and flexibility?

Enhancing Health Equity

<p>Analysis, development, selection and review</p>	<p>Are there policies that are creating or furthering inequities among students? Consider diverse equity deserving student groups including Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, neurodivergent people, gender non-conforming folks... etc...</p> <p>Are there policies that are creating health inequities or inequities in access or quality of care/support for certain equity deserving student groups?</p> <p>Are there policies or processes that equity deserving students are bringing forward as needing to be changed/created/updated?</p>
<p>Content, writing and format</p>	<p>Do you have plans to meaningfully engage and compensate equity deserving folks to help inform your new policy?</p> <p>How might plain language help ensure clarity around this policy?</p>
<p>Application, communication and interpretation</p>	<p>How might plain language help ensure clarity around this policy in terms it's communication and application?</p> <p>What processes can be put in place to ensure students know about and understand this policy and how it might impact them?</p>

Acknowledgements

This guide is part of SFU's Healthy Campus Community initiative and has been led by SFU's Health Promotion team. It is a living document that will be modified over time. This document was last updated on June 10th, 2023 with thanks to Caldon Saunders, Health Promotion Special Projects Assistant, Nazafarin Esfandiari, Health Communications Assistant, and Daksha Jadhav, Health Promotion Strategist for their leadership and contributions. For further information or to provide feedback, please email: health_promo@sfu.ca or visit www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity.

Appendix A: Glossary

For the purpose of this document, the following definitions are used.

Decolonization: the socio-political agenda that seeks to redress historical and current practices that have had deleterious effects on Aboriginal peoples (SFU Aboriginal Reconciliation Council, 2017)

Diversity refers to “a broad range of human differences, including but not limited to ethnicity, race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic position, ability, age, religion, and national origin. Further, as an academic institution, we are informed by diverse knowledge sharing practices and ways of thought” (SFU Library Statement on Equity, Diversity & Inclusion, 2022).

Equity: “when responsibilities, resources, and opportunities are distributed fairly and justly among all group members and done so in a manner that works to resolve historical and current disadvantages for under-represented and marginalized groups” (SFU Library Statement on Equity, Diversity & Inclusion, 2022).

Inclusion “exists when all community members are recognized, respected, and welcomed, as well as enabled to freely engage with, question, and shape the community’s activities. A critical aspect of inclusion is being mindful of the impact that differences in power and privilege can have on perceptions, experiences, relationships, and freedom of expression” (SFU Library Statement on Equity, Diversity & Inclusion, 2022).

Mental health: “more than the absence of a mental health condition or illness; it is a positive sense of well-being, or the capacity to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face” (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2019).

Well-being: “what people think and feel about their lives, such as the quality of their relationships, their positive emotions and resilience, the realization of their potential, or their overall satisfaction with life” (Centre for Disease Control, 2018).

Appendix B: Plain Language Examples and Resources

Plain Language is a clear, succinct writing style which ensures the reader understands as quickly and completely as possible. It is not to be confused with an oversimplified or condescending style. By choosing straightforward vocabulary and sentence structures and by organizing and presenting your material clearly and logically, you can save the reader time and effort and ensure that your message will be clearly understood (Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2015). Using plain language is particularly important to acknowledge the diversity of the audience, for example, individuals whose first language is not English.

Instead of...	Use...
a large number of	many
in absence of	without
give consideration to	consider
owing to the fact that	because, since

Use:

- Active voice.
- Humanize the message (we, you, I) where appropriate.
- Short and concise sentences and paragraphs.
- Punctuation where appropriate.
- Reduce non-essential information when possible.

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